

**WOMEN WORKERS IN BORDER TRADE CENTRES IN
NORTHEAST INDIA: A STUDY OF MIZORAM AND MANIPUR**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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MIMMY ROSANGPUII

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**Women Workers in Border Trade Centres in NorthEast India: A Study of
Mizoram and Manipur**

**BY
MIMMY ROSANGPUII**

**Supervisor
Dr. Suwa Lal Jangu**

**Submitted
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in Political Science in Mizoram University, Aizawl.**



MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
AIZAWL: MIZORAM
(www.mzu.edu.in)

Post Box No. 190
Gram: MZU
Phone: (0389) 23316109
Fax: 0389 – 2331610
Email: mzut169@mzu.edu.in
Mob. No. 9436768637

Dr. Suwa Lal Jangu
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science

MZUT169/POLSC/MZU/2012/2025/179
Dated: 11/12/2025

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **MIMMY ROSANGPUII**, a research scholar bearing Ph.D. Registration No. MZU/Ph.D./1492 of 03.11.2020 in the Department of Political Science, Mizoram University, has completed her work on “Women Workers in Border Trade Centres in NorthEast India: A Study of Mizoram and Manipur.” for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Political Science under my supervision. The work carried out by the scholar is original and no part of the thesis has been published in any form, either in a journal or a book.

She has fulfilled all the criteria as prescribed by the UGC Regulation 2018, including the mandatory publication requirement. Upon completion of all formalities at Mizoram University, I am pleased to forward the thesis for evaluation and further necessary action.

(Dr. Suwa Lal Jangu)
Supervisor

DECLARATION
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
JUNE 2025

I **MIMMY ROSANGPUII**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science**.

(**MIMMY ROSANGPUII**)

(**Prof. AYANGBAM SHYAMKISHORE**)
Head

(**Dr. SUWA LAL JANGU**)
Supervisor

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This research is dedicated to the memory of my beloved brother C.T. Ramfanmawia who pass away untimely. May he continue to share in the joy of my achievements from heaven.

Dated Aizawl

MIMMY ROSANGPUII

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEP	-	Act East Policy
AH1	-	Asian Highway 1
AIDS	-	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AP	-	Arunachal Pradesh
ASEAN	-	Association of South East Asian Nations
BBIN	-	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal
BIMSTEC	-	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRI	-	China's Belt and Road Initiative
BSF	-	Border Security Force
BTCs	-	Border Trade Centres
BTZs	-	Border Trade Zones
COVID19	-	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CSOs	-	Civil Society Organizations
DONER	-	Development of North Eastern Region
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GST	-	Goods and Services Tax
GVC	-	Global Value Chain
HIV	-	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HP	-	Himachal Pradesh
IIGS	-	Indian Insurgent Groups
ILO	-	International Labour Organization
KMMPPT	-	Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project
LCS	-	Land Custom Station
LEP	-	Look East Policy
LPG	-	Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization
MADC	-	Mara Autonomous District Council
MDoNER	-	Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region
MNF	-	Mizo National Front
MSDE	-	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
MSME	-	Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

MWDC	-	Manipur Women's Development Council
NGOs	-	Non-Government Organizations
NRLM	-	National Rural Livelihood Mission
P-L	-	Pawi-Lakher
PMMY	-	Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana
PPPs	-	Public-Private Partnerships
SADC	-	South Africa Development Community
SEWA	-	Self-Employed Women's Association
SEZs	-	Special Economic Zones
SHGs	-	Self-Help Groups
UN	-	United Nations
UNECA	-	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNODC	-	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development
VVP	-	Vibrant Village Programme
WTO	-	World Trade Organization

CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter deals with the core part of the thesis work. It includes a statement of the problem, literature review and methodology. It discusses the conceptual framework of the study. The chapter presents the outline of the thesis work, including the study objectives, research questions, research gap and chapter plan.

On a global scale, women contribute significantly to the trading landscape, especially within informal and small-scale cross-border commerce. Despite systemic challenges such as restricted access to funding, limited availability of trade-related information, and insufficient legal safeguards, women frequently serve as central economic actors. Global institutions like the WTO and UN Women have increasingly emphasized the necessity of integrating gender perspectives into trade policies, encouraging strategies aimed at bolstering women's economic roles. Nationally, the extent and nature of women's engagement in trade are influenced by a country's legal structure and economic development.

In many low and middle-income countries, women dominate sectors of informal trade, like street vending and small-scale retail, where formal recognition is often lacking. This lack of recognition restricts access to licenses, social protection, and legal recourse. Conversely, in wealthier nations, women are becoming more active in structured trade arenas such as digital commerce and export-driven industries, though gaps in leadership representation and income equality continue to pose significant hurdles.

At the National Level, the government of India and the state government are actively involved in cross-border trade for strengthening the infrastructure and developmental activities for it. Border areas which are actively engaged in the border trade received a good funding from the central government and they are recorded as a higher growth rate of state GDP as compared to other border states. The cross

border trade with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal flourished smoothly, besides here is a huge scope for expanding its border with Myanmar and Pakistan also. India is having a vast untapped intra-regional potential in trade. Border areas have the potential to leverage the cultural and ethnic similarities with the neighbouring countries this strengthen diplomatic relations.

For the promotion of Border trade, the government of India take some development initiatives such as Bharatmala for international transport network to strengthen land route connection with the neighbouring countries. Furthermore, there is another initiatives like Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) for promotion of cross border trade through cultural and ethnic linkage in Himachal Pradesh (HP), Arunachal Pradesh (AP) and Uttarakhand. Intra-cross border trade is one the most driving factors in the south and east asian countries for successful engagement in Global Value Chain (GVC). India share its border with seven countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Pakistan and China. It is estimated that more than 73 per cent of india's export to south asian countries are through Land routes, 60% through roads and 13 per cent by rail.

The North-East region of India, known for its unique socio-cultural diversity and varied geographical landscape, serves as a distinct area for socio-economic interactions, particularly in the context of border commerce. Within this region, the states of Mizoram and Manipur, which share international boundaries with Myanmar, play a significant role in advancing India's Look East and Act East strategies. These border trade hubs have become critical points for economic exchange, facilitating international trade and serving as essential sources of income for the local communities. Among the various participants in these trade networks, women workers form a key yet often overlooked segment.

At the regional level, trade dynamics and cultural traditions lead to varied experiences. In many African regions particularly East and West African women account for a large share of cross-border informal trade. Regional bodies have taken steps to streamline trade and build women's capacities through training and supportive policies. South Asia, by contrast, often sees lower female trade

participation due to traditional social constraints; however, initiatives centered around digital platforms and micro-enterprise are beginning to shift this narrative. In Latin America and Southeast Asia, the rise of women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises, supported by trade liberalization, has broadened participation, though gender inequality continues to be a concern. On the local front, women traders are commonly active in markets, self-help groups, and community enterprises. Their work is essential to the functioning of rural and peri-urban economies, where formal job opportunities may be limited. Nonetheless, they face practical issues like poor infrastructure, safety concerns, and exposure to gender-based violence. In response, grassroots organizations, community collectives, and local NGOs often step in to offer support in the form of microcredit, skills training, and advocacy.

The involvement of women workers in border trade centres in North-East India, especially in Mizoram and Manipur, has become an increasingly important area of study in understanding both regional economies and gender relations. Located near international borders, these regions have evolved into crucial trade hubs, often operating informally and on a smaller scale, with women playing a significant role in various economic sectors. In both Mizoram and Manipur, women contribute not only to the day-to-day trade activities but also to the maintenance of cross-border economic exchanges. This research examines the socio-economic challenges and opportunities faced by these women, their impact on the local economy, and the effect of their roles in border trade on their social status and empowerment. By focusing on these two regions, the study sheds light on the intersection of gender, economic involvement, and regional development in the context of India's northeastern borderlands.

Across all levels, women's involvement in trade demonstrates adaptability and perseverance. Yet, realizing genuine inclusion and equality will require sustained action through inclusive policy design, targeted investments in education and technology, and the development of infrastructure that supports women traders at every tier.

1.1. Historical Background

The National Policy for the Empowerment of women was passed in 2001 and The Women's reservation policy bill is criticized to further strengthen political participation in India. The North- East India consists of seven states endowed with rich natural resources, Water, vegetation and hydrocarbon. The ministry of the development of North- eastern Region (DONER) is the deciding body under the government of India. This region shares international Border with several neighboring countries. The North-East has long been shaped by a complex mix of socio-political factors, such as ethnic diversity, insurgency issues, economic marginalization, and developmental constraints. Despite these challenges, cross-border trade, especially with Myanmar, has seen a gradual rise. The establishment of official trade hubs like Moreh in Manipur and Zokhawthar in Mizoram has paved the way for new economic opportunities, benefiting both the state and local communities.¹ These centres have transformed into vibrant marketplaces where a range of goods, from textiles to electronics, are exchanged, thereby creating job prospects for border residents. Traditionally engaged in informal trade networks, women in this region are increasingly stepping into formal trade spaces, thereby altering the socio-economic landscape of border areas.²

The history of women workers in the border trade centres of North-East India, particularly in Mizoram and Manipur, is intricately linked to the region's socio-political and economic changes.³ North-East India, including these two states, has long been a crossroads of diverse cultures, ethnic groups, and political histories, shaped by its position near international borders. The region's development has been influenced by external trade relations, colonial policies, and socio-economic transformations post-independence.⁴ During the colonial period, the British focused

¹ E. Pritchard. (2021). *The impact of cross-border trade on the gendered economy of North-East India*. Journal of

Border Studies, 34(2), 112-130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1534076X.2021.1917171>

² Ibid.,

³ B. Barman. (2019). *Border trade and the role of women: Case studies from Manipur and Mizoram*. In A. Das & S.

Kalita (Eds.), *Women and border trade in South Asia* (pp. 23-45). New Delhi: Sage Publications.

⁴ Ibid.,

on consolidating their control over the region's borders, including those with Myanmar, China, and Bhutan.⁵ However, the demarcation of boundaries in Mizoram and Manipur was less rigid than it is now, with cross-border trade playing a vital role in local economies.⁶ Women were key players in these informal trade activities, often working as vendors who transported goods such as textiles, food, and handicrafts. This work was viewed as an extension of their domestic roles, with many women involved in family-run businesses or small-scale entrepreneurial ventures, contributing significantly to the region's economic activities.⁷

Following India's independence, the geopolitical landscape of North-East India underwent significant changes, particularly with the creation of new administrative borders and the implementation of trade policies. The "Look East" and later the "Act East" policies enhanced economic ties with Southeast Asia. Mizoram and Manipur became important hubs for border trade, with markets like Moreh (Manipur) and Zokhawthar (Mizoram) serving as focal points for exchanges between India and Myanmar.⁸ Women became more involved in these markets, taking on roles as traders, shopkeepers, and transporters.

In Mizoram, women's participation in border trade has historical roots in the state's connections with Myanmar's trade networks. In areas like Zokhawthar, women played pivotal roles as traders of agricultural products and small goods, often engaging in activities like cross-border smuggling or transporting goods through unofficial channels. Though their contributions were often overlooked in favor of male-dominated trade narratives, women were central to these economic exchanges. Manipur, too, saw women as vital participants in cross-border trade, especially in districts such as Chandel and Tengnoupal.⁹ The Moreh trade centre, located near Myanmar, became a crucial economic hub where women were involved

⁵ Pritchard.,Op.Cit

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ Barman.,Op.Cit

⁸ N.Roy&P.Gupta. (2017). *Cross-border trade and gender relations in North-East India: A study of trade policies and*

women's economic roles. International Journal of Asian Studies, 15(3), 210-225.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/ijasi.2017.21>

⁹ Ibid.,

in the sale of textiles, vegetables, spices, and more. Many women from indigenous communities actively engaged in trade with Myanmar, supplying goods that were in high demand on both sides of the border.¹⁰ However, the involvement of women in border trade was not without its challenges.

Gender norms often limited their access to formal trade networks, relegating them to the informal economy. Women faced fluctuating trade policies, border security concerns, and the effects of insurgency, all of which disrupted both the economy and social structures. Despite these hurdles, women showed resilience, creating social networks that allowed them to thrive in the informal trade sector. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as North-East India's strategic importance grew, women in border trade centres gained more visibility. With the introduction of border trade agreements and an emphasis on connectivity and regional cooperation, women were recognized not only as informal traders but also as crucial economic actors. Their involvement in trade policies, infrastructure development, and community welfare became more pronounced, marking their increasing contribution to regional economic development.

Today, women workers in Mizoram and Manipur's border trade centres still face challenges such as socio-economic inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and fluctuating political conditions. Yet, their historical contributions remain central to the region's economy. Through their participation in informal markets, these women have asserted their economic agency and navigated complex socio-political landscapes, making them essential to both cross-border trade and the broader socio-economic development of North-East India.¹¹ The story of women workers in these border trade centres is not just a reflection of their marginalization but also their agency and resilience. They have played a critical role in sustaining and growing the economies of Mizoram and Manipur, making them indispensable figures in the region's economic history.

¹⁰Ibid.,

¹¹ National Commission for Women. (2018). *The participation of women in informal trade sectors in India: A report on North-East India*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncw.nic.in>

Women's involvement in border trade is not entirely new. Historically, women in Mizoram and Manipur have been active in trade and business, often as an extension of their household and community roles. In Manipur, for instance, the iconic Ima Keithel (Mother's Market) exemplifies women's entrepreneurial spirit.¹² This centuries-old, women-run market highlights their dominance in local commerce. Similarly, in Mizoram, women have played a significant role in agriculture and small-scale trading.¹³ However, the shift towards formalized border trade introduces new complexities, requiring women to navigate regulatory systems, competition, and socio-cultural expectations. This transition from informal to formal trade arenas presents both opportunities and obstacles, necessitating a deeper exploration of their changing roles.

Government policies and regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of women in these trade centres. India's initiatives to enhance trade with Southeast Asian countries have led to infrastructural improvements and policy shifts to promote cross-border commerce. However, the benefits of these policies are not always equitably distributed. Women traders frequently encounter bureaucratic challenges, including the absence of gender-sensitive policies, which can hinder their business activities. Additionally, security concerns and the militarized nature of border areas create a climate of uncertainty, further complicating women's engagement in trade.¹⁴ The intersection of security issues, trade regulations, and women's economic involvement is a critical aspect of their lived experiences, which this study aims to examine.

Women's participation in border trade has implications that go beyond individual income to broader socio-economic progress. By becoming active economic contributors, women enhance the financial well-being of their families and communities, thereby playing a part in poverty alleviation and economic growth. Their engagement in trade also has the potential to strengthen regional ties, aligning with India's Act East policy by fostering closer socio-economic connections with

¹²Ibid.,

¹³Ibid.,

¹⁴ R. Singh. (2020). *Women and trans-border trade in Manipur: An analysis of cultural and economic impact*. Asian Journal of Social Science, 48(4), 459-478. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajss.2020.01.004>

neighboring countries. Nonetheless, the full potential of women's contributions is often constrained by structural inequalities and a lack of targeted support systems, underscoring the need for policy measures that address these gender-specific barriers.

1.1.2. Border Trade

Border trade refers to the 'overland exchange' of goods through a mutually agreed-upon list of items by communities residing on either side of an international boundary.¹⁵ Many nations around the globe maintain border trade relations with their neighboring states. India, for instance, has established agreements with its neighbors like China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, among others, to facilitate such trade. Specifically, India and Myanmar formalized a border trade agreement in January 1994.¹⁶ This form of cross-border commerce is vital for the residents living along the Indo-Myanmar frontier. The current study focuses on Lopu village, situated in southern Mizoram, where border trade serves as a crucial source of livelihood and significantly contributes to the local economy. Women, in particular, have been central to this process, making noteworthy economic and financial contributions to both society and their families by engaging in cross-border trade. Despite their efforts, women's economic contributions are often overlooked within the male-dominated structure of society.

Within tribal communities, especially those considered in this research, women play a crucial role in fostering economic growth by participating in diverse labor activities, ranging from traditional jhum cultivation to cross-border trade. These women not only engage in agricultural and trading activities but also handle household responsibilities, effectively multitasking between domestic and economic roles. Despite the fact that women's participation in the labor market is frequently undervalued, their impact on economic development remains undeniable. Reports from the International Labour Organization in 2004 indicated that, by 2007, approximately 1.2 billion women and 1.8 billion men were part of the global

¹⁵Ibid.,

¹⁶Chettri. (2016). *Women in border trade: The case of Manipur's women traders*. Economic and Political Weekly, 51(12), 30-38.

workforce.¹⁷ Often, women's labor force participation and productivity are found to be higher than that of men. In the context of this study, women have demonstrated a significant role beyond traditional domestic duties, actively engaging in border trade to support their families.

1.2. Conceptual framework

The involvement of women in border trade centers reflects a layered and dynamic reality, emerging at the convergence of gender, economic activity, transboundary interactions, and the socio-spatial periphery. These women operate within intricate socio-economic frameworks influenced by local practices, national policies, and global forces. Their presence is often situated within informal economies, regulatory ambiguity, and deeply entrenched gender expectations. To grasp the full scope of their experiences, one must draw upon diverse theoretical lenses, such as feminist economic critique, transnationalism, labor studies, and borderland analysis.¹⁸ Central to this exploration is the border itself an ambiguous zone where state control is asserted and contested. These trade outposts function not just as nodes of commerce, but also as arenas of cultural negotiation, regulatory oversight, and identity construction. Women engaged in activities ranging from small-scale trading and logistics to service roles are essential to maintaining the flow of commerce across these intersections. Yet, their contributions frequently go unrecognized in mainstream policy dialogues, often overshadowed by larger national narratives on trade, sovereignty, and security.¹⁹ Recognizing the border as more than a demarcation line as a space shaped by social norms and institutional power offers deeper insight into how these women's roles are regulated and perceived.²⁰

Gender, as a structuring force, significantly shapes the nature and scope of women's participation. Their roles are framed by broader societal beliefs about femininity,

¹⁷Government of Mizoram. (2022). *Mizoram's border trade and its economic implications for women workers*.

Mizoram State Planning Board Report.

¹⁸S. Beugelsdijk, & T. Van Schaik. (2005). *Cross-border trade and economic integration: Theoretical foundations and empirical applications*. Springer.

¹⁹Ibid.,

²⁰Ibid.,

domestic responsibilities, and their place in the public sphere. Engagement in cross-border trade may offer women financial agency and an outlet beyond traditional household roles, but it also often places them in precarious labor situations lacking formal recognition or legal protections.²¹ Through a feminist political economy approach, we can better understand how systemic undervaluation of women's labor is perpetuated by structures rooted in patriarchal economic systems. A significant portion of women's work in these trade zones falls into informal sectors, characterized by legal ambiguity and lack of regulation. These include unlicensed trading, unofficial logistics, and small-scale commerce that exists in the margins of legality. Women dominate these sectors, which are often vulnerable to inconsistent enforcement, corruption, and exploitation. Factors such as limited formal employment opportunities, educational barriers, and migration pressures push many women into these roles.²² Consequently, their economic strategies are shaped by both resilience and a constant negotiation with changing market conditions, bureaucratic hurdles, and local power structures.

Social networks, family ties, and communal affiliations often play a central role in shaping access to trade opportunities. These informal support systems can act as protective buffers, offering knowledge and assistance in navigating the complex landscape of border commerce.²³ However, they can also reinforce established hierarchies and limit independence, particularly when access to capital or information is mediated through male relatives or gatekeepers within the community. Women may inherit trade positions or rely on these social connections, yet this reliance can constrain their ability to operate autonomously. Power is not only gendered but also shaped by the geopolitical environment of these regions. Trade centers situated along borders often experience heightened oversight, militarization, and surveillance. Such state interventions frequently impact women more severely, particularly where their mobility is already constrained by cultural norms or legal

²¹D. Rodrik. (2018). *The globalization paradox: Democracy and the future of the world economy*. W.W. Norton & Company.

²²Ibid.,

²³ Ibid.,

restrictions.²⁴ Furthermore, women from indigenous or economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face multiple layers of discrimination and exclusion in these spaces, deepening their marginalization.

The influence of globalization is also central to the current landscape of cross-border trade. Policies promoting market liberalization, regional agreements, and shifting global supply chains have reconfigured local economies and labor demands. While these processes have increased trade volumes and introduced new goods, they have also destabilized traditional economic practices and intensified job insecurity. Women at the lower end of the economic spectrum are often the most affected by these transitions, facing price volatility, rising competition, and a lack of protections in an increasingly informalized labor environment.²⁵ Development interventions in border regions frequently overlook the complexities of women's contributions. While programs by governments, NGOs, and international agencies often emphasize gender inclusion, these efforts sometimes fall short by promoting narrow definitions of empowerment. Initiatives focused solely on entrepreneurship may boost visibility without addressing deeper structural barriers or improving labor conditions. As a result, women's roles are celebrated in rhetoric but often unchanged in practice.

To genuinely understand the lives and labor of women in border trade, research must adopt grounded, people-centered methodologies. Ethnographic fieldwork, life histories, and participatory approaches are essential to capturing the full spectrum of their lived realities—experiences that are often absent from formal statistics.²⁶ These qualitative insights reveal not only economic strategies but also the everyday struggles, resilience, and aspirations that define their participation in this complex arena. Moreover, any analytical framework aimed at understanding women in border trade must be broad, interdisciplinary, and intersectional. It must synthesize economic critique with gender analysis, spatial theory, and postcolonial perspectives.

²⁴W. Keller, W. &S.R. Yeaple. (2009). *Multinational enterprises, international trade, and productivity growth: A*

case study of the technology sector. Review of Economics and Statistics, 91(4), 873-891.

²⁵*Ibid.*,

²⁶P. Mundy. (2017). Border trade and the policy framework: Theories and practices. *The Journal of International Business and Economics*, 15(1), 10-25.

Such a framework should illuminate not just the obstacles these women face but also their capacity for innovation, adaptation, and leadership.²⁷ Ultimately, these women are not passive participants in border economies; they are active agents shaping the social and economic landscapes in which they operate, constantly negotiating power, space, and survival.

1.2.1. Women empowerment

The link between women's empowerment and border trade reveals a deeply nuanced and shifting reality, shaped by a wide range of social, political, cultural, and economic influences. In numerous developing and transitional economies, border regions are not merely geographic divides—they serve as bustling zones of exchange, cultural convergence, and vital sources of livelihood for many, particularly women.²⁸ Within these dynamic environments, women actively carve out roles for themselves, push back against established gender norms, and find ways to assert economic agency. However, their empowerment through border trade is far from a straightforward process; it is molded by systemic inequities, informal practices, geopolitical pressures, and entrenched gendered power structures.

In a broader sense, empowerment goes beyond economic gain; it encompasses the capacity to make autonomous life choices, exert control over personal and professional paths, and participate meaningfully in various spheres of society.²⁹ When placed within the context of cross-border commerce, empowerment can take on complex and often contradictory forms. Women may engage in trade due to entrepreneurial spirit, familial legacies, or economic necessity. In doing so, they access income, movement across regions, and decision-making opportunities that subtly disrupt traditional household and community hierarchies. This participation, while sometimes precarious, often offers women an entry point into economic systems historically dominated by men.

Despite the opportunities, women's economic involvement in these zones is deeply intertwined with marginalization. Border areas are often characterized by

²⁷Ibid.,

²⁸S. Saldívar-Hull. (2021). *Feminism on the border*. US; University of California Press.

²⁹Ibid.,

developmental neglect, underfunded infrastructure, and weak institutional presence. These deficiencies amplify the difficulties faced by traders, particularly women. Operating largely within informal sectors, many female traders lack access to capital, training, legal recognition, and protection. For many, engagement in border commerce is a survival strategy in response to broader crises—rising unemployment, displacement, or failing local industries.³⁰ Cultural expectations around gender further shape the nature of women’s participation. In many regions across the Global South, women are often restricted to informal, small-scale cross-border activities, while men dominate formal, higher-revenue transactions. This division is more than economic; it carries symbolic weight, reinforcing the notion that women’s labor is supplementary or less legitimate. In addition to systemic barriers, women face routine harassment, bribery, intimidation from officials, and in extreme cases, sexual coercion.³¹ The inconsistency and opacity of regulations often leave women vulnerable to exploitation and financial loss.

Yet, these very spaces also foster creativity, resilience, and collective agency. Women frequently build support systems and informal networks that facilitate the exchange of resources, knowledge, and solidarity. Across various regions, women’s collectives, informal unions, and trade associations have emerged as platforms for advocacy, challenging unfair regulations, lobbying for policy changes, and offering mutual protection. These grassroots movements, although often overlooked in formal documentation, are powerful expressions of agency and self-organization within marginal systems. The role of information and education is also critical. When women receive financial literacy training, legal awareness, and access to entrepreneurial resources, their ability to operate sustainably and grow beyond informal sectors improves dramatically.³² In many instances, women who began as petty traders have gradually expanded their operations, building viable cross-border enterprises and creating jobs for others in their communities. These success stories push back against the idea that informality is synonymous with stagnation, revealing

³⁰N. Kabeer. (2016). *Gender, livelihood, and empowerment: Women's economic empowerment through trade*. UK; Oxford University Press.

³¹Ibid.,

³²Ibid.,

instead its potential as a foundation for larger transformation—especially when aligned with supportive policy and institutional frameworks.³³

Nevertheless, the broader policy landscape often fails to reflect the gendered realities of trade. National trade strategies and regional agreements typically emphasize large-scale economic metrics, sidelining the informal and gendered dimensions of cross-border commerce. The experiences of women—marked by exclusion, legal ambiguity, and insecurity—are rarely captured in official statistics or policy discussions. The absence of gender-sensitive trade frameworks has tangible consequences: women’s contributions go unrecognized, their vulnerabilities remain unaddressed, and their potential to drive inclusive economic growth is underutilized. Further complicating the situation are the broader political dynamics of borders themselves. These are frequently contested spaces marked by military presence, regulatory flux, and political tensions. Women operating in these environments must constantly adapt to shifting controls, bureaucratic scrutiny, and unpredictable policy shifts. Their status is further complicated by other intersecting identities such as ethnicity, migration status, or social class, which can increase their exposure to discrimination and exclusion.

Still, women’s participation in border trade contributes significantly to local and even national economies. In parts of Africa, for example, informal trade represents a major share of total trade volume, with women constituting the majority of participants. Their activities support households, sustain education for children, and inject vital income into economically stagnant regions. With adequate investment in infrastructure such as secure trading spaces, accessible transport systems, and gender-responsive customs practices border commerce could evolve into a powerful engine for both economic and social advancement.³⁴ Beyond economic metrics, the personal and symbolic aspects of empowerment are equally important. For many women, involvement in trade across borders brings more than financial return; it cultivates a sense of self-worth, confidence, and personal identity. Mastering new languages,

³³Ibid.,

³⁴S. Shekhawat. (2020). *Women and borders: Refugees, migrants and communities*. I.B. Tauris.

building networks, and engaging in cross-cultural negotiations empowers them in ways that challenge prevailing societal roles and expectations.

In essence, the relationship between border trade and women's empowerment is rich with contradictions but also full of transformative potential. While existing frameworks often constrain and expose women to exploitation, their responses reflect innovation, adaptability, and resistance. True empowerment in this context requires reimagining women not as passive beneficiaries but as central, active participants in shaping economic futures.³⁵ This demands comprehensive policy reforms, legal protections, financial inclusion, and broader cultural shifts that move beyond tokenism and toward meaningful structural change. Border trade, with all its unpredictability and informality, presents a compelling lens through which to examine both the challenges and the opportunities for gender equity in global trade. It blurs traditional distinctions between formal and informal, center and periphery, and even empowerment and oppression. In this contested and dynamic terrain, women are not merely crossing borders—they are redrawing them.

1.2.1. Border trade centre

Border trade hubs are far more than mere logistical zones for the transfer of goods between neighboring nations. They exist at the crossroads of economic imperatives, political calculations, social evolution, and regional collaboration. Located on the edges of countries, these centres act as arenas for commercial activity, cultural interchange, and administrative dialogue. Especially in remote or underdeveloped areas, such trade points often become essential to the livelihoods of local populations and regional economies.

Trade across borders is not a new phenomenon—it predates the formation of modern states. Border communities have historically engaged in informal trade, seasonal commerce, and barter systems rooted in shared cultural, linguistic, and familial connections.³⁶ These longstanding traditions laid the foundation for what has become

³⁵Ibid.,

³⁶G.M.Sánchez. (2014). *The role of border trade in regional development: Case studies from Latin America*. Springer.

more formalized and regulated inter-state commerce. In contemporary times, the creation of official trade centres by governments represents an effort to regulate these interactions, reduce illicit activities, strengthen security, and foster economic partnerships. In an era of growing global interdependence and evolving geopolitical dynamics, the strategic value of border trading zones has increased.³⁷ These zones are now viewed not only as commercial facilitators but as instruments of foreign policy and regional cooperation. Examples such as Moreh-Tamu between India and Myanmar or Ruili on the China-Myanmar border demonstrate how such centres function as gateways that connect domestic markets to broader regional networks. Equipped with essential infrastructure like customs offices, warehouses, and transport links, they are designed to support smoother trade processes. In many cases, these zones benefit from tailored rules and bilateral pacts that aim to ease commerce and empower local traders.

However, running and developing these centres comes with numerous challenges. They are where national policies meet local conditions, often revealing a disconnect between overarching economic strategies and the ground realities. While official narratives promote these zones as engines of growth, those who actually engage in daily trade—vendors, drivers, small business owners—frequently encounter a more complex environment.³⁸ They must navigate obstacles like inefficient bureaucracy, corruption, poor infrastructure, inconsistent policy enforcement, and safety concerns. These trade zones also operate in socially intricate landscapes. Border areas are often home to diverse communities whose identities differ significantly from the dominant national cultures. As such, trade practices in these regions are influenced by local traditions, power structures, and social norms. Cross-border commerce often supports entire communities that may feel more aligned with each other across the border than with distant capitals.³⁹ This blending of formal and informal, legal and traditional, gives these centres a layered and fluid character.

³⁷ Ibid.,

³⁸ McCalla, & Swinnen. (2015). *Trade and development in the Americas: The economic and social dimensions of trade liberalization*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

³⁹ Ibid.,

Informality remains a hallmark of many such trade zones. Much of the trading activity is conducted outside of official frameworks, with small-scale merchants operating without licenses or strict regulatory compliance. These informal channels, though technically outside legal systems, are crucial for local economies. However, the unregulated nature of this trade leaves participants vulnerable to exploitation, legal ambiguity, and harassment. Women are a significant, though frequently overlooked, part of this informal economic fabric. Acting as traders, carriers, cooks, and entrepreneurs, they are integral to the everyday functioning of these hubs. Yet, they face numerous obstacles such as limited financial access, lower educational opportunities, and gender-based violence.⁴⁰ In some cases, border trade centres offer these women opportunities for economic independence and social mobility, but without institutional backing and gender-aware policies, these gains remain tenuous.

Security is another vital dimension of border trade management. In response to fears over smuggling, insurgency, and trafficking, states often implement heavy surveillance and military presence in these areas. While such measures may be necessary for national security, they can also alienate local communities and hinder the free flow of legitimate commerce. The delicate act of balancing trade facilitation with enforcement remains a central challenge. Infrastructure, or the lack thereof, plays a crucial role in determining the success of these centres. Many are situated in neglected regions with inadequate roads, storage, communication networks, and public services. These deficiencies make it harder for traders to move goods, reach markets, or navigate administrative hurdles, ultimately raising costs and reducing profit margins.

To make border trade centres more effective, there's a need for policies that are both strategic and inclusive. Addressing infrastructure gaps, offering support to small-scale traders, streamlining regulations, and recognizing the value of informal economies are all necessary steps.⁴¹ Just as importantly, these centres should be viewed not simply as tools of state policy, but as vibrant spaces where local voices and realities shape outcomes. Cross-border collaboration is essential to the long-term

⁴⁰Ibid.,

⁴¹G.Crespi. (2018). *Cross-border trade and economic integration in Southeast Asia*. Routledge.

viability of these zones. This includes shared investment in infrastructure, common customs standards, and mechanisms for resolving disputes peacefully. Regional bodies and international organizations can assist by providing funding, facilitating dialogue, and advocating for policies that support gender equality and inclusive development. So, border trade centres reflect the societies that surround them. They embody the tensions and potentials of globalization, the quality of governance, and the adaptability of border communities. With thoughtful planning and inclusive policies, these hubs can become not just trade corridors, but places of connection, opportunity, and transformative growth.

1.2. The Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Centre of NE India

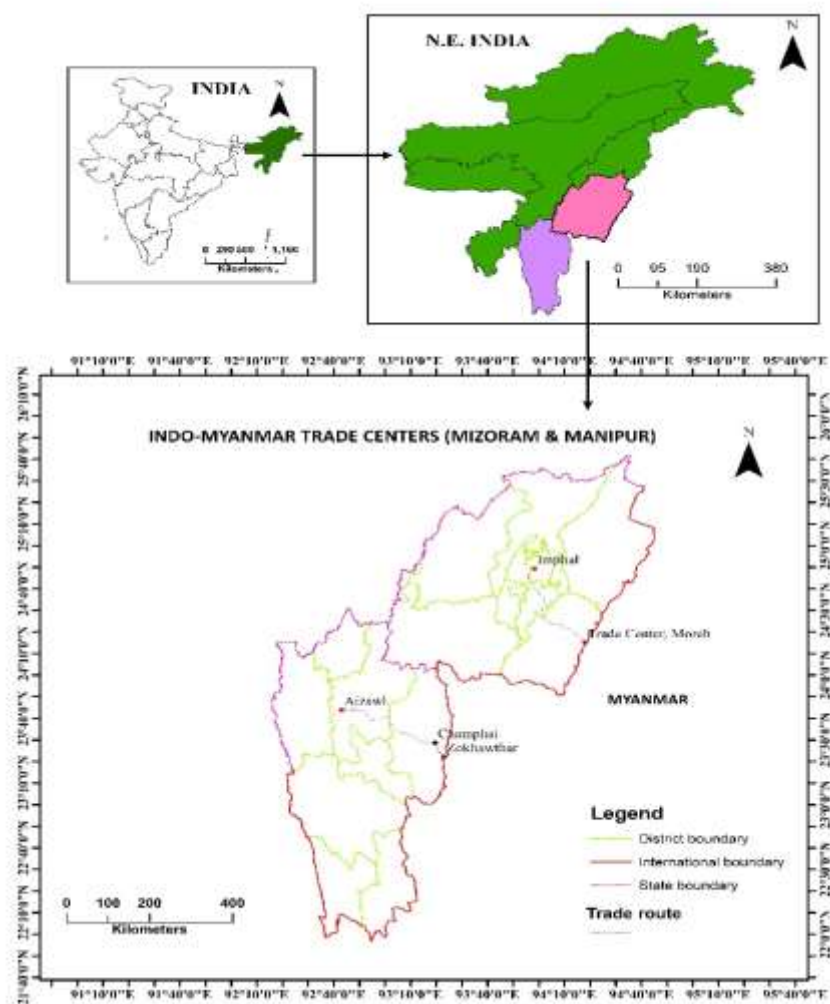


Fig.1 Indo Myanmar Border Trade Centre (Mizoram & Manipur)

The Indo-Myanmar border serves as a territorial boundary separating India from Myanmar. This demarcation was established during the colonial period, defining borders between the two countries. The border extends through three northeastern Indian states—Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland. The Indo-Myanmar borderland has a unique historical narrative, housing multiple tribes who were territorially divided during British rule. The communities on both sides of this border share a common history, culture, and traditions rooted in colonial demarcation, followed by subsequent post-colonial state policies. The region has seen continuous movement of people and exchange of goods, both legally and illegally, with cross-border trade and interactions binding the borderland communities together. An agreement between India and Myanmar permits people living along the border to cross up to 16 kilometers without restrictions.⁴²

The Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) set up a forest check post at the border, managed by the Forest Department. MADC, which shares its longest boundary with Myanmar, employs a Forest Range Officer, a Beat Officer, and forest guards at this post.⁴³ These officials collect taxes on goods imported from Myanmar and maintain a register for travelers' details. While MADC lacks the authority to check official documents, this system helps regulate the flow of goods across the border. MADC is located in Mizoram's southern region and is home to the Mara tribe, known by different names in Myanmar and nearby areas.⁴⁴ The Mara-inhabited region, termed as Marara, translates to "land of the Mara people." The British annexed this area in 1924, placing it under the South Lushai Hills administration.⁴⁵ Following the annexation, the Mara territory was split into two administrative zones:

⁴²Lalchhuanawm&Lallawmkimi. (2019). *Challenges of women workers in cross-border trade: A case study of Mizoram*. In M. Roy & K. Sharma (Eds.), *Women's Labour and Empowerment in India* (pp. 58-74). Kolkata: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴³Ibid.,

⁴⁴R. Sarma. (2016). Women in the informal sector in North-East India: The case of Mizoram. *Journal of North-East Indian Studies*, 12(3), 75-88

⁴⁵Ibid.,

the Western part under the Lushai Hills and the Eastern part under Myanmar's Chin Hills, a division that still persists.⁴⁶

In 1953, the Mara-inhabited area became part of the Pawi-Lakher (P-L) Regional Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. By 1972, it was upgraded to an Autonomous District Council, initially known as Lakher District and later renamed Mara District in 1988.⁴⁷ Mizoram's international border with Myanmar stretches for 510 kilometers. The Tiau River acts as a natural borderline on the western side, delineating the two nation-states, India and Myanmar. Zokhawthar, a village in Mizoram's Champhai district, is a key Land Custom Station (LCS) with immigration and customs offices.⁴⁸ However, informal trade continues in the MADC region, where communities on both sides engage in cross-border commerce without stringent state regulation. Borders are typically seen as lines of demarcation separating two sovereign territories, highlighting their differences. A case in point is the fenced wall along the India-Pakistan border.

The border signifies the state's legitimate authority to exercise power, including coercion. It serves as a representation of state control, managing the movement of people and acting as a conduit of information between different territories. However, the Indo-Myanmar border challenges the conventional notion of borders. It is not merely a geographical boundary or territorial limit but rather a dynamic space where there is continuous cross-border movement of people, goods, and services. The Indo-Myanmar borderland can be perceived as a starting point or a strategic location where interactions between two communities have historically taken place.

Rather than viewing it as a strict dividing line, it should be understood as a sociocultural zone where individuals from both sides come together and engage. The border also functions as a negotiation platform, facilitating exchanges between the populace and the state on multiple levels. Academic interest in border studies has grown, especially with India's shift towards new foreign policy and economic

⁴⁶L.M.Hmar. (2019). Gender roles and economic activities in border trade centres of Mizoram. *Indian Journal of*

Gender Studies, 26(2), 130-148.

⁴⁷Ibid.,

⁴⁸Ibid.,

strategies involving its South Asian neighbors, including Myanmar. As India seeks to expand its trade, investment, and economic ties with ASEAN countries, Myanmar plays a pivotal role as a gateway, given its shared land and maritime borders with India. The adoption of initiatives like the Look East Policy/Act East Policy has further drawn scholarly focus on Indo-Myanmar border trade.

Although India's border with Myanmar is militarily significant, it is not as tightly controlled as its borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. This difference highlights the various ways borderlands perceive and interact with state presence. The dynamics of state-border-people relationships can be better understood by examining the role of women in these areas. Unlike the India-Bangladesh-Pakistan borders, where documents are mandatory even for family visits, the India-Myanmar border is relatively open, allowing residents to move freely within a 16 km radius on either side.⁴⁹ However, travel to major cities requires proper documentation or passports. Additionally, individuals need identification cards or a permission letter from the Village Council President (specifically from Ralie village).⁵⁰ Obtaining these permissions is generally not an issue for women traders, as they often have established connections or friends across the border in Myanmar.

The participation of women in socio-economic activities dramatically increases the status of women and improve the lives of women. The involvement of women workers in trade activities open up an important opportunity to women through global trade like digital economy and the rise in service. Women potential are expanded through trade activities which decrease inequality and extended women skill to enhance consumers' choice. It increases in creation of new jobs and women in bargaining power.⁵¹

Some available evidence shows that the women who contributed in small and medium -sized enterprises are not always registered in some trade data. This means

⁴⁹S.Gupta. & S. Das. (2022). The informal economy and women workers in border regions: Evidence from North-East India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 57(11), 45-55.

⁵⁰Ibid.,

⁵¹Women and Trade: The Role of Trade in Promoting Women's Equality. Retrieved from www.worldbank.org

that there are some barriers in trade with women participation that can benefitted from reforms which can reduce the cost of trade as trade facilitation. Many women participated in global trade indirectly than we think. In most developing countries, women are found in export-oriented sector. This has brought higher wages and economic empowerment women.⁵² The significant role played by women help in the development of the society and to make it advance and modern society.Reduction of gender gap can release the wealth of women talents, creativity and resourcefulness and inventiveness for developing countries in quest for transforming their society through trade.⁵³ There is a need to reinforce the management skill and abilities of women entrepreneurs. Gender equality is vital and should be concern in public policies. This is essential for the developing countries to complete the implementation of gender perspectives.⁵⁴ The leader in the developing countries have more responsibilities in and can focus on promoting the participation of women in international trade for growth.

In global economy, women play a major role because they invest more in education, health and nutrition. Established a safe foundation for their future families and also to the communities than men do. Empowering women through the involvement in trade can creates opportunities for everyone. So, empowering women economically is crucial to enjoy economic benefit. Globally, the women own around 10 million of small and medium-sized enterprises. This is account for 80% of jobs around the world. The increasing competitiveness enhanced the possibility in creating new jobs. The achievement of economic target goals and sustainable economic growth is possible through the participation of women.⁵⁵After Indian independence, the leader of our country comprehends the role of women in economic field and the participation of people have put together for the context of development. During the political debate on International Women's Decade. Women are considered as a weaker section in the society and there is a demand for treating women with sympathy and understanding. The decade of women make way for

⁵²Trade and Gender-OECD. Retrieved from www.oecd.org

⁵³Ibid.,

⁵⁴Ensuring greater participation of women in international trade. 03-Oct-2016. Retrieved from www.intracen.org

⁵⁵Women and Trade- International Trade Centre. Retrieved from www.intracen.org

providing reservation in jobs for women in organized sector service and industries. This will lead to employment to women and generation of income through self-employment.

In Manipur, women participation in the workforce uplifts their position, where most of trade is done by women. Due to this, women in Manipur held high position in which all the exchange of the produce and internal trade is managed by them. Collectively, the range of trade in Manipur was agricultural product from vegetables to crops and from woven cloth to spinning of wheel. The capital Imphal is the largest market place and important trading place in Manipur. Apart from this Manipuri Muslim like the *Poggens* are deprived of remunerative prices because of social taboos women are not allow to came out and run shop at their own.⁵⁶

For improving the condition of women, participation in development path is crucial for reduction of poverty not only for achieving social justice. The worldwide experience indicates that women who have great supporter can contribute much to the economic developments and can improve the health of the family, investing the potentiality in women is essential to sustainable developments. At the same time, there is some barriers that investment in education to female and health is somewhat low. Some constrain is made and restricted to access to different kinds of service and assets, and the condition is made worse by law and regulation which oblige on opportunities of women. The attitude and action of men should change that will play a relative role towards developmental approach.⁵⁷

Education and power to women is essential for development of the society. Women take part in many activities outside family and kids. She has to take care of all her family member. By fulfilling such responsibilities at home, women are able to take part outside household activities and are able to come out and do jobs for brightening future for family and the country as well. The participation of women in economic activities outside the household sector like formal agriculture and industries can be

⁵⁶ R. Sarma, ,Op.Cit

⁵⁷Enhancing women participation in economic development. Retrieved from <https://elibrary.worldbank.org>

measured, but participation of women in informal like household work, educating children and giving training and doing household chores are not measured.

Women involved in informal trade activities are large in number but their participation is undervalued especially trade at international border is informal cross-border trade. Large percent of women are involved in informal trade is women. According to The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), informal trade which include cross-border trade, domestic trade and re-export.⁵⁸ This activity is the main source of jobs creation in Africa. In South Africa Development Community (SADC) the activity of informal trade activities come around 30-40 per cent of intra trade, with US\$ 17.6 billion per year. Most importantly, the people who are involved in informal trade come around 70% in Africa and provide around 20% to 75 % of the total employments in some other countries.⁵⁹

Involvement of women workers in cross-border trade activities leads to some kind of economic empowerments. But at the same time, it can lead to gender-based violence from the corrupt agents of the border which made women workers extremely helpless to persecutions and other form of violence. Experiencing high taxation and regulation of trade, limited access to credit facilities, unhealthy working condition and market opportunities information. The International Women's Day which is observed in 8th March discuss on constrain and made recommendation on infrastructure, regulatory and direct support, training and communication. These recommendations are not critical to reduce constrain but to improve facilitation of trade and for promotion of economic empowerment of women and to promote gender equality.⁶⁰

1.4. Review of Literature

Joyati Mitra's work "*Women and Society Equality & Empowerment*" (1999) is a collection of articles in the present compilation seeks to profile the aspect of equality

⁵⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2017). *Economic empowerment of women in border areas:*

North-East India. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/india>

⁵⁹ Gender equality and Trade Policy- United Nations, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/>

⁶⁰ Women without Borders: Gender and Informal Cross Border Trade, <https://www.agrilink.org>

and empowerment of women, a cherished goal for long. The work examines the status of women, how they are being treated in the society and every aspect of life. She argues that even though the constitution and some State Government have been taken initiatives for empowerment, safeguard of the women yet the status of women even in the modern world did not elevated as it has to be. The quality of women has been eloquently expressed and those are of beneficial and a great force to boost the attitude of women and this would make them realize their real strength and help them to break socio- economic and political barriers of women to become successful and influential as men.

Sarada Rath, Navaneeta Rath (1999) '*Women in India, A Search for Identity*' is a collection of selected essays emphasizing on the changing uniqueness of women in the social, political and economic field. State and society in Indian today is affected by patriarchal ethics. Development of the rural women are neglected because their potentialities have not known there is still a hidden social discrimination like the attitudinal behaviour against women employment. There is a prolonged issue for women, mass mobilization and a conscious effort on the part of all the citizens male and female can solve the issue of identity crisis prevailing in the Indian women. The liberal and the radical feminist of the present considered that equality, justice and identity of the Indian women are the development goals for achieving in the future generation.

Srinath Baruah (2000) in his edited book chapter of Gurudas and RK Purkayastha '*Border Trade North-East India and Neighboring Countries*' discuss about the trading system of the North Eastern part of India and made assessment about the nature of trade in the north eastern part of India with its neighboring countries. It discusses the attainment of Look East Policy is responsible in promoting economic growth with neighboring countries of Asia. This essay enumerates the north eastern state especially the trading areas to south eastern nations should take sufficient measure. The infrastructural facilities especially transport and communication should improve the trading system and apart from this, for the improvement of facilities like ware housing, banking and insurance, better facilities in transit point are necessary. It analyzed the need to build a strong and healthy growth of border trade.

Mira Seth (2001) '*Women and Development: The Indian Experience.*' Thousand Oaks. London. Sage Publication analyses the development issues of women and how things came to be what they are at present. This was followed by the assessment and evaluation of the women efforts to accelerate women's development since independence. The book presents the modest efforts at enlightening and promoting understanding of women development issues. Higher education, high position in government, business and high profit jobs have achieved through the legislation made by the governments.

Narasaiah(2004) '*Empowerment for women*' New Delhi, Discovery publishing House Analyses the struggle for women which was confined by the division of roles along the gender lines. In the 20th Century the first struggle for women was initiated in 1861. Women are engaging not only in household with the new educational opportunities taking part in the major social and political emancipation movements. The main objectives of women were to participate in the public life which they put efforts in having the right to vote. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Sexual equality was reasserted in 1929 by the convention on all forms of discrimination against women, this has become treasurable tools for emancipation of women in the world.

Bharat Jhunijhunwala and Madhu Jhunijhunwala (2004) '*Indian approach to women's Empowerments*' Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publication is a collection of articles tries to discuss the Indian tradition from the Hindus standpoints. India is male dominated society where male will always be the head of the family. But the conditions of women are empowered through reforms and these reforms encourage women through economic and political development with a division of roles. The entrance of women in the labor force increases the supply of labor with higher profit. 'Opportunities of self-realization' with regard to equality between male and female has to be obtained.

Thomas CJ, Gurudas, Bijoy Singh N (2005) in their book '*Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials*' in their book discuss that the Northeast Indian cross-border region did not result in cross-border economic interdependence.

Due to a lack of central focus, this border point was viewed as a vulnerable region by state-centric security in both India and Myanmar. However, with the emergence of Southeast Asian nations following the Cold War, the border's situation changed. The advent of globalization has raised economic concerns for the country's foreign policy. The expansion of regional trade agreements integrated the border region into the economic corridor. This book describes the issues, current state, and future prospects of border trade between India and Myanmar, which is based on resource production and demand structure. A strategic tool for economic development was found in the overlooked cross-border area.

Indo-Myanmar Relations in the Greater Perspectives of India's Look East Policy: Implications on Manipur is an article written by Langpoklakpam Suray Singh (2009) in an edited book of Thingnam Kishan Singh on *Look East Policy & India North East: Polemics and Perspectives* analyzed the growth of relations between India and Myanmar and its implications on Myanmar. It stated that with regard to border trade, the Indian initiatives seems to be more concentration in political and security than the economic relations. Economic analyst stated that the Central Government is not interested in the overall development in Manipur especially the border trade in the region is totally confusing. No one take the responsibility in this area on trade and elapses the cross-border relationship between socio-political problem and economic development. With the absence of developmental determinations, human trafficking, drug and smuggling prevail in the area which brought disease like HIV/AIDS. If there is no policy for redressal of this grievances it will damage the whole Manipuri region. Policy implementation and planning should be undertaken for Manipur to become meaningful for Indo-Myanmar cooperation and can play a positive role for its India's perspective to Look East Policy.

Ranjan Kshetrimayum (2010) in his article, '*Border Trade Between India and Myanmar Through Moreh: Its Trends and Problems*' analyzed that Moreh is a commercial capital of Manipur and Myanmar is India's gateway to South East Asia which has a country of this group which has land and maritime boundary with India, After India became a summit level partner of ASEAN and a member of the east Asia Summit, it improves relation with Myanmar that is beneficial in many ways. Besides

that, India and Myanmar are members of some sub regional groupings such as the BIMSTEC and the Mekong-Ganga cooperation. On the other hand, despite the sanctions imposed by the west China has raised its economic profile in Southeast Asia, particularly Myanmar. Due to its availability of gas and resources in Myanmar India should not be left behind because it is essential for economic development and for industries.

A Glimpse of Self-Management and Development Institution of North East India is an article written by J.J. Roy Burman (2011) discuss that Self-Management and development in the North East did not increased the attention of the governments but it still operational. The institution which involves in self-development did not receive any help from external agencies. This led to self-determination and self-development. In one of the North-Eastern states of India, the traditional jhum cultivation was abolish by the state chief minister which led to economic starvation especially to the rural poor. People oriented program became impossible for a number of departments. Welfare activities and generation of revenue and construction was nil. But there is some possibilities that could provide a sense of stability to inter-village and other inter-regional institution.

Disparity in socio-economic development and the implication on communal conflict; A study on India's North Eastern region is an article written by Debasis Neogi (2012) discusses the North Eastern part of India which comprise the seven State is poorly developed. In spite of the common mongoloid origin there is a different lifestyle in the social and economic development. This paper attempt to find out the disparity in the social economic condition of the region. It illustrated the situation prevailing in health, education, economic and social sector. Disparity on the social stability result in insurgency which have penetrating the North East region creating communal conflict can be traced in disparity and deprivation. This paper demonstrate disparity and deprivation in poverty and communal conflict can be controlled and make prescription and suggestion in the social economic development of the North East region.

Uddipan Dutta, Bhupen Sharmah (2013) *Functioning Village Council in Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland* discuss the functioning of village council as an important hallmark of development in the hill of North East to various communities. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments provide a separate power to rural and urban areas. The Village Council has judicial power in exercising its duty only to petty crimes and their power exercise extended only to demanding fine and expulsion.

Prabir De and Jayanta Kumar Ray (2013) *India- Myanmar Connectivity: Current Status and Future Prospect* analyzed the land border and trade in India felt insignificant as compared to other trade center in the world. The most effective border trade with India is Moreh which is located at Manipur. There are four Land Custom Center in India which deals with Myanmar. The Border Trade Agreement which was signed in 1994 provided a legal framework for the border area, before signing the Trade Agreement most of the work have been done by head loading sine time immemorial. Moreh Land Custom Station at Tamu in Myanmar was functioned in Aril 1995. After India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement in 1994, a second Border Trade point at Champhai LCS in the Mizoram at Rih sector in Myanmar began in 2004. Another Border trade is functioned at Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh. Another proposal is made and to this has to be opened at Avakung-Pansat/Somrai. After that India and Myanmar have signed memorandum of understanding in 2012 to open border *haat*.

‘*Role of Panchayati Raj in Socio- Economic Empowerment of Rural Women: A study in Ghaziabat, Bulandshshrand and Gautam Budh Nagar*’ is an article written by Nagalaxmi M Raman Sukkhwant S. Bindra (2015) discusses about the role of rural women in three districts. Panchayati Raj Institution includes rights from the beginning in various aspect of the development of rural areas. Women empowerment means the change of structure through radical change in law, property Rights, control over women work. Economic empowerment of women signifies to employment and income generation through training and skill development. To make the women achieve their position, a number of involvements are necessary. The participation of

women in political process is crucial for the reflexing of both equality and developments.

'Challenge confronting women in Media' is an article written by Rachel Kabi and K. H. Kabi(2016) investigates the challenge facing women and media practitioner in India. Media situation in the world is miserable especially those in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indonesia it is less than 20% but women in media industry are found to be higher. Female journalist has powers to defend themselves and have make significant progress in the industry but in order to attain equal position as man. Media situation in Asia and Pacific regions is gloomy where the ratio of men and women is 4:1 across the region. The article is an attempt to comprehend the complexities of their jobs and the motivating factors for women journalist to continue with passion in spite of being threatened from different areas.

Assessing the participation of men and women in cross-border trade in agriculture: Evidence from selected East African countries written by Michele Mbo'o-Tchouawou, Joseph Karugia, Leonard Mulei and Hannah Nyota (2016) analyzed the pattern of gender in cross border trade. Men and women have the same work culture in the region which signifies the potential of women in assessment of trading. Informal sector remains high in these areas more than formal trade. Policy and awareness can contribute to improve all the traders at the people residing at the border points. There is no effective measures trade provision and there is a need for strengthening forum for cross-border stakeholder.

Contextualizing Indo-Myanmar Border Trade at Moreh in the edited book of E. Bijoy Kumar Singh, HomenThangjam and Shukhdeba Sharma (2016) analyzed that trade with Myanmar take place through Moreh linking with Tamu located at northwest Myanmar at Sagaing. India and Myanmar are increasingly engaged in cross border trade and economic cooperation. The trade statistics show that India's export to the East and Southeast Asia is dominated by processed petroleum oil, metallic products, jewelers' products, diamond, medication mixes in dosage, chemicals, iron and steel, ships, boats and floating structures, pharmaceuticals, electrical machinery and equipment, clothing, vehicle parts, clothing, accessories,

food and animal fodder and cotton products. Tea, coffee and rubber constitute a very small portion of India's export to these countries, it gives the fact that the share in domestic product of the region is growing up by a little one percent.

Socio-economic impact of Act East policy in North Eastern region is an article written by PartacsonRomun Chiru(2017) discusses about the North Eastern region yields optimistic or pessimistic shape from the looking east policy. The Act East policy try to improve the economic conditions and health care and absolutely neglected the economic crisis prevailing in the North East Region. The implementation of look East policy transform the North East Region to better platform into International arena. To prevent anti-social economic activities like Drug and Arm struggling Act should be properly channelizing. There is frequent illegal trade practice in this region. The establishment of special economic zone at the appropriate place is the most urgent need for the North Eastern region.

Expanding Opportunities, "Expanding the Benefits of Trade to Women in the BBIN Region: A Program Design Primer (2017) prepared by the Asian Foundation presented a program for women in the BBIN region for intervention and expanding trade benefit and trade-related especially to women. It examines that the process of intra-regional trade was lagging behind and women inclusion is very low while there is impressive growth in trade. The male domination in trade activities have structurally drag women down in women's participation especially in economy this reflection is found in economic activities and trade activities across the border.

Women in a corporate world: A reality or myth is an article written by Anju Beniwal (2018) discusses about the role of women in a corporate world. Women has passed through different stage and experience a dramatic change. Women at the top management position are rarely found. Poverty can only be eliminated if women – half of the world population are educated and have willingness to generate income for themselves and their families. There is a myth applied by the India that only men are the bread earner while women are supposed to care of the household and the family. This can be referred as a guilt applied in the Indian society. Recently, things have changed, women can have assumed top position, they are now engaged in

organization and do all men can do. With entering to the corporate world, women have implicit several roles in carrying about gender equality. Women have better relationship building skill as compared to man. The representation of both gender in income creates a balance in the society.

Women's Rights Are Human Rights being an article written by Bharti Chhibber (2018) discusses that attaining equality between men and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women are fundamental Human Rights and United Nations. Women around the world nevertheless regularly suffer violation of their Human Rights throughout their lives, and realizing women's human rights has not always been a priority. Achieving equality between women and men require a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which experience discrimination are denied equality so as to develop appropriate strategies to eliminate such discrimination. Some group of women face additional forms of discrimination. Political participation is crucial as it is not only a symbol of women's development and empowerment but also creates further awareness and mobilizes other women to enter the political arena to promote their own and social interest.

Women Trade Union Participation in India- a Qualitative Inquiry is an article written by Sasmita Dash(2019) discuss the participation of women in trade and their responsibilities in the family made it difficult to actively participate in trade. It stated that women participation is not possible because of masculine structure of society and argued that the women participation is a myth. The workforce is driven by men, and women are considered as a lower social acceptance. Therefore, masculine structure made it difficult to reach full potential to women. The continuation of masculine partition in leadership shows the men superiority in the workplace. Especially men are concentrated and invest time and energy for the growth of trade and can fully participated.

Empowered or Entangled: Agency and choice in Women's Employment in India is an article written by Neetha N (2020) Analyses the position of women in India was uplifted due to the formation NGO which is aided by self-help group. Economic opportunities in the society show the advantage of men show social realities. But

women are benefit from the growth of economy through greater policy. The men reason for less women participation was because lack of suitable employment to women. This is because the disparity in men and women in different skill of work. In some context women are looking for self-supporting in economics context. Entrepreneurial and skill training program are made possible for men. This led to less women in entrepreneurship. Empowerment which understands the conceptual understanding of feminine aspect is necessary.

Women's Economic Empowerment and gender equality in Trade Facilitation: The Role of Customs and Border Services(2020) USAID, From the American People investigate on the participation of women on cross-border trade in Africa and discuss the economic hurdles in the assessment of participation of women in formal trade. Liberalization of trade benefitted the trade system in Africa. Due to the limitation of data on trade facilitation and women involvement there is a need to have a proper data of women in trade.

Choudhury S, Kumar S (2021) in his article “Gender discrimination and marginalization of women in North-East India” Talk about the Northeast's social isolation of women. North East Indian women's circumstances are far better than those of their counterparts in other parts of the nation. It is quantifiable in terms of women's spaces, social mobility, and life choices. Different indicators indicate that certain women in the nation have a somewhat better position than others. In addition, moreover, women in the Northeast experience various forms of discrimination, especially in a patriarchal culture. This patriarchal culture often manifests in social isolation, limiting women's access to resources and opportunities. Despite some advantages, many women in the Northeast still face challenges in asserting their rights and achieving true equality in society.

G.S. Leela (2023) in his article “*Migrated Women Workers in Unorganized Sector- Challenges and Issues in India*” analysed the state of women in the unorganized sector. concentrating especially on migratory women. They encounter prejudice and social difficulties. both political and economic. Economic challenges are compounded by a lack of legal protections, leaving these women vulnerable to

exploitation and abuse. Additionally, their migratory status often isolates them from essential support networks, making it difficult to access healthcare, education, and fair wages, thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty and marginalization. Many women work in the unorganized and informal sectors, earning poor wages that barely cover their daily expenses. They are denied rights and assistance. People migrate because they are poor and unemployed, but they still have to work at low-paying jobs to make ends meet. Migrant workers have encountered numerous issues and difficulties as a result of their inability to sustain and represent themselves on their own.

Ophelia Yumlembam (2024), in her article '*Indo-Myanmar border fencing initiative: Assessing imperatives and challenges*', discuss it may be detrimental to both nations if the central government decides to fortify its border with fencing and terminate the Free Movement Regime. Because of its complicated topography, the area has a lot of ethnic and cultural similarities. Political leaders may object, and local insurgent organizations may form, adding to the region's already high level of tension. An approach that takes into account the region's complexity and security is necessary for India's policy with Myanmar.

Harsh V. Pant and Pratinashree Basu (2024), in their Observer Research Foundation's article '*At 10, the path ahead for India's Act East Policy*', discuss India's initiatives to improve connectivity through infrastructure projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand project, the Trilateral Highway. Chattogram and Mangla Ports a crucial route for shipping products to and from Bangladesh, have been delayed. This led to India's northeastern area becoming underdeveloped and less linked with countries in Southeast Asia. However, its strategic geopolitics allow it to close the distance and fortify its economic and political ties.

1.5. Research Gap

The participation of women in the social, economic and political sphere can be found in different areas of research and books. The existing review shows the evident that women participation in cross-border areas have played a significant role in the growth and development of the society. Cross-Border trade and women

empowerment made a significant study from the reviewed book and publication. But the participation of women in cross-border especially in *Moreh* and *Zokhawthar*, has been neglected and it require a bookish publication or writing about the participation at the border area. Therefore, in this study, the importance of women participation is investigated and the requirement information regarding the positive impact and some limitation and shortage in the area are identified.

1.6. Statement of the Problem

Socio- Economic changes are found in the North-East region which can be found from the fact that that women have involved in different roles in the society such as victims, survivors, combatants, peace activist, negotiators, household head, and laborer in traditionally male dominated field. The literacy rate in this area is higher than the national average except in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

Moreh town is located in India-Myanmar border at Tengenoupal district of the state of India. It plays a crucial role in connection with India-Myanmar relation and became an instant developed trade point with Myanmar and on the other side of the border Tamu. It is one of the most important trading centers between India and Myanmar and play a key role in bringing economic development of the state. The Central and State government take several new measures to promote and increase trade link with Southeast Asia. This will provide a competitive advantage to Manipur.

Champhai is also the main entry route from Myanmar to India located near the International Border between India and Myanmar. Champhai is only 30 km from Zokhawthar. Zokhawthar is under the jurisdiction of Champhai Police station. Many Foreigner from Myanmar entered Mizoram via Zokhawthar- Rih sector. Being located at the International boarder, many Foreigner from Myanmar are known to have been involved in Drug trafficking. The central and State Government provided Security services to the officer of land custom station besides maintaining law and order. D. Company of Assam Rifles and Zokhawthar Police out post are situated at Zokhawthar.

Zokhawthar is a border between India and Myanmar. It is the main source of trade link between the two. In these area women are engage in different kinds of activities as men. Women have played a significant role in the society as well as economic development. Though granted by the constitution of India women are also participating in the community development purpose, few people are elected as their representatives at the local level. The people living in this area are mostly immigrants. Poverty impels people to reside in this area but there is no programme for agriculture women workers. Thus, they mostly engage in different kinds of work to earn their daily bread. In Zokhawthar Border Trade Centre, most of women workers playing equal part with men. Women are involved in the economic activities for generation of money because of their economic backwardness. This brings economic development in the community.

ZokhawtharRih-Sector has economic significance due to its strategic location which can improve regional cooperation with South-East Asian countries. After the Border Trade Agreement was signed between India and Myanmar in 1994, the barter system which visualize the exchange of goods without transaction of money was replaced to normal trade in 2015. Some data shows that there is lack of demand for the Indian products. Reed brooms and Betel Nuts are particulars imported through Land Custom Station at Zokhawthar. Besides there is some other product to meet the demand for other items like pharmaceuticals and fertilizers are met through informal trade. After the opening of Land Custom Station at Zokhawthar the livelihood of the people has changed and slash and burn i.e., jhumming cultivation was consigned with employment generated through this trade point which is dominated by informal trade. This informal trade needs to be addressed by the authorities for formalizing trade at this point.

1.7. Scope of the Study

The study delineates the economics, political, and social determinants shaping the labour participation of women workers in the border trade centres of Mizoram and Manipur. Economically, it examines the gendered structure of labour engagement, income distribution pattern, and the influence of trade infrastructures

and cross-border market dynamics on women's economic mobility. Politically, it analyses the regulatory frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and policy regime governing border trade, with emphasis on how these structure condition women's women access to opportunities, rights and protection. Socially, it assesses the cultural norms, community hierarchies, and gendered constraints that mediate women's mobility, decision making and workplace experience.

By integrating these dimensions, the study establishes a focused analytical framework for understanding women position, constraints and roles within the border. The study seeks to provide a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which women workers engage in border trade and the border implications for inclusive socio-economic development in Zokhawthar and Moreh

6.6. Limitations of the Research

The research focuses the women's experiences at the border trade centers between Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur. It explores women's participation in these locations in detail. The experiences of women workers at the two local sites of border provides essential data on empowerment of women in borderlands specially border trade centers. Yet its conclusions might not precisely demonstrate the multidimensional working conditions of female employees across different border areas besides diverse trade setups.

This research demonstrates that most documented female participation involves unofficial business operations including small-scale vending together with unregulated market work. Analysis of the informal sector throughout this research has resulted in less comprehensive examination of experiences by women working in formal trade or larger-scale enterprises.

The research combines descriptive and analytical methods to study women's economic activities which rely on qualitative information collected using case studies and interviews and participant observation. The research method presents detailed information but reduces the potential to measure economic significance or spread women's economic impact as well as policy outcomes.

This research examines border trade experiences and participation issues for women at present while avoiding any assessment of temporal changes. The study prevents researchers from understanding long-term trends because recent policy measures and present socio-economic developments cannot be properly evaluated.

The study reveals gender-related trade barriers but lacks systematic evaluation of additional social elements including ethnic, age, educational and marital status combinations that influence border trade experiences for women. The study reviews government and NGO initiatives but does not assess thoroughly their outcomes in eliminating women's work obstacles along with their sustained empowerment.

The study faces difficulties in obtaining complete data specifically because it encounters limitations in tracking informal trade operations and incomplete statistical records in border region areas. Lack of adequate documentation affects both the analysis completion quality and researchers' capacity to reach valid conclusions. The study's findings depend on its research method and scope but reveal additional aspects that future research should explore regarding women's experiences in border trade zones.

1.8. Significance of the Study

The status of women in socio-economic mainstream is consistently lagging behind. Women experienced high poverty rates than men, facing adverse health condition and remain under represent in political office with wide variation by the state. The economic security of women is linked to their family income, not only from government jobs but also from other source, while some women enjoy comfortable family income. Some women are still struggling to make ends meet. Various steps are on its way for further improvement. Women have potential, skill and knowledge which can prove helpful to establish and manage.

The most significant things were to create awareness, motivation and support from their family or other organization. With proper assistance, women can strengthen their capacities besides adding to the family income and national productivity. It is the need of the hour to create awareness to women regarding their rights, when and how to exercise these rights. Without knowledge one cannot be bold

as she could be, after knowing what their rights entails, then only they will be daring and brave to take what they ought to have. The various institutions of the society; be it public, private or NGOs should always remember that, half of the population is female. This will help them to realize that the welfare of women in all aspects of life is as important as male welfare.

The present study will contribute in finding out the important role that women workers play in the border trade-based economic arena. While undertaking the study, many women workers will have some awareness in this regard as well, since they are going to be respondents of this research. The study will analyse the comparative role and status of women workers in border trade-centres in both Mizoram and Manipur. The proposed study analyses women's workers in border trade centres in Mizoram and Manipur.

1.9. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the profile of border trade and border trade between India and Myanmar
2. To examine women's work in the border trade centres at Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur.
3. To study the women's empowerment through the Border Trade Centres.
4. To analyse the problems that women workers face at the Border Trade Centres.

1.10. Research Questions

1. What is the historical background of border trade between India and Myanmar?
2. What is the status of women workers in the border trade centres at Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur?
3. How does the significance of border trade centres for women's empowerment?
4. What are problems at border trade centres faced by women workers?

1.11. Methodology

The present study is based on descriptive design and cross sectional in nature. It is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted to analyse the participation of women workers in Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used for the present study. The present study seeks to compare the participation of women in Moreh and Zokhawthar at the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Centre.

Purposive non probability sampling method was adopted to select sample for the field-study. The primary data were collected by using semi structured interview schedule to conduct personal interview with 105 women workers in Zokhawthar(Mizoram) and 105 women workers in Moreh(Manipur) at each border trade center. Personal interviews with women workers in each border trade center were conducted according to the convenience of the women workers. Hence, the total sample size for the study is 210. Direct observation method also conducted in Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur).

The researcher applied both open-ended and closed ended questions were used to collect the primary data. Telephonic interviews mode applied to women workers in Moreh due to the Manipur crisis. Primary data also collected from government notifications, gazette publications, websites of government offices. The collected primary data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics is employed to provide an outline of the general characteristics of the study. Secondary data include books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, research studies, and electronic sources.

1.12. Chapterization

Chapter I: Introduction

The introductory chapter deals with the core part of the thesis work. It includes a statement of the problem, literature review and methodology. It discuss the conceptual framework of the study. The chapter presents the outline of the thesis work, including the study objectives, research questions, research gap and chapter plan.

Chapter II: Historical background of border trade and border trade centres between India and Myanmar

This chapter traces the historical background of border trade and border trade centers in India and Mizoram. It also presents the status of the border trade centres by examining the geographical proximity and intertwined cultural and economic landscapes that define the boundary shared by India and Myanmar. It emphasizes the long-standing historical connections that have played a crucial role in shaping the nature of trade. An overview of early interactions is provided, highlighting ancient trading paths, cross-border religious and cultural influences, and customary exchanges sustained by communities living in the frontier regions. It presents an overview on the evolution of prominent trade hubs while also discussing the physical and bureaucratic challenges that accompany developments in the border area.

Chapter III: The border trade centers for Women's empowerment in Manipur and Mizoram

This chapter discusses the role and importance of the border trade centers for women's empowerment. It analyses the border trading centers and other trade facilities in general the Northeast regions and particularly in Manipur and Mizoram. The chapter discusses the emerging border trade activities where women are not only participating but actively redefining their roles as business owners, informal traders, and community influencers. These border areas, long plagued by isolation, political strife, and neglected infrastructure, have ironically become fertile ground for a unique form of female empowerment.

Chapter IV: Women's work in border trade and Border Trade Centers between India and Myanmar

This chapter includes the participation and status in border trade in Zokhawthar and Moreh Border Trade Centres. It discusses the perspectives of women in border trade. The role of women in border trade, i.e. formal and informal trade, is also mentioned in detail. The need and steps for the empowerment of women in border trade is also discussed. It presents a qualitative study on the role of women and Border Trade and

Border Trade centres in Mizoram and Manipur. This chapter underline the gender perspectives of Border Trade and Border Trade Centres.

Chapter V: Challenges and Prospects of Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres

This chapter discuss the challenges and prospects of women workers in the border trade centre of Mizoram and Manipur. These locations serve purposes that go beyond economic transactions—they are deeply rooted in the area's geography, cultural heritage, political dynamics, and long-standing transnational relationships. Understanding these trade hubs requires viewing them as reflections of broader societal and economic patterns, not merely as marketplaces. These trade zones hold vital importance for the economy of northeastern India, particularly concerning Myanmar.

Chapter VI: Conclusion and suggestions

The final concluding chapter of the research work summarised the entire work. It presents a summary of all previous chapters. This chapter includes findings and observation, suggestions and conclusion. This conclusion chapter opens with presenting a summary of the entire work. The British colonial authorities conducted substantial changes to trading activities that occurred between India and Myanmar. The colonial government designed policies that focused on resource exploitation together with infrastructure development for imperial economic integration of Myanmar. The Indo-Burma Trunk Road together with the Burma Railway enabled the imperial markets to obtain teak wood and rice through resource transportation. These new developments dismantled traditional barter practices that existed before colonial interference causing damage to established communities throughout both territories.

Chapter II

Historical background of border trade and border trade centres between India and Myanmar

This chapter opens by examining the geographical proximity and intertwined cultural and economic landscapes that define the boundary shared by India and Myanmar. It emphasizes the long-standing historical connections that have played a crucial role in shaping the nature of trade activities seen along the border today. An overview of early interactions is provided, highlighting ancient trading paths, mutual religious and cultural influences, and customary exchanges sustained by communities living in the frontier regions. Attention is then turned to the evolution of prominent trade hubs, notably Moreh in the state of Manipur and Zokhawthar in Mizoram, while also discussing the physical and bureaucratic challenges that accompany such developments.

Furthermore, the continued influence of cross-border ethnic affiliations on local commercial behavior is considered. The chapter concludes by placing the India-Myanmar border trade within the wider framework of India's Act East Policy, initiatives to enhance regional integration, and broader diplomatic strategies, emphasizing its strategic value in the current global and regional setting.

2.1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War signaled a major turning point in international affairs, ushering in a reconfigured global landscape shaped by the intertwined processes of liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG). These transformative forces reshaped the foundations of global diplomacy and economic engagement. With globalization accelerating, economic interdependence among nations became not just advantageous but essential. In this reshaped world order, regions once considered peripheralsuch as India's northeastern frontierbegan to recognize the strategic importance of participating in cross-border commerce, prompting the development of border trade centers as mechanisms for fostering integration and growth.

Geographical constraints, particularly the landlocked status of several northeastern states, combined with uneven development, pushed policy makers to look beyond domestic markets. This shift reframed border areas, long viewed as distant or marginal, into potential engines of economic advancement. The emphasis turned toward reconnecting these regions with neighboring countries, positioning borders as zones of opportunity rather than division. This transformation was rooted not just in geographic logic, but also in a broader shift in regional thinking, where South and Southeast Asian nations began treating cross-border collaboration as a pathway to collective progress and regional stability.

Amid these changes, India's diplomatic stance experienced a notable evolution. The earlier Look East Policy matured into what became known as the Act East Policy, designed to reinforce strategic and economic relationships with eastern neighbors like Myanmar, Thailand, and the wider ASEAN bloc. Importantly, this policy transition was not imposed from the top alone; it aligned with the long-held aspirations of border communities, many of which had deep cultural, familial, and trade-based ties across national lines. In areas like Manipur, these cross-border bonds played a crucial role in reviving historical trade pathways and informal exchanges, adding a personal and communal layer to an otherwise state-driven initiative.

As regional policies and strategies matured, the landscape of border trade began to change in structure and scope. Informal transactions and traditional bartering systems gradually gave way to more formalized trade arrangements, supported by new infrastructure, regulatory policies, and institutional collaboration. A broader range of goods entered the market, and digital tools began to transform how goods were tracked, moved, and exchanged. While adopting the efficiencies of global trade, these border economies retained a distinctly local character, balancing modern logistics with traditional networks. This progression reveals a deeper story—one where evolving border trade patterns reflect the intersection of grassroots ambitions, national policy shifts, and global economic trends. Each element feeds into the next, creating a dynamic ecosystem of interaction that redefines the purpose and potential of border regions in the 21st century.

The final decade of the 20th century marked the onset of a new era characterized by the growing economic integration of nations worldwide. The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) strengthened the institutional framework supporting the freer, multilateral exchange of goods and services. Simultaneously, countries in various regions have formed regional trade blocs, where trade barriers are significantly reduced compared to the multilateral framework. While this global economic integration has been largely advantageous for many countries, those that have struggled to integrate effectively have faced economic setbacks. However, this integration is not without challenges. While it creates opportunities and expands consumer choices, it also necessitates challenging adjustments and relocation for individuals whose industries may become non-competitive in the new global market.

India's northeastern region has been among the areas that have struggled to reap the benefits of this evolving economic landscape. Even during India's pre-liberalization era, when the economy was strongly state-controlled, the region faced challenges. During the initial decades of economic planning in the 1950s and 1960s, the region's economic progress was minimal.¹ In subsequent decades, fiscal allocations to the region increased—partly to counteract the perceived neglect by the central government and partly to support the newly formed, financially weak states created through political reorganization.²

These financial inflows spurred some government-led growth in the region. However, with the onset of liberalization and globalization in 1991, where market forces began to play a more dominant role, the region entered a new phase of sluggish economic growth.³ Although the influence of globalization is evident in the availability of a broader range of consumer goods in local markets, the region has seen little improvement in production and income-generating activities. On the contrary, some small-scale industries that once thrived under earlier protectionist

¹R. Bhatia. (2006). *India-Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours*. New Delhi: Routledge.

²*Ibid.*,

³*Ibid.*,

policies have shut down, and farmers have faced income losses due to cheaper imports, such as areca nut.

Factors such as geographic isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and negative perceptions caused by ethnic conflicts and militant activities have made the region unattractive to private investors. However, at a time when cross-border economic ties are strengthening in various parts of the world, border trade is viewed with optimism in this region as a potential way to overcome its geographic isolation. With nearly 98% of the region's boundary forming international borders shared with Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, the potential for trade is significant. Trade with Bhutan and Bangladesh has gained momentum through efforts to promote regional cooperation within South Asia, while trade with Myanmar has become particularly relevant in the context of India's "Look East" policy. Myanmar's location, connecting India to the thriving economies of Southeast Asia and China, positions it as a crucial link not only for bilateral trade but also for broader economic ties with the eastern and southeastern nations.⁴

The Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement, signed on January 21, 1994, by the governments of India and Myanmar, aimed to formalize border trade activities and create a conducive framework for such exchanges.⁵ Initially, the agreement permitted trade in 22 products, primarily agricultural and primary commodities produced within the two nations (excluding third-country goods that dominate informal trade, as will be discussed later).⁶ In 2001, additional items were included in the list of tradable goods. However, in practical terms, the agreement largely formalized the traditional exchanges between local communities on both sides of the border. Nonetheless, it holds symbolic importance in strengthening the economic relationship between the two nations.

The agreement designated specific customs posts for trade: (a) Moreh in India's Manipur State and Tamu in Myanmar, (b) Champhai in India's Mizoram State

⁴D. R.Choudhury. (1999).*India's Look East Policy: Strategic and Economic Dimensions*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

⁵Ibid.,

⁶Bhatia.,Op.Cit

and Hri in Myanmar, and (c) any other locations mutually agreed upon by the two countries.⁷ Following the agreement's signing, land customs stations (LCS) were established at Moreh and Champhai on the Indian side. However, the Champhai station remains non-operational, and all official Indo-Myanmar border trade currently occurs through the Moreh-Tamu corridor. Following the signing of the border trade agreement, formal trade activities in the Moreh–Tamu sector experienced a significant boost. Trade volumes increased from approximately ₹15 crores in 1995-96 to ₹46.49 crores in 1996-97 and ₹62.39 crores in 1997-98.⁸ However, this upward trend saw a sharp decline the following year due to restrictions imposed by Myanmar on November 26, 1997, requiring Indian exports to precede imports from Myanmar.⁹ Although there was some recovery in subsequent years, trade volumes failed to return to the levels witnessed in 1996-97 and 1997-98.¹⁰

2.2. Pre-colonial era

The pre-colonial history of border trade between India and Myanmar unveils a rich narrative of local commerce, cultural interactions, and complex socio-economic networks. Before colonial boundaries were introduced, the India-Myanmar borderlands served as a dynamic trade hub, driven by geographic proximity and the interdependence of various communities residing in the region. Groups such as the Mizos, Nagas, Kukis, Chins, and others engaged in mutual exchanges that underpinned their economies and livelihoods. Trade during this era was primarily conducted through the barter system, reflecting the economic self-reliance and regional connectivity of these communities. Key trade items included agricultural staples like rice, millet, and sesame, which formed the foundation of their economies. Additionally, textiles—both locally produced and obtained through secondary trade—were highly valued. The abundant natural resources of the area supported the exchange of forest products, medicinal herbs, spices, and handcrafted tools and weapons. Beyond meeting economic needs, this exchange facilitated cultural interactions, enabling communities to share knowledge, skills, and traditions.

⁷Choudhury.,Op.

⁸ Ibid.,

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Ibid.,

Geography significantly influenced trade dynamics. The Kaladan River, for example, acted as a vital trade route, linking the interior of present-day Mizoram to the Bay of Bengal trade networks and beyond. Similarly, the traditional trade routes, such as the one that later became the Ledo Road during World War II, facilitated exchanges between northeastern India and Myanmar.¹¹ These geographic features shaped trade patterns, with rivers and pathways serving as essential conduits for goods and ideas. The relationships between these communities extended beyond economic transactions, carrying socio-political implications. In a time when rigid borders did not exist, people moved freely across the region, fostering kinship ties and alliances that transcended modern national boundaries. These interactions cultivated a shared identity among the ethnic groups, who often participated in collective festivals, rituals, and ceremonies. Markets and trade fairs at strategic locations became not only centres for commerce but also venues for social interaction and conflict resolution.

Cultural exchange was another critical aspect of this trade. Communities adopted culinary practices, clothing designs, and artisanal techniques from one another.¹² For instance, similarities in textile patterns and dyeing techniques indicate a mutual exchange of ideas. Likewise, spices and herbs traded along these routes shaped regional cuisines, blending flavours that remain integral to local dishes today. However, this thriving trade was not without its challenges. The rugged terrain, consisting of dense forests, hills, and rivers, presented significant obstacles. Traders faced risks from natural disasters, wildlife, and inter-tribal conflicts. Nevertheless, these difficulties were mitigated through local expertise, such as employing guides and scouts familiar with the terrain.

The pre-colonial trade system along the India-Myanmar border epitomized a decentralized, community-oriented economic model deeply intertwined with local realities. This system, shaped by the needs and relationships of the people and their environment, laid the groundwork for trade patterns that persisted into the colonial

¹¹M. P. Singh.&T. Thapa. (2014).*Trade and Development in Northeast India*. Guwahati: Omsons Publications.

¹²Ibid.,

period, albeit with significant alterations due to colonial interventions. Studying this period highlights the resilience and adaptability of border communities and their critical role in connecting two culturally and economically intertwined regions.¹³

2.3. Colonial Era

The origins of border trade between India and Myanmar date back to ancient times, but the British colonial era (1824–1948) played a pivotal role in formalizing and reshaping these trade practices.¹⁴ This period saw the institutionalization of trade routes and their integration into the broader framework of imperial economic strategies. The British administration's efforts transformed traditional practices to align with colonial objectives, embedding them within the global economy of the empire.

2.3.1. Early Colonial Interventions and the Development of Trade Networks

The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826) initiated British incursions into Myanmar. Following the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, the British annexed Arakan and Tenasserim, gaining access to strategic trade routes along Bengal and Assam's eastern frontiers.¹⁵ These territorial gains laid the foundation for Myanmar's gradual integration into the colonial economic system. Further consolidation occurred with the annexation of Lower Burma after the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852 and the conquest of Upper Burma in 1885, culminating in Myanmar's incorporation into British India in 1886.¹⁶ This administrative integration persisted until 1937 when Myanmar became a separate crown colony.¹⁷ During this time, the British prioritized developing trade routes that connected Myanmar's resource-abundant regions to Indian markets and, ultimately, the broader imperial trade network.

Traditional land-based trade routes, particularly those traversing the mountainous regions of modern-day Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland, had long

¹³Ibid.,

¹⁴ P. Das. (2016). Border Trade with Myanmar: A Northeast Perspective. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(12), 45-52.

¹⁵Ibid.,

¹⁶M. P. Singh.&T. Thapa.,Op.Cit

¹⁷ Ibid.,

facilitated exchanges of goods like salt, textiles, spices, and forest products among local communities. However, colonial policies redirected these routes to meet the commercial demands of the empire.

2.3.2. Infrastructure Expansion and Resource Exploitation

To support resource extraction and enhance trade, the British invested significantly in infrastructure projects. They expanded road networks, railways, and riverine transport systems to link Myanmar's hinterlands with India's trade hubs. One notable example was the construction of the Indo-Burma Trunk Road, connecting Imphal in Manipur to Mandalay in Myanmar, which served as a vital overland route.¹⁸ Railways also revolutionized trade logistics. The Burma Railway connected Rangoon to Mandalay and extended toward India's border, enabling the efficient transport of teak, oil, and minerals.¹⁹ Teak logging, in particular, became a cornerstone of colonial trade, with logs transported to shipyards and construction sites across the empire.

The commodification of resources extended to agriculture, particularly rice. Myanmar, often referred to as the "rice bowl of the East," became a significant exporter of rice under British supervision.²⁰ The Irrawaddy Delta saw extensive cultivation, with newly established trade routes facilitating rice exports to imperial markets.

2.3.3. Effects on Local Communities and Trade Practices

While colonial infrastructure projects enhanced trade integration, they often undermined local traditions and economies. Indigenous barter systems and community-based exchanges were gradually replaced by cash transactions and commodity-oriented trade. Border communities, including the Chin, Kuki, and Naga tribes, faced significant disruptions. Their economies, traditionally dependent on subsistence farming and localized trade, were subordinated to the colonial economy's

¹⁸Ibid.,

¹⁹ P. Das., Op.Cit

²⁰Ibid.,

demands. Additionally, the imposition of border controls restricted free movement, further alienating these groups from their traditional livelihoods.

2.3.4. Establishment of Border Trade Hubs

The British established formal border trade hubs along key routes to regulate and expand trade. Centres like Tamu (Myanmar) and Moreh (India) became critical points for goods collection, taxation, and redistribution. These hubs facilitated customs enforcement and the imposition of tariffs, generating substantial revenue for the colonial administration. However, the creation of such centres further entrenched colonial control over border regions, transforming them into zones of economic extraction. Systems of permits and licenses regulated trade, disadvantaging local traders and consolidating power among British authorities and allied commercial enterprises.

2.3.5. Decline and Enduring Legacy

World War II and the Japanese invasion of Myanmar in the 1940s disrupted these trade routes and damaged infrastructure.²¹ During the war, many border trade hubs were abandoned or repurposed for military purposes. After independence, both India (1947) and Myanmar (1948) faced the challenge of redefining trade relations and managing new national boundaries.²² Despite these disruptions, colonial-era trade infrastructure remains integral to modern connectivity. For example, the Indo-Burma Trunk Road has been upgraded and integrated into the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project. Similarly, trade hubs like Moreh and Tamu continue to play vital roles in bilateral commerce.

The colonial period marked a transformative phase in the India-Myanmar border trade, characterized by infrastructure development, resource exploitation, and the establishment of formal trade centres. While these changes fostered economic integration, they also disrupted traditional systems and marginalized local communities. The legacies of this era continue to influence the geopolitical and economic landscape of the India-Myanmar borderlands today.

²¹ Bhatia., Op.Cit.

²² Ibid.,

2.4. Post-Independence

The origins of border trade between India and Myanmar can be traced back to the colonial era when both territories were under British control. Myanmar, previously known as Burma, was incorporated into British India in 1886 after the British annexed the region.²³ This period brought significant geopolitical changes, establishing new trade routes while limiting local autonomy. During British rule, Burma's resources, including teak, oil, and minerals, were heavily exploited, and infrastructure was developed primarily to serve colonial interests. Roads, railways, and ports were built to facilitate the extraction and transportation of these resources.

The India-Myanmar border, located in northeastern India, held strategic significance as a trade and cultural link between the two regions. Despite being part of the British Empire, Burma's relationship with India was complex. While trade flourished, especially in agricultural products and natural resources, the economic benefits largely favoured the British colonial system. Burma's local industries, such as rice and rubber production, were shaped by British demands, sidelining indigenous traders.²⁴ In 1937, Burma was separated from British India and became a distinct British colony. This redefined the political and administrative boundaries, though the established trade routes continued to facilitate exchanges. When both India (1947) and Myanmar (1948) gained independence, there was optimism that bilateral trade would continue to grow. However, the early post-independence years saw political instability and economic challenges in both nations. Myanmar's independence was marred by ethnic conflict, internal power struggles, and the rise of a military regime in 1962, leading to a shift in trade priorities.²⁵

After Myanmar's military coup in 1962, the country adopted socialist policies that emphasized self-reliance, leading to the closure of many border trade routes, including those with India. The military regime's focus on isolation resulted in Myanmar's economic insularity, which severely impacted cross-border trade. At the same time, India, still transitioning from a colonial economy, focused on self-

²³ Ibid.,

²⁴ Das., Op.Cit

²⁵ Ibid.,

sufficiency, leading to limited foreign trade and minimal interaction with Myanmar. In the 1980s and 1990s, Myanmar's military regime began to relax certain policies, allowing some openness, but the country remained largely isolated, complicating relations with neighbours like India.²⁶ The political climate in Myanmar, coupled with human rights violations, strained international relations, further hindering trade.

In the late 1990s, India's economic reforms and market liberalization led to a renewed focus on its northeastern borders, particularly with Myanmar. Myanmar's growing trade with China and Southeast Asia highlighted its strategic importance, prompting India to engage more actively in regional cooperation. The early 2000s saw efforts to revitalize border trade, but Myanmar's political volatility remained a challenge. Despite efforts to improve trade, Myanmar continued to face political unrest, including natural disasters in 2008, which further strained India-Myanmar relations.²⁷ During this period, India engaged diplomatically with Myanmar, but trade remained sporadic due to a lack of infrastructure and political instability. The situation began to improve in the early 2010s as Myanmar transitioned to a semi-democratic government. New Border Trade Centres (BTCs) were established in locations like Moreh (Manipur) and Tamu (Myanmar) to facilitate smoother trade between the two nations. These centres became key hubs for exchanging goods, including agricultural products, textiles, and minerals. The reopening of these trade routes was part of a broader diplomatic strategy to enhance bilateral relations.

India's investment in regional connectivity, including improving transport infrastructure, complemented this new phase of cooperation. India's "Look East Policy" (now the "Act East Policy") focused on strengthening ties with Southeast Asia, with Myanmar seen as a crucial partner in this strategy. However, political instability in Myanmar persisted, and in 2021, a military coup once again disrupted the country's governance, plunging it into crisis.²⁸ This new wave of instability posed significant challenges to border trade and the operation of BTCs, as Myanmar faced

²⁶ Bhatia., Op. Cit.

²⁷ Ibid.,

²⁸ Ibid.,

economic sanctions and increasing isolation. The political turmoil affected trade relations and disrupted the stability of cross-border exchanges.

Political shifts in both nations have shaped the history of border trade between India and Myanmar. From colonial rule to independence, military regimes, and attempts at opening up trade, the relationship between the two countries has fluctuated. Although recent developments, such as the establishment of Border Trade Centres, offered hope for stronger cooperation, Myanmar's ongoing political instability continues to threaten the future of this vital economic partnership. The evolution of trade and political ties will remain influenced by broader regional and international developments.

2.4. Revival of Border Trade (1990s Onwards)

The border trade between India and Myanmar has deep historical, cultural, and economic roots that span centuries. Situated in Southeast Asia, Myanmar shares a lengthy and diverse border with India, extending over 1,600 kilometres, positioning it as a key connection between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. This border has long been a channel for the exchange of goods, culture, and traditions. However, the nature of this trade has transformed significantly, particularly in modern times, driven by shifting geopolitical dynamics, economic changes, and the evolving policies of both countries.

2.4.1. Early Historical Background

Historically, the regions linking India and Myanmar, especially India's northeastern states, have had longstanding trade ties with Myanmar. Before colonialism, indigenous groups like the Chin, Kuki, Naga, and Mizo tribes operated robust cross-border trade routes, engaging in barter. These routes extended into Myanmar's northern regions, creating links between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. Products such as rice, tea, salt, timber, gemstones, and agricultural goods were exchanged in informal and decentralized markets.

The arrival of British colonial rule in the 19th century led to a shift in trade patterns. Myanmar, then known as Burma, became part of the British Empire, and

the borders with India were formalized.²⁹ The British facilitated trade through official channels, seeking to use Myanmar as a source of resources like teak and rice, which were transported to India and other regions. The expansion of railways and roads helped improve this trade, though it remained limited to a few commodities under colonial control.

2.4.2. Post-Independence Era and the Decline of Border Trade

After India gained independence in 1947 and Myanmar followed in 1948, both countries pursued different foreign policies and economic systems. India, under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, adopted non-alignment, while Myanmar, after a military coup in 1962, shifted to a policy of isolationism under General Ne Win.³⁰ This period saw a sharp decline in cross-border trade, with the closing of borders and strict border controls disrupting formal trade. Informal routes still existed, but they were not enough to sustain substantial economic activity. The military regime in Myanmar adopted a "Burmese Way to Socialism," restricting external trade and promoting self-reliance.³¹ Meanwhile, India's focus on economic self-sufficiency and limited engagement with Myanmar further curtailed formal trade relations for several decades.

The Indo-Myanmar border has historically been an essential trade route, fostering the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural connections between the two nations. Stretching over 1,600 kilometres, this boundary links the northeastern Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram with Myanmar's Sagaing and Chin States. Despite its strategic significance for regional development and economic integration, cross-border trade has experienced a marked decline in recent years, primarily due to a mix of geopolitical instability, economic barriers, and inadequate infrastructure.

Trade between India and Myanmar has deep historical significance, evolving over centuries. Traditional barter systems were integral to the livelihoods of border

²⁹M.M.Rahman. &S.K. Chowdhury. (2009). Regional Connectivity in South Asia: A Bangladesh-Myanmar Perspective. *Journal of Asian Development*, 3(2), 123-144.

³⁰Ibid.,

³¹Ibid.,

communities. Following India's independence in 1947 and Myanmar's in 1948, formal agreements were introduced to encourage and regulate trade.³² Notably, the 1994 India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement sought to legitimize and facilitate cross-border commerce by allowing barter trade in a limited range of goods, including agricultural tools, spices, and textiles.³³ Over time, this framework expanded to permit normal trade with a broader product range. However, the volume of trade has remained far below its potential, largely due to unresolved challenges. Border trade hubs like Moreh in Manipur and Zokhawthar in Mizoram envisioned as key economic centers, have struggled to thrive.

One major factor contributing to this decline is the ongoing political instability in Myanmar. The military coup in February 2021 significantly disrupted governance and triggered unrest, particularly in border areas. This instability has led to frequent roadblocks and armed conflicts, severely impacting trade routes. On the Indian side, insurgency and smuggling activities further complicate cross-border trade. The porous nature of the border facilitates illegal movements of contraband, prompting stricter security measures that unintentionally hinder legitimate trade by causing delays and logistical challenges.

Economic policies have also played a role in diminishing border trade. The implementation of India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 created hurdles for many small traders who struggled to adapt to the new system.³⁴ Furthermore, transitioning from barter to standard trade has been difficult due to underdeveloped banking systems and inadequate infrastructure in border regions. Currency exchange issues compound these challenges, as the lack of formal banking channels results in reliance on informal systems. Additionally, Myanmar's economic instability and the depreciation of its currency, the kyat, have made trading with India less appealing for Myanmar-based businesses.

³² Bhatia.,Op.Cit.

³³ Ibid.,

³⁴ M. Hussain. (2000).The Role of Border Trade in Socio-Economic Development: A Case Study of Indo-Myanmar Border. *Asian Survey*, 40(5), 765-788.

Infrastructural shortcomings along the Indo-Myanmar border remain another significant barrier. Poor road networks, inadequate warehousing, and insufficient trade facilities limit the volume of goods that can be efficiently transported. For example, Moreh faces frequent congestion due to insufficient infrastructure, while Zokhawthar struggles with poor road conditions and outdated customs facilities. Development projects like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, which could enhance connectivity, have faced delays due to bureaucratic and financial challenges, further hindering trade prospects. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues by disrupting supply chains, restricting movement, and bringing trade activities to a near standstill. Although some trade has resumed, volumes remain significantly below pre-pandemic levels. The pandemic also underscored the vulnerabilities of the region's healthcare and logistical infrastructure, highlighting the need for more resilient systems.³⁵

The decline in trade has profoundly affected the socioeconomic fabric of border communities. Many small traders, transport workers, and labourers who relied on cross-border commerce have lost their livelihoods, resulting in rising unemployment and economic difficulties.³⁶ The downturn has also fueled smuggling, as individuals seek alternative income sources. Revitalizing the Indo-Myanmar border trade will require comprehensive measures to address the underlying causes of its decline. Strengthened diplomatic and political collaboration between the two countries is essential to foster stability and create a conducive trade environment. Prioritizing the development of border infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and modern customs facilities, can significantly improve trade efficiency. India should also simplify its trade policies, establish better banking systems, and offer incentives to attract traders. Additionally, investing in capacity building and skill development for local communities can enhance their participation in trade activities.

International collaboration, particularly through frameworks like ASEAN and initiatives such as India's Act East Policy, can further boost regional integration. By addressing these challenges and fostering sustainable development, the Indo-

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ Ibid.,

Myanmar border can become a thriving trade corridor, benefiting both nations' economies and uplifting the border communities.

2.4.3. Geopolitical Shifts and the Revival of Border Trade (1990s Onward)

The 1990s marked a significant political and economic shift in Southeast Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War led to changes in regional relations. The globalized world of the 1990s offered new opportunities for cooperation, and both India and Myanmar began to explore avenues for reviving cross-border ties. One key moment in the revival of border trade came with India's "Look East" policy in the early 1990s, designed to strengthen economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asia, including Myanmar.³⁷ This initiative was part of a broader effort to enhance India's political, economic, and security presence in the region.

Through this policy, India sought to engage Myanmar by fostering trade and economic cooperation. The reopening of borders for trade in specific areas, particularly in northeastern states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh, was a critical first step. Additionally, infrastructure development, such as roads and bridges, was key to facilitating cross-border trade. Simultaneously, Myanmar underwent political and economic changes. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Myanmar had been isolated under military rule. However, after the Asian financial crisis of 1997, Myanmar began considering economic reforms.³⁸ The country aimed to open its economy, improve relations with its neighbours, and integrate more fully into regional economic networks.

In the late 1990s, a series of agreements between India and Myanmar laid the foundation for the border trade's revival. The 1994 India-Myanmar Trade Agreement allowed for the formalization of trade through designated border trade centres.³⁹ This agreement facilitated the exchange of goods such as agricultural products, consumer goods, and spices.

³⁷T.Haokip. (2012). "India's Look East Policy and the Northeast: Putting the Cart before the Horse?" *Strategic Analysis*, 36(2), 304-312.

³⁸Ibid.,

³⁹Ibid.,

2.4.4. Establishment of Border Trade Centers

In the 1990s and 2000s, Border Trade Centers (BTCs) were established to streamline the flow of goods between the two countries. These centres became vital for trade and symbolized the growing political and economic relationship between India and Myanmar.⁴⁰ Located in border towns like Moreh (Manipur), Zokhawthar (Mizoram), and Tamu (Myanmar), the BTCs facilitated trade in items such as betel nuts, rice, timber, pulses, and consumer goods.

India also supported Myanmar in upgrading the infrastructure at these border points by investing in roads, bridges, and customs facilities to ease trade flows. Myanmar, in turn, improved its customs infrastructure to make the clearance process more efficient. The creation of border trade hubs along the Indo-Myanmar boundary has become a pivotal aspect of bilateral relations between India and Myanmar, demonstrating a shared commitment to boosting economic collaboration, advancing regional growth, and strengthening cultural and social connections. Positioned strategically at key locations along the 1,643-kilometer border, these hubs aim to enhance cross-border commerce, upgrade infrastructure, and improve the livelihoods of local communities.⁴¹

India and Myanmar share a border stretching 1,643 kilometres, presenting significant geographical, economic, and strategic opportunities for both nations.⁴² This extensive border traverses rugged terrains of mountains, forests, and rivers, linking India's northeastern states to Myanmar's northwestern regions. Over time, border trade has become a vital element of bilateral relations, supported by the establishment of key trade hubs in strategically important areas. These trade hubs play a multifaceted role by fostering economic development in border areas, strengthening interpersonal ties, and enhancing diplomatic relationships. Additionally, their strategic placement highlights their dual purpose: boosting trade while addressing challenges like insurgency, smuggling, and cross-border ethnic complexities.

⁴⁰Hussain.,Op.Cit

⁴¹Ibid.,

⁴²Ibid.,

1. Moreh

Moreh, a vibrant town situated in the southeastern part of Manipur, India, holds a strategic position as an important trade centre, particularly due to its proximity to Tamu in Myanmar. Its location at the India-Myanmar border makes it a key point for cross-border trade and cultural exchange, playing a significant role in the region's economic activities. Historically, Moreh has been a critical junction in the trade networks that span this region. Positioned on the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, the town is set to become a vital trade route for Southeast Asia; this proximity to Myanmar has turned Moreh into a central hub for trade, with goods such as timber, agricultural products, and raw materials flowing from Myanmar into India.⁴³ In return, India exports a variety of goods, including textiles, processed food, and construction materials to Myanmar, driving regional economic activity.

The commercial growth of Moreh is closely linked not only to its geographical significance but also to India's growing emphasis on fostering ties with Southeast Asia. The Look East Policy, later rebranded as the Act East Policy, aims to enhance trade and diplomatic relations between India and Southeast Asia. As a focal point of this policy in the northeastern region, Moreh has seen substantial infrastructure upgrades, reinforcing its role as a key trade and logistics hub.⁴⁴ The town's importance as a trade centre is underscored by its active local markets, which thrive on cross-border commerce. Vendors and traders from India and Myanmar converge in the area to engage in the exchange of various goods, from textiles to electronics to food items. Despite the informal nature of much of the trade—conducted through human porters or small vehicles—efforts have been made to formalize the process through the creation of a dedicated customs station at the border.

Moreh's infrastructure has been bolstered by significant investments, improving road networks and border facilities. Notably, upgrades to the India-Myanmar-Tamu highway have reduced travel times, facilitating not just trade but

⁴³Ibid.,

⁴⁴ K.S. Singh. (2011). Trans-Border Trade in Northeast India. In B. Dutta & K. D. Singh (Eds.), *Northeast India: A Transnational Perspective* (pp. 134-155). New Delhi: Sage Publications.

also fostering better people-to-people exchanges. The opening of the Moreh-Tamu border crossing has further enhanced cultural and educational interactions, cementing Moreh's role as a vital link between the two nations.⁴⁵ Despite its promise as a thriving trade centre, Moreh faces several challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability. The region has experienced intermittent political unrest, which disrupts trade and economic activity. The insurgency in Manipur, coupled with the complex political landscape involving local, state, and national authorities, occasionally creates instability that impedes the smooth flow of trade. Furthermore, much of the trade conducted in Moreh remains informal, leading to challenges related to taxation, regulation, and oversight.⁴⁶

Internal infrastructure within Moreh also remains underdeveloped, with markets, warehouses, and transport facilities not yet meeting the demands of larger-scale formal trade. This limitation hinders the town's potential to fully capitalize on its location and hampers the efficiency of trade operations. As a result, a large portion of the trade continues to operate in informal sectors, which can sometimes be inefficient and unsustainable in the long run. Beyond trade, Moreh also functions as a cultural meeting point.⁴⁷ The daily interactions between Indian and Myanmar nationals have fostered a unique blend of cultures, with shared traditions and close ties between the people of Manipur and Myanmar's Chin ethnic group further enriching the town's cultural fabric. Moreh, thus, stands as a place where diverse cultural identities coexist.

Looking ahead, Moreh's role as a significant player in regional trade appears to be on an upward trajectory. The upcoming Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, which seeks to enhance transport links between India and Myanmar, is expected to greatly improve trade efficiency. Moreover, India's continued focus on regional development, along with expanding trade agreements, will position Moreh as a central node in a growing network of commercial corridors

⁴⁵Ibid.,

⁴⁶Ibid.,

⁴⁷Hussain.,Op.Cit

across Southeast Asia.⁴⁸ With its strategic location, cultural richness, and evolving infrastructure, Moreh has the potential to emerge as a crucial trade hub not just for India and Myanmar, but also for the broader ASEAN region. Although challenges related to political stability and infrastructure development remain, the town's future growth prospects are bright, and it stands as an essential component in the vision for regional economic integration and development.

1. Zokhawthar

Zokhawthar, situated in Mizoram's Champhai district, has rapidly become a major trade hub, primarily due to its strategic location at the India-Myanmar border. Close to the Rihkhawdar crossing in Myanmar, this town acts as a crucial link for cross-border trade between India and Southeast Asia. Over recent years, its significance as an economic and commercial centre has grown, driven by a combination of local developments and its proximity to Myanmar and the broader ASEAN region. In the past, Zokhawthar's importance was minimal, with the economy centred around agriculture and local handicrafts. Yet, the opening of the border and infrastructure upgrades in recent decades have turned the area into a thriving trade corridor.⁴⁹ The town's position is vital, sitting at the convergence of two major trade routes: the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTTP) project, connecting India's eastern states to Myanmar and the Bay of Bengal, and the traditional overland routes linking India's northeast to Myanmar. This makes Zokhawthar a key player in facilitating the flow of goods between the two regions.

Zokhawthar's trade spans a wide range of products, from agricultural items and textiles to machinery and industrial goods. A major traded item is betel nut, which sees high demand in Myanmar and across Southeast Asia. Consumer goods, including electronics and daily essentials, also make up a significant portion of the trade. The border market in Zokhawthar not only serves as a commercial hub but also as a centre for cultural exchange, where traders from Myanmar and India share

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

⁴⁹ S.K. Mitra. (2018). Cross-Border Trade and Informal Markets. In P. Baruah (Ed.), *Economies of the Eastern Himalayas* (pp. 89-105). Kolkata: Academic Press.

goods, ideas, and traditions, further deepening the ties between the two nations.⁵⁰ The Indian government has played a crucial role in Zokhawthar's transformation. Investments in infrastructure, such as improved roads, bridges, and customs facilities, have greatly enhanced the region's connectivity. Notably, the completion of the 110-kilometer Zokhawthar-Champhai road has made the transportation of goods and people much easier. Additionally, better border management practices and the establishment of trade facilitation systems have streamlined cross-border operations, making trade more efficient.

In addition to infrastructure, India's "Act East" policy has also bolstered Zokhawthar's emergence as a key trade hub.⁵¹ Support for initiatives like the Kaladan project, which connects the Indian port of Kolkata to Myanmar's Sittwe port and ultimately to Mizoram's border, has provided a major boost to trade.⁵² Once fully operational, the Kaladan project is expected to drastically lower transportation costs and time, enhancing trade flow across the region. Zokhawthar's role as a trade hub extends beyond economic considerations; it is also of strategic geopolitical significance. As India seeks to strengthen its ties with Myanmar and the Southeast Asian region, Zokhawthar provides direct access to ASEAN markets, facilitating greater economic integration and cooperation. This aligns with India's broader "Act East" policy, which focuses on increasing trade, investment, and regional collaboration with Southeast Asia.

Despite its success, Zokhawthar faces challenges. Border security remains a concern, as cross-border smuggling and illegal activities sometimes disrupt legitimate trade. Continued improvements in infrastructure and facilities are needed to manage growing trade volumes and ensure the region's competitiveness. Additionally, there is a need for investment in human resources and skills development to adapt to the complexities of a globalized trade environment.

In short, Zokhawthar has transformed from a small border town into a dynamic trade hub with significant economic and strategic importance. This change

⁵⁰Ibid.,

⁵¹Ibid.,

⁵²Hussain.,Op.Cit

is the result of careful planning, infrastructure development, and the push for regional integration. As India and Myanmar strengthen their ties, Zokhawthar is set to play an even more crucial role in shaping future trade in the region.⁵³ With ongoing government support and further investments in infrastructure, Zokhawthar has the potential to become a central node in trade networks connecting India to Southeast Asia, driving economic growth and strengthening diplomatic relations.

2. *Avangkhu-Pangsha*

The Avangkhu-Pangsha corridor in Nagaland marks a key advancement in India's strategic, economic, and infrastructural planning, positioning it as a notable trade route along the Indo-Myanmar border. This corridor is central to India's deepening ties with Southeast Asia, presenting new prospects for bilateral commerce, cross-border connections, and regional economic cooperation.⁵⁴ Its significance is further amplified by the area's unique geography, socio-political dynamics, and the growing relevance of neighbouring Myanmar. Connecting Nagaland with Myanmar, the corridor serves as an essential link between the two countries, strengthening bilateral relations and easing the flow of goods and people.⁵⁵ Offering direct access to Southeast Asia, this route is crucial to India's Act East Policy, which focuses on enhancing economic relations with its eastern neighbours. By boosting trade, the corridor also supports India's goal of forging stronger connections with ASEAN countries, fostering regional integration and development.

Logistically, the corridor offers a more effective trade route between India and Myanmar compared to other land paths. Situated in the eastern part of Nagaland, near the Indo-Myanmar border, it connects to the town of Pangsha in Myanmar. This relatively underdeveloped region holds substantial potential for infrastructure and economic growth, as the Indian government and local authorities are increasingly working to improve road links, border trade points, and access to markets in Myanmar and beyond. The Avangkhu-Pangsha corridor is also instrumental in

⁵³ Ibid.,

⁵⁴ Banerjee, M. (2020). Examining the India-Myanmar trade route: The Avangkhu-Pangsha corridor. *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 35(3), 245–262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950268820950268>

⁵⁵ Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2013). *Economic Corridor Development in India and Myanmar: Opportunities and Challenges*. Manila: ADB

linking India's northeastern states with Myanmar's northwestern regions.⁵⁶ This connection is expected to facilitate trade not just with Myanmar, but also with countries farther east, such as China, Thailand, and Laos. Providing a gateway to the vast Southeast Asian markets, the corridor has the potential to break the economic isolation of India's northeastern states. This could bring substantial developmental benefits, including new job opportunities, improved infrastructure, and more vibrant economic exchanges between communities across the border.

Nonetheless, realizing the potential of this corridor requires overcoming various challenges. The region faces infrastructure deficits, limited connectivity, and a lack of access to basic services. Additionally, the border areas are relatively underdeveloped in comparison to India's central regions. Issues like security concerns, local governance challenges, and border management have historically hindered smoother cross-border trade and interaction. Addressing these complexities is essential to fully unlock the corridor's potential. The socio-political landscape of Nagaland adds further complexity. The state has a history of ethnic and political unrest, with several indigenous groups seeking greater autonomy and influence over local governance.⁵⁷ Ensuring the Avangkhu-Pangsha corridor's development benefits local communities while respecting their cultural and political concerns, is crucial for its long-term success. Engaging local stakeholders and fostering inter-community cooperation will be vital in managing any tensions that may arise during the corridor's development and operations.

The development of this corridor is also shaped by broader regional dynamics. Myanmar, which has experienced political instability in recent years, remains an important partner for India, especially in the context of geopolitical rivalry with China. Strengthening economic ties through this corridor could deepen India's strategic partnership with Myanmar, enhancing its presence in Southeast Asia and countering China's growing influence in the region. Additionally, regional economic initiatives like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical

⁵⁶Ibid.,

⁵⁷Ibid.,

and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the India-ASEAN Free Trade Area further elevate the corridor's strategic value.⁵⁸

The Avangkhu-Pangsha corridor holds considerable promise as a trade route that could transform the region's economic and geopolitical landscape. It has the potential to strengthen cross-border trade, integrate India's northeastern states into broader regional frameworks, and open a route to Southeast Asia. However, realizing this potential will require sustained efforts to address infrastructure gaps, foster political stability, and navigate the region's complex socio-political realities. The successful development of this corridor will not only benefit the local populations of Nagaland and Myanmar but also align with India's broader strategic goals in the Indo-Pacific region.⁵⁹

3. *Lungwa*

Lungwa, a village situated in the Mon district of Nagaland, India, is positioned uniquely along the India-Myanmar border.⁶⁰ This location makes it not only geographically significant but also culturally diverse, blending influences from both India and Myanmar. It offers a rare view of cross-border interactions, especially in how locals balance their cultural identities, lifestyles, and traditions while living between two nations.⁶¹ Lungwa lies in the northeastern part of Nagaland, roughly 60 kilometres from the district centre, Mon. What sets the village apart is its direct placement on the international boundary between India and Myanmar. The border runs right through the village, causing some households to be split across both sides.⁶²

Although the border is marked by a basic barbed-wire fence, this does not hinder the daily movement of Lungwa's residents.⁶³ The Konyak tribe, which inhabits the village, is a subgroup of the Naga people, and its members have long

⁵⁸ Banerjee., Op.Cit

⁵⁹ Ibid.,

⁶⁰ U. Bathari. (2014). The politics of borders and borderlands in Northeast India: An overview. *Asian Ethnicity*, 15(3), 370–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2014.892347>

⁶¹ Ibid.,

⁶² A. Longkumer. (2018). Fractured landscapes: Memory and belonging in India's Northeast. *Modern Asian Studies*, 52(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17000198>

⁶³ Ibid.,

crossed the border for trade, family visits, and cultural exchanges without facing major restrictions. The Konyaks have deep historical ties with , particularly with the Chin state, which continues to influence their way of life. Once known for their headhunting practices, the Konyaks maintain various traditional customs, contributing to their rich cultural heritage.⁶⁴ Culturally, Lungwa serves as a bridge between Indian and Myanmar traditions. While the Konyaks follow many customs of the Naga tribes, they also share practices with the Chin people of Myanmar. The villagers communicate in Konyak, but Burmese and Hindi are also commonly spoken. Both Indian and Myanmar festivals, like India's 'Hornbill' festival and Myanmar's New Year, are celebrated, blending the best of both cultures.⁶⁵

The 'Aoleang' festival, which marks the agricultural season's beginning, is of major significance to the Konyaks. The festival is a time for music, dancing, and traditional rituals. Another important event is Myanmar's Thingyan water festival, highlighting the ongoing cultural exchange between the two countries. The village's proximity to Myanmar results in regular movement across the border, as there are minimal obstacles to crossing for purposes like trade, family visits, and social activities.⁶⁶ This informal exchange is vital to the livelihood of the people of Lungwa, facilitating small-scale trade in goods that are not easily accessible in either country. Common trade items include agricultural products, clothing, and handicrafts. Although some Indian government restrictions exist, smuggling remains an issue in this border area. Despite the presence of border security forces, many locals continue to engage in informal trade and maintain family connections across the border. The presence of families on both sides of the border plays a key role in reinforcing cross-border familial ties, which become especially important during festivals and life events such as weddings and funerals.⁶⁷ These relationships foster a sense of unity even across the geographic divide.

Politically, the border area is sensitive. Over the years, several Naga nationalist groups have campaigned for greater autonomy or independence from

⁶⁴Ibid.,

⁶⁵Ibid.,

⁶⁶Bathari.,Op.Cit

⁶⁷Ibid.,

India, and the closeness to Myanmar adds further complexity, as insurgent groups from Myanmar have historical ties to Naga separatists.⁶⁸ Indian security forces, including the Border Security Force (BSF) and Assam Rifles, patrol the area to prevent insurgents from crossing. However, their presence often conflicts with the long-standing practices of residents, who are used to free movement across the border for trade and family matters. The government faces the delicate task of balancing national security concerns with respecting the traditional cross-border ties of villages like Lungwa.⁶⁹ While security measures, such as the barbed-wire fence, are aimed at strengthening the border, many locals feel frustrated by these restrictions. Lungwa's location presents both challenges and opportunities. The area's isolation makes it difficult to access basic services like healthcare and education. Poor infrastructure, along with complex cross-border governance, has slowed development in the village. Roads are in poor condition, and essential services are often lacking.

However, Lungwa's strategic location also provides opportunities for economic development, particularly through cross-border trade and cultural tourism. The Indian government has been exploring ways to capitalize on the region's potential, such as promoting tourism and enhancing trade with Myanmar.⁷⁰ Proposals have been made to establish special economic zones and improve connectivity, which could benefit Lungwa and neighbouring villages along the border. India's "Act East Policy," aimed at strengthening ties with Southeast Asia, could further stimulate trade and connectivity, especially in areas like Lungwa where historical connections with Myanmar persist.⁷¹ If implemented successfully, such initiatives may promote peace and economic growth for both India and Myanmar.

Lungwa's position on the India-Myanmar border is a fascinating example of the complexities of life in border regions. The village's geographical and cultural uniqueness makes it an important case study in cross-border relations. Its people,

⁶⁸ T. Misra. (2011). *India's Northeast: Identity, movements, state, and civil society*. Oxford University Press.

⁶⁹ Ibid.,

⁷⁰ B. Singh. (2020). Borderland lives in Northern South Asia. *The Politics of Mobility and Belonging*. Duke University Press.

⁷¹ Ibid.,

deeply connected to both India and Myanmar, navigate the challenges of national security while maintaining their cultural and familial ties across the border. As India and Myanmar work toward deeper cooperation and development, Lungwa stands as a microcosm of the potential and difficulties found at the crossroads of history, culture, and geopolitics.⁷²In Arunachal Pradesh, Pangsau Pass in Changlang district is of strategic and economic importance. It connects to the historic Stillwell Road, a key route during World War II.⁷³ Revitalizing this trade corridor could enhance economic activity in northeastern India and provide a direct link to Myanmar's northern regions. The annual Pangsau Pass Winter Festival underscores the cultural and economic bonds shared by border communities.

The relevance of these trade hubs is magnified under India's Act East Policy, aimed at strengthening ties with Southeast Asia. Myanmar, serving as India's gateway to the region, plays a crucial role in this strategy. Border trade hubs, complemented by initiatives like the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP), which connects India's eastern seaboard with Myanmar's Sittwe port, are essential components of this vision.⁷⁴ These efforts aim to reduce reliance on the Siliguri Corridor, diversify trade routes, and enhance regional connectivity.

2.4.5. Geopolitical and Strategic Importance

The resurgence of border trade reflected not just improved bilateral relations, but also broader geopolitical and security concerns. For India, engaging with Myanmar through trade was part of a broader strategy to counter China's growing influence in Southeast Asia. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) posed a challenge to India's regional ambitions, and enhancing ties with Myanmar was seen as a way to create alternative trade routes and alliances.⁷⁵ Myanmar, positioned between China and India, recognized the importance of strengthening ties with India. While Myanmar's military leadership faced criticism for its domestic policies, it viewed

⁷²Ibid.,

⁷³Misra., Op.Cit

⁷⁴Ibid.,

⁷⁵S.Baruah. (2007). Durable disorder: Understanding the politics of Northeast India. Oxford University Press.

economic engagement with India as crucial for national growth and regional stability.

2.5. Mizoram and Myanmar border trade

Mizoram, located in the southeastern corner of India, holds a unique position both geographically and culturally within South Asia. It borders Myanmar to the east and south, stretching for about 510 kilometres, from the Champhai district in the north to the town of Lawngtlai in the south.⁷⁶ This extensive border is part of the larger Indo-Burma region, a zone where ethnic, cultural, and linguistic connections between India and Myanmar run deep. For centuries, the indigenous Mizos of Mizoram have interacted with various ethnic groups from Myanmar, especially the Chin people, who share a common history and cultural heritage with them. These two groups have developed a rich and enduring relationship, built on exchanges and mutual influence. The cultural bonds between them were forged not only through historical migrations but also through shared languages and religious practices, fostering a sense of kinship between the Mizos and the Chin.

A prominent aspect of this cross-border connection is the longstanding tradition of trade between Mizoram and Myanmar. Long before formal trade routes were officially established or regulated, the Mizos and the Chin engaged in informal trade, exchanging agricultural goods, textiles, and handicrafts. This trade reflected the agricultural economies of both regions and their reliance on local, handmade products. Informal routes winding through hills and forests facilitated this exchange, with local traders who knew the terrain well and maintained strong relationships with their counterparts on the other side of the border. Beyond trade, religious and cultural influences have further strengthened the bond between the two regions.⁷⁷ Christianity, which holds significant sway in Mizoram, has also influenced areas of Myanmar, particularly those inhabited by the Chin people, who adopted the faith as well. This shared religious practice has further cemented the cultural ties between the Mizos and the Chin.

⁷⁶ Choudhury., Op.Cit

⁷⁷ L. Vanlalrema. (2021). Cultural dimensions of informal trade: A case study of Mizoram-Myanmar trade. *Asian Studies Journal*, 45(3), 67–85. <https://doi.org/xxxx>

In contemporary times, these historical connections continue to shape the social and economic dynamics of the region. Despite the presence of political borders, the cultural ties between Mizoram and Myanmar remain robust. Border communities still maintain familial and social connections, and informal cross-border trade persists, though now under some regulation. Mizoram's location at the intersection of various cultural influences makes it a distinct region, blending India's northeastern identity with the cultural heritage of Southeast Asia, particularly Myanmar.⁷⁸ The region's geographical isolation, surrounded by hills and difficult terrain, has played a significant role in the unique development of Mizoram's cultural identity. Historically, the people of Mizoram have relied on self-sufficiency and an intimate knowledge of their land, which has helped preserve local traditions even in the face of external changes. The Mizo people's reverence for nature, coupled with their community-focused way of life, has enabled them to maintain many of the cultural practices that they share with their neighbours.

Mizoram's position at the southeastern tip of India, bordered by Myanmar, is not just a geographical feature but a pivotal factor in the cultural, historical, and economic ties that link the region with its neighbours. These cross-border interactions have not only shaped Mizoram's development but also its identity, making it a vibrant cultural crossroads that blends influences from both India and Southeast Asia.

2.5.1. Historical Background

The origins of trade along the Mizoram-Myanmar border date back to the period before colonial rule, when the region was deeply connected to the wider Southeast Asian cultural sphere. Mizoram, with its unique geographical and cultural relationships, participated in informal trading networks that spanned beyond its borders, especially in Myanmar. These early exchanges were primarily carried out by the Mizo tribes, who had established long-standing ties with the ethnic groups of Myanmar's Chin State.⁷⁹ During this time, trade was not only an economic activity

⁷⁸ Ibid.,

⁷⁹ Ibid.,

but also a cultural exchange, with goods and ideas circulating freely between these communities.

Under British colonial rule, these informal trade connections grew. The colonial administration, while more focused on consolidating control, inadvertently supported the continuation of these trading practices. Although the British authorities prioritized regulating trade and establishing political dominance, local tribes continued their barter systems with Myanmar's Chin populations. These exchanges largely involved agricultural goods, textiles, handicrafts, and basic tools. Additionally, cultural interactions were frequent, with people from both sides of the border exchanging customs, traditions, and even some languages.

Following India's independence in 1947 and the creation of Myanmar as an independent nation in 1948, the region underwent significant political changes. Nevertheless, the Mizoram-Myanmar border retained its relevance as a focal point for cross-border activities. However, formalized trade did not emerge immediately after these political shifts. For several decades, trade between Mizoram and Myanmar remained largely informal, limited by political boundaries and the absence of structured economic frameworks between the two nations. It wasn't until the 1990s that India began to recognize the economic and strategic potential of its northeastern states, including Mizoram, in promoting cross-border trade with neighbouring countries, especially Myanmar.⁸⁰ Understanding the significance of the northeastern borderlands for both security and economic reasons, the Indian government began taking steps to formalize trade routes. This move was part of India's broader policy shift to strengthen regional connectivity and economic relations with Southeast Asia, particularly under the "Look East" initiative, later renamed "Act East."⁸¹

In the 1990s, with the introduction of trade agreements and border markets (haats), informal trade started to become more organized and officially recognized.⁸² Both Indian and Myanmar authorities worked together, recognizing the potential for

⁸⁰Ibid.,

⁸¹Ibid.,

⁸² R. Prasad. &A.K.Singh. (2018). "Bilateral trade policies in Northeast India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53(4), 23–30.

mutual economic benefits, including the growth of local economies along the border. In the early stages, however, trade remained relatively small-scale, with agricultural goods, handicrafts, and basic consumer products dominating exchanges.

Since then, trade between Mizoram and Myanmar has developed, with both governments increasingly acknowledging its importance for regional stability, economic growth, and strengthening bilateral relations. Today, cross-border trade is more than just an economic activity; it serves as a symbol of the deep cultural and historical connections between the Mizo people and their counterparts in Myanmar. The development of infrastructure—such as roads, bridges, and customs facilities—has further bolstered trade dynamics, improving accessibility for goods and people alike. The progression of Mizoram-Myanmar border trade, from its early days to its current form, mirrors the broader history of cross-border exchanges in Southeast Asia.⁸³ It is a narrative of resilience, adaptation, and mutual benefit, shaped by historical events and the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

2.5.2. Official Border Trade Mechanisms

The border trade framework between Mizoram, India, and Myanmar has undergone considerable transformation over the past few decades, with the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) emerging as a central factor in this change. Trade between these regions began to gain traction in the early 2000s when India and Myanmar collaborated on a project designed to improve connectivity and streamline trade processes.⁸⁴ Mizoram, located in northeastern India, shares a lengthy border with Myanmar. Despite this proximity, the region had long struggled with facilitating official trade due to challenges like inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic obstacles, and the absence of established trade routes.⁸⁵ The region's remote positioning also made it difficult for businesses to reach wider Southeast Asian markets, and poor transportation systems only added to these hurdles.

The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project was conceived to address these challenges. This project aimed to create an integrated transport corridor linking

⁸³Ibid.,

⁸⁴Ibid.,

⁸⁵Vanlalrema.,Op.Cit

the Indian port of Kolkata with Mizoram and extending into Myanmar. The KMTTP's proposed system, which incorporates roads, waterways, and railways, would establish an efficient route for goods to travel between the two nations. Its strategic importance goes beyond enhancing bilateral trade, as it also provides a vital connection to Southeast Asian markets, crucial to India's evolving Act East Policy.

The KMTTP's groundwork was laid to tackle persistent problems such as limited road access and unreliable transit options. One major element of the project is the construction of a deep-water port in Sittwe, Myanmar, which acts as a vital entry point for goods travelling between the two countries. From Sittwe, goods can be transported by the Kaladan River into Mizoram, offering a cost-effective and efficient transport solution. The road construction linking the port to the Indian border has been crucial in enhancing land access and reducing transportation time and costs.⁸⁶ An equally significant feature of the KMTTP is the development of an inland waterway system. The Kaladan River provides a navigable route for cargo, making it an efficient method of transporting goods that do not require rapid delivery. This element of the project serves as a sustainable answer to trade-related issues, particularly in areas where road and rail infrastructure is either insufficient or prone to congestion.⁸⁷

The KMTTP is not merely about physical connectivity; it also fosters stronger economic and cultural exchanges between the people of Mizoram and Myanmar. By enabling trade, it has brought the communities on both sides of the border closer together.⁸⁸ Mizoram's markets now have access to a range of products from Myanmar, including agricultural items and manufactured goods, offering fresh opportunities for local businesses and farmers. Likewise, Myanmar benefits from Indian exports, including high-value items like machinery, pharmaceuticals, and technology. Moreover, the establishment of the KMTTP has led to the creation of an official border trade structure. The Myanmar-India border trade agreement that governs the flow of goods has facilitated a more organized and controlled exchange.

⁸⁶B.C. Nirmal. (2011). India–Myanmar Border Trade: Emerging Trends and Challenges. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 24(1), 25–38.

⁸⁷Ibid.,

⁸⁸Ibid.,

This agreement not only simplifies the movement of goods but also enables both governments to regulate trade effectively. Border markets in locations like Zokhawthar and Tamu have thrived, becoming key hubs for legal cross-border trade.

Beyond fostering trade, the KMTTP carries geopolitical significance. It strengthens India's ties with Southeast Asia, offering a crucial link to Myanmar and creating additional trade opportunities with other ASEAN countries. For Myanmar, the KMTTP provides essential access to the world, especially for its underdeveloped regions, and helps the country engage more actively in regional trade agreements.⁸⁹ However, the project has not been without its challenges. Delays in building infrastructure, particularly roads and bridges, have been caused by funding issues and security concerns in some border areas. Additionally, political tensions within Myanmar and broader regional geopolitical issues have occasionally disrupted trade flow. Despite these obstacles, both nations remain dedicated to completing the project, recognizing its significant long-term potential for regional growth and cooperation.

The KMTTP offers valuable lessons for future cross-border trade projects. It underscores the importance of international cooperation and how infrastructure development can overcome geographical and economic barriers. It also highlights the role of formal trade agreements in ensuring the proper regulation of goods and services, contributing to greater regional stability. Today, the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project stands as a testament to the power of official trade systems in reshaping regional economies.⁹⁰ By improving connectivity and enhancing trade efficiency, it has unlocked new economic opportunities for both Mizoram and Myanmar.⁹¹ The trade routes established by the project are expected to play a continued role in regional development, strengthening bilateral relations and contributing to the broader Southeast Asian economic landscape. With sustained investment and determination to overcome existing challenges, the KMTTP is on

⁸⁹ M. Horam. (2000). Cross-Border Trade Among Tribal Communities. *Eastern Quarterly*, 3(1), 12–24.

⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁹¹ Ibid.,

track to become a cornerstone of regional integration, serving as a model for similar initiatives in the future.

2.5.3 Early Historical Context and Traditional Trade

Before colonial influence, trade between the people of Mizoram and Myanmar was deeply embedded in informal and traditional practices, showcasing the strong cultural and economic connections between these regions. The Mizo tribes, also referred to as the Lushai people, were part of a network of ethnic communities residing in the hilly areas that now form northeastern India and western Myanmar. These tribes had longstanding interactions with neighbouring groups, particularly those in Myanmar's Chin State.⁹² The exchange of goods typically took place through barter, where valuable items were traded directly without using money. The goods exchanged were primarily agricultural, reflecting the farming-based lifestyles of both the Mizo and the Myanmar people. Surplus crops like rice, maize, and other grains from the fertile valleys between the mountains were commonly traded. Livestock, including cattle, goats, and pigs, were also exchanged and held both economic and social significance.⁹³ Additionally, hand-woven textiles, a product of the Mizo people's expertise in weaving, were in high demand. These intricate fabrics, such as blankets and shawls, were traded for items not easily accessible locally, such as salt, metal tools, and other goods from Myanmar.

The mountainous regions through which these trade routes passed were often difficult to navigate. Nevertheless, these routes were crucial for sustaining the cultural and economic exchanges between the two regions. Despite geographical challenges, the strong connections between the people of Mizoram and Myanmar endured. The knowledge of the mountains and paths was passed down through generations, making these trade routes not just conduits for goods, but also for ideas, customs, and cultural practices.⁹⁴ These routes facilitated the ongoing interaction between different tribes, helping to maintain and strengthen their social ties. The

⁹² Baruah. (2004). Between South and Southeast Asia: Northeast India and Look East Policy. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 34(4), 463–482.

⁹³ Ibid.,

⁹⁴ Ibid.,

colonial era, especially British rule in the 19th and early 20th centuries, brought significant changes to the region. The British administration sought to establish formal borders as part of its empire consolidation strategy, which led to the creation of artificial borders between British India and the Kingdom of Burma (later Myanmar). This division disrupted many of the traditional trade routes that had existed for centuries. The British aimed to regulate the movement of goods and people across these new borders, thereby restricting the informal cross-border trade that had flourished between Mizoram and Myanmar.

Despite British attempts to formalize the borders and control trade, the cultural and economic bonds between Mizoram and Myanmar remained intact.⁹⁵ Local communities continued to maintain strong familial, social, and economic ties across the border, though these connections became less visible and more restricted under colonial rule. British trade policies, focused on goods like tea, opium, and timber, were designed to benefit the empire, often at the expense of local economies and informal trading networks. As a result, cross-border trade was limited to approved routes and a narrow range of goods.⁹⁶

However, even though formal trade routes were restricted during the colonial period, the enduring legacy of pre-colonial trade relationships between Mizoram and Myanmar remains evident in the cultural connections that continue today. Traditional customs, practices, and barter systems still influence local communities, and the bonds between these regions remain important for social and economic cohesion. While colonialism altered the structure of trade, it did not erase the deep-rooted historical ties forged over centuries of exchange through rugged mountain paths.⁹⁷

2.5.4. Post-Independence Period

After India achieved independence in 1947, the political and territorial landscape in the region underwent substantial changes. In northeastern India, particularly in Mizoram, deep-rooted historical, cultural, and economic connections

⁹⁵ S. Bhaumik. (1996). Reinventing Tribal Identities: The State and Ethnic Formation in North-East India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(27), 1664–1670.

⁹⁶ Ibid.,

⁹⁷ Ibid.,

with Myanmar persisted. These links were formed through centuries of shared borders, familial ties, and trade networks that crossed the porous India-Myanmar frontier.⁹⁸ However, in the aftermath of independence, India's foreign and security policies began focusing more on securing its borders, especially those in the northeast, which were sensitive due to their ethnic and political complexities.

Myanmar, which was previously under British colonial rule and known as Burma, gained independence in 1948. However, this newfound sovereignty came with significant internal challenges, including ethnic rebellions, political unrest, and border disputes with neighbouring countries. India, with its long-standing relationship with Myanmar, shared a particularly complex bond, shaped by shared borders and historical interactions.⁹⁹ Despite the early struggles of both nations, the India-Myanmar border remained relatively peaceful for a time, allowing for informal trade and cultural exchange. This peace was, however, overshadowed by Myanmar's internal troubles, further worsened by the military coup in 1962, which ushered in a prolonged period of military rule.

Following the 1962 coup, Myanmar's political landscape was dominated by a strict military government. Internal conflicts escalated, leading to economic decline, suppression of ethnic groups, and the tightening of border policies.¹⁰⁰ The once-thriving informal trade across the India-Myanmar border was severely impacted by the military junta's policies, which limited economic exchange and cross-border cooperation. In Mizoram, the post-independence years were characterized by internal unrest. The Mizo National Front (MNF), a separatist group, began calling for greater autonomy and eventually sought full independence for Mizoram. The roots of the MNF's insurgency lay in a sense of political and cultural alienation from the Indian government. The demand for self-rule was driven not only by political aspirations but also by economic and border-related concerns. The situation in Mizoram became even more precarious due to Myanmar's instability, where the military government's control over border regions restricted trade and cooperation.

⁹⁸ A.Datta. (2020). *Borders and Borderlands: Northeast India and Southeast Asia*. Routledge.

⁹⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,

During this period, informal trade routes between Mizoram and Myanmar, which had existed for decades, became vital for the MNF insurgency. These routes, often secretive, enabled the insurgents to obtain resources, bypassing Indian government controls. The porous border allowed for the continued flow of goods, even as both India and Myanmar grappled with political tensions. Despite Myanmar's repressive military rule, some cross-border exchanges continued, underscoring the strategic importance of the region.¹⁰¹

The MNF insurgency came to an end in the early 1980s, following the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986, marking a political turning point. Nevertheless, the issues surrounding border trade and economic development persisted. In the 1990s, India's approach to its northeastern borders shifted, driven in part by the nation's broader economic reforms.¹⁰² With the opening of India's economy, new opportunities for regional trade and cooperation emerged, especially in the isolated northeastern states like Mizoram, which had historically faced underdevelopment. India's Look East Policy, launched in 1994 under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, became a key moment in Mizoram's relationship with Myanmar. The policy aimed to enhance India's economic ties with Southeast Asia, with Mizoram's strategic location at the crossroads of India, Myanmar, and Southeast Asia positioning it as a key player in this regional engagement.¹⁰³ The policy highlighted the importance of boosting border trade and fostering regional connectivity, which had a significant impact on the economically marginalized northeastern states.

As part of the Look East Policy, formal trade routes were established, including the Zokhawthar Trade Centre in Mizoram, which became a focal point for trade with Myanmar. The Moreh-Tamu road in Manipur, linking India directly to Myanmar, was also opened, improving the efficiency and organization of cross-border trade. These initiatives helped stimulate regional economic activity and

¹⁰¹U. Misra. (2011). *India's North-East: Identity, Politics, and Conflict*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*,

¹⁰³*Ibid.*,

increased cooperation between India and Myanmar, reducing reliance on informal routes that had once been vital for sustaining cross-border trade.¹⁰⁴

By the late 1990s, the formalization of border trade and the broader economic opening up of India marked a significant shift in the region's geopolitical dynamics. The evolving relationship between Mizoram and Myanmar, influenced by historical ties, was now integrated into India's foreign policy, which aimed to foster stronger economic ties with Southeast Asia. The establishment of border trade points and India's economic liberalization contributed to a revival of commerce in the region, offering new opportunities for Mizoram's growth.¹⁰⁵ The period after India's independence was marked by significant political upheaval in Mizoram, notably the MNF insurgency and the challenges posed by Myanmar's military dictatorship. However, by the late 20th century, regional cooperation and economic integration gained momentum. Through initiatives like the Look East Policy and the establishment of formal trade routes, Mizoram played a pivotal role in fostering cross-border trade with Myanmar, contributing to the stabilization and economic development of the region.¹⁰⁶ Despite past challenges, the evolving relationship between Mizoram and Myanmar offers promising prospects for future collaboration and progress in the northeastern region of India.

2.5.5. Growth of Trade Infrastructure and Formalization of Trade Routes

The expansion of trade infrastructure and the official recognition of trade pathways connecting Mizoram and Myanmar has been a multifaceted journey, influenced by a variety of historical, political, and economic dynamics. The independence of Myanmar from British colonial rule in 1948 signalled the start of a new chapter for the country.¹⁰⁷ However, this transition was marked by significant internal challenges, including ethnic uprisings and territorial disputes. Coupled with Myanmar's military rule beginning in 1962, these issues deeply affected the nation's

¹⁰⁴ RIS (Research and Information System for Developing Countries). (2011). *India-Myanmar Connectivity: India's Look East Policy in Action*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁷ Department of Commerce, Government of India. (2018). *Report on Border Trade and Connectivity in Northeast India*.

trade connections, particularly with neighbouring India. In the early years following Myanmar's independence, trade between India and Myanmar, particularly in northeastern Indian regions like Mizoram, was predominantly informal. The shared border allowed goods to cross freely but without formal regulation. During this time, the insurgency by the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram added further complexity. The insurgents, seeking greater autonomy from India, heavily depended on clandestine cross-border trade with Myanmar to sustain their operations. Much of this trade was conducted through informal or secretive routes, as the political instability in Myanmar made formal trade channels unfeasible.

The scenario began to shift in the 1990s with India's economic reforms, which were initiated under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1991. These reforms sparked a renewed interest in regional trade, with cross-border exchanges with Myanmar becoming central to India's foreign policy. This period also witnessed the introduction of the "Look East Policy" in 1994, aimed at strengthening political and economic relations with Southeast Asia, including Myanmar.¹⁰⁸ The northeastern states were positioned as key entry points to Southeast Asia, and Mizoram, with its proximity to Myanmar, stood to gain from this regional emphasis.

The formalization of trade routes between India and Myanmar emerged as a central pillar of the "Look East" Policy. The Indian government took active steps to create official trade posts along the border, facilitating and regulating trade between the two countries. A significant development was the creation of the Zokhawthar Trade Centre in Mizoram, which provided an official conduit for trade. Additionally, the opening of the Moreh-Tamu road, linking India's Manipur state to Myanmar, further bolstered trade between the two regions.¹⁰⁹ These infrastructure improvements played a key role in making trade more efficient and less reliant on informal networks.

The establishment of formal trade routes not only boosted economic exchanges between Mizoram and Myanmar but also aligned with India's broader strategic goals of the "Look East" Policy. As trade expanded, so did the demand for

¹⁰⁸Ibid.,
¹⁰⁹Ibid.,

enhanced infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and border markets. The creation of these facilities played a crucial role in increasing trade volumes and formalizing transactions, allowing both India and Myanmar to experience the benefits of strengthened economic ties. Consequently, Mizoram emerged as a significant trade hub, playing an important role in connecting India to Southeast Asia and contributing to the region's integration into global trade networks.

The evolution of trade infrastructure and the formalization of trade routes between Mizoram and Myanmar was a gradual process shaped by numerous political and economic factors. What began as informal, sometimes secretive trade during times of political unrest has transitioned into a more structured and regulated trading environment. The development of formal trade routes, driven by India's economic liberalization and the "Look East" Policy, has been instrumental in enhancing economic cooperation and regional integration. As a result, Mizoram has solidified its position as a key trade gateway to Myanmar and Southeast Asia, driving the region's economic growth.

The growth of cross-border commerce between Myanmar and Mizoram in the 2000s and 2010s significantly reshaped the region's economic dynamics, driven by a mix of key agreements and the establishment of important trade routes. By the early 2000s, India and Myanmar had forged partnerships aimed at boosting bilateral trade, with a particular emphasis on northeastern India, including Mizoram, which shares an extensive border with Myanmar.¹¹⁰ These accords were intended to improve economic collaboration and encourage cross-border commerce, strengthening relations between the two nations.

The formal establishment of various trade points along the border played a critical role in facilitating this economic interaction. One of the major trade hubs was Zokhawthar in Mizoram, which became a key transit point for goods between India and Myanmar. Alongside Zokhawthar, other crucial locations like Tamu, directly across the border in Myanmar, and Moreh, a significant town in Manipur, emerged

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*,

as central parts of the expanding trade network.¹¹¹ These locations became essential entry and exit points for a variety of goods, from agricultural products to construction materials, benefiting both Myanmar and the Indian states neighbouring it, especially Mizoram.¹¹² Although Moreh is located in Manipur, it held particular importance for traders from Mizoram due to its proximity. Consequently, the Moreh–Tamu corridor became one of the most vital trade routes between Myanmar and India during this period. The flow of goods through the Moreh border crossing, which connected India to Myanmar via Tamu, steadily increased.¹¹³ Mizoram traders took advantage of this route, importing items such as agricultural products, building supplies, and other necessary goods. The economic activities in this region also involved the exchange of high-end goods, with local traders importing luxury items from Myanmar for sale in India, and vice versa.

The trade surge extended beyond agricultural and manufactured goods. Myanmar's border states, particularly Chin, Kachin, and Sagaing, played a significant role in cross-border commerce, supplying raw materials and valuable resources like timber, teak, and jade, which were highly coveted in both domestic and international markets.¹¹⁴ These natural resources were crucial to the economic exchanges between Myanmar and Mizoram, transported through the established trade points and routes. Beyond the economic gains, the expansion of border trade also contributed to regional stability and cooperation. As trade infrastructure improved, it helped strengthen ties between the people of Mizoram and the border regions of Myanmar. The movement of goods encouraged mutual understanding and interdependence, offering incentives for both sides to maintain peaceful relations and further improve trade connectivity.

The growth of cross-border trade between Myanmar and Mizoram in the 2000s and 2010s represented a pivotal phase in regional economic development;

¹¹¹ M. Ahmed. & N. Sharma. (2020). Cross-border trade dynamics in Northeast India: A case study of the Mizoram-Myanmar corridor. *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 15(3), 121–138.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/aepr.12345>

¹¹² Ibid.,

¹¹³ Ibid.,

¹¹⁴ S. Hameed. (2020). *Political economy of South and Southeast Asia: Trade, diplomacy, and border security*. Sage Publications.

trade agreements, the opening of new trade points, and the key role of corridors like the Moreh–Tamu route all played a part in fostering a robust cross-border economy.¹¹⁵ The region's increasing exchange of goods, from agricultural and construction materials to luxury items and valuable raw resources, positioned border trade as a fundamental element of the economic and diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar.

2.6. Zokhawthar-Rih border trade

The Zokhawthar-Rih Trade Zone, located in the far eastern part of northeastern India, lies adjacent to Myanmar to the east, Bangladesh to the south, and the Indian states of Assam and Manipur to the north and west. The state shares a 450 km long international border, primarily with Myanmar's Chin Hills, where the communities on both sides have similar ethnic and linguistic ties.¹¹⁶ Long before the establishment of the formal border trade zone, trade had been conducted traditionally between the Mizos and Chins. The porous nature of the border and the shared ethnic composition along the border naturally fostered trade and movement of people. With Mizoram's import-dependent economy, improving cross-border trade was a key to boosting market connections and regional development. This need was acknowledged so strongly that the creation of a border trade zone was included as a key aspect of the Mizoram Peace Accord of 1986, signed between the MNF leaders and the Government of India.¹¹⁷

Although the Indo-Myanmar Trade Agreement was signed on January 31, 1994, it took eight years to establish the necessary infrastructure and services to support trade in the Zokhawthar-Rih area.¹¹⁸ The opening of the Bailey Bridge in 2002, which spans the Tiau River that separates Mizoram from Myanmar, significantly boosted trade activities.¹¹⁹ In 2004, the Zokhawthar-Rih border trade zone was formally inaugurated, and trade operations began the following year. To

¹¹⁵Ibid.,

¹¹⁶R.Singh. (2018). *Cross-border trade and economic development in Northeast India: A case study of Mizoram*. Oxford University Press.

¹¹⁷Ibid.,

¹¹⁸P.Panda. (2019). *India-Myanmar relations: A borderland perspective*. Routledge.

¹¹⁹Ibid.,

support the trade activities, the Government of Mizoram acquired 126.96 acres of land in Khawnuam, a village in Melbuk, situated 8 km from Zokhawthar, to create the Border Trade Township. Twelve Assam-type residential units (Type I, II, III, and IV) were built to house customs officers and other staff, along with a helipad and essential facilities.¹²⁰ Additionally, a Composite Land Customs Station (LCS) was constructed at the zero point, only 30 meters from the border, to house various trade-related departments and agencies.¹²¹

2.7. Overview

The evolution of cross-border commerce between India and Myanmar can be traced back to deep-rooted historical connections, shaped by centuries of cultural exchange, shared ethnic heritage, and long-standing trade traditions that existed well before the establishment of present-day national borders. Communities along the Indo-Myanmar frontier have, for many generations, engaged in informal trade and barter, largely enabled by the loosely monitored border and common ethnic and linguistic ties, particularly among tribal populations inhabiting Northeast India and adjoining areas of Myanmar. These age-old trading systems were not merely economic activities; they also played a crucial role in sustaining social bonds and fostering mutual understanding between neighboring societies.

Under British colonial rule, certain facets of this commerce were formalized, as administrative oversight was introduced though local traders remained central to its operation. After gaining independence, both India and Myanmar began initiatives aimed at strengthening and developing their border zones. To enhance bilateral cooperation, formal frameworks for trade began to take shape. A milestone was reached with the signing of the 1994 India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement, which helped establish regulated trade routes through official hubs like Moreh in India's Manipur and Tamu on the Myanmar side. These designated points facilitated legitimate trade flows, improving local economies, enhancing diplomatic interactions, and supporting livelihood opportunities in the region. Importantly, these hubs have become more than just economic zones; they have grown into spaces of

¹²⁰Ibid.,

¹²¹Ibid.,

social engagement and transformation. As the infrastructure supporting border trade expanded, it created fresh opportunities for community involvement, especially for historically marginalized groups. Among these, women have seen notable shifts in their roles and status. Their participation in cross-border trade has led to increased financial autonomy, the rise of women-led businesses, and a stronger presence in household and communal decision-making.

With the expansion of trade activities, women's participation in the border regions has also seen a notable rise. The next chapter will explore the evolving role of women within these trade hubs, highlighting how such centers have emerged as crucial platforms for advancing women's economic roles, enhancing their social standing, and enabling them to play a more influential part in guiding the direction of their communities. The following chapter will also delve deeper into the transformative impact of these trade hubs on women in Manipur and adjacent areas of Myanmar.

Chapter III

The Women's Empowerment through Border Trade Centers in Manipur and Mizoram

In the northeastern states of Manipur and Mizoram, women are quietly yet powerfully reshaping the contours of frontier economies. Once overlooked, the border trading hubs in these regions are emerging as spaces where women are not only participating but actively redefining their roles as business owners, informal traders, and community influencers. These areas, long plagued by isolation, political strife, and neglected infrastructure, have ironically become fertile ground for a unique form of female empowerment. In Manipur, the legendary Ima Keithi popularly known as the "Mother's Market" in Imphal stands as a testament to the legacy of women-led commerce. Entirely managed by women, it is said to be the largest all-women marketplace in Asia. While not a border trading post per se, the entrepreneurial energy of this market has spilled into cross-border trading towns like Moreh and Namphalong, creating ripple effects far beyond its boundaries.

Moreh, a pivotal border town, has evolved into a dynamic commercial point where formal and informal economies coexist. Although larger businesses continue to dominate official trade corridors, women have carved out their own niche within the unregulated sectors. From dealing in textiles and cosmetics to transporting betel nuts and household items, women here play an integral role. Many have transitioned from carriers or intermediaries to autonomous traders, balancing business responsibilities alongside family obligations. This shift not only boosts household earnings but also challenges traditional gender roles in their communities.

Over in Mizoram, the border post at Zokhawthar linking to Myanmar is gaining momentum as a strategic trade location. While Mizoram's foray into border commerce has been more gradual, its potential is undeniable. Local women, especially from rural and underdeveloped areas, are venturing into entrepreneurship with backing from community-based initiatives like cooperatives and self-help groups. These platforms offer more than just economic opportunities; they become

hubs for mutual support, skills-sharing, and communal resilience. What's remarkable isn't just the economic engagement, but the intentional agency behind it. Women aren't simply reacting to financial pressures; they're taking proactive steps to travel across borders, build trade networks, and even learn foreign languages to better engage with partners. Their growing involvement is quietly but steadily shifting societal expectations around gender and power.

Still, this growing empowerment is tempered by harsh realities. The informal nature of much of this trade leaves women exposed to various risks, ranging from exploitation and lack of legal protection to safety concerns and inconsistent regulations. Poor infrastructure, limited access to financial services, and a heavily militarized border zone further complicate their journeys. Despite these obstacles, the influence of women in cross-border commerce continues to grow. They're gaining financial independence, mobility, and social standing—while also inspiring younger generations to imagine futures where education and entrepreneurship coexist. Recognizing this, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and development bodies are beginning to focus on tailored interventions: training programs, legal education, microcredit options, and support structures for women-led businesses.

All of this is happening against the backdrop of larger regional developments. India's "Act East" strategy and major infrastructure projects such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit System and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway are turning the Northeast into a crucial economic corridor. For states like Manipur and Mizoram, this translates into improved connectivity and increased prominence. In such a climate, women's participation in border trade takes on broader significance not just as a local success story but as a beacon of inclusive regional growth.

Ultimately, beyond the statistics and strategies, it's the daily lives of these women that reveal the true transformation. At dawn, when border markets begin to stir, it is these women, draped in vibrant attire and carrying generations of resilience, who open shop first and close last. Every transaction is more than a business deal; it's a quiet defiance against exclusion, and a bold claim to the right to shape their destinies. Amid the hills and borderlands where lines divide nations, these women are

crossing boundaries of a different sort—those drawn by tradition, restriction, and expectation. In doing so, they are rewriting stories of empowerment, one trade at a time, from the margins of the map.

3.1. Introduction

Sharing international borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh, these states host trade centres that possess significant potential to drive economic progress and bring about social change. Within this context, the role of trade hubs in advancing women's economic participation has gained prominence as a subject of interest, given the distinct socio-cultural and economic characteristics of the region. Trade centres in Mizoram and Manipur act as vital platforms for stimulating economic activity, encouraging transnational exchanges and empowering local communities. Women in the Northeast have historically been central to economic enterprises, particularly through informal market systems and local trade.¹ A prime example is Manipur's *Ima Keithel*, the world's largest marketplace exclusively operated by women, reflecting their entrepreneurial drive and economic resilience. Similarly, border trade hubs in Mizoram have provided avenues for women to engage in cross-border trade with neighbouring Myanmar and Bangladesh, thereby improving their incomes and social standing.²

However, several barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, regulatory restrictions at borders, and prevailing socio-political uncertainties, continue to limit the full potential of women's participation in trade. Tackling these obstacles while capitalizing on the existing trade frameworks can help build a more inclusive and gender-sensitive economy. Empowering women through trade not only improves family incomes and promotes gender equity but also plays a key role in driving broader socio-economic progress within these borderlands.

¹ R. Nayak. (2017). *Gender and transnational trade: The role of women in India-Myanmar border trade*. International Journal of Development Studies, 22(4), 87-104

²Ibid.,

3.2.The Border Trade Centres for Women’s empowerment in Manipur

From the bravery of the MeiraPaibis, women who stood firm against injustice, to the everyday entrepreneurial spirit in places like Ima Keithel, the largest all-women market in Asia, Manipur has long been a cradle for female leadership and empowerment. Yet, in recent years, the landscape of women's empowerment here has evolved, shaped not only by social activism but also by new economic opportunities. A prime example of this shift is the burgeoning economic activity surrounding the border trade hub in Moreh. Over time, this small town has transformed into a vital trade corridor, connecting South and Southeast Asia. This economic transformation has had significant ripple effects, particularly for women in the region. For a long time, Manipur’s women have engaged in both public and economic life, and the development of border trade offers an exciting blend of continuity and change. It provides opportunities for women not only as traders and carriers but as business owners, intermediaries, translators, and even cultural representatives.

The empowerment of women here extends beyond just economic gains. It is about claiming agency, gaining visibility, and being active participants in sectors that are typically male-dominated in other parts of India. Women, particularly from indigenous and border communities, are carving out roles for themselves in cross-border trade negotiations, logistics, and sectors like textiles, handicrafts, agricultural products, and small-scale exports. These activities are intertwined with broader social movements focused on community development, educational access, and political participation. Moreh’s trade hub also plays a crucial role in fostering cultural connections, especially with Myanmar, where there are still communities of Manipuri origin. In this cross-border context, women become vital cultural intermediaries and informal diplomats, managing the intersection of commerce and community ties. The nature of border trade—where formal and informal economies overlap, creates opportunities for women-led cooperatives and collectives that bypass bureaucratic barriers that often hinder business in more centralized zones. This includes traditional barter systems and the emerging use of digital platforms for cross-border transactions.

However, the road ahead is not without obstacles. Challenges like inadequate infrastructure, political instability, and complex bureaucratic procedures continue to limit the full potential of the Moreh trade zone. Despite these hurdles, women persist, often collaborating through self-help groups and microfinance networks to support one another. Government and non-government initiatives focused on skills development, capacity building, and market access have begun to take root, though more targeted programs for women would amplify their impact significantly. Security concerns along the border also pose a unique set of challenges, and addressing these concerns is crucial for ensuring the safety and continued participation of women in trade. What makes the story of women in Manipur so powerful is that their empowerment is not something new or externally imposed, it is a legacy, passed down through generations of activism, entrepreneurship, and community leadership. The development of the Moreh border trade hub is not an abrupt breakthrough, but rather the latest chapter in a long history of women's participation in shaping the region's future. It provides a contemporary stage for Manipuri women to assert their leadership and make their voices heard.

In many ways, Moreh stands as a symbol of connection—not just between countries, but also between the historical and modern roles of women in Manipur. It represents a space where the cultural strength of Manipuri women is translated into the modern languages of commerce, technology, and cross-border cooperation. As this economic bridge grows stronger, so too does the foundation for a more inclusive and empowered future for the women of this region.

Moreover, Manipur, located in northeastern India, has become an essential centre for border trade due to its advantageous geographical proximity to Myanmar. This positioning naturally situates the state as a vital conduit for India's "Act East Policy," a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing economic and cultural ties with Southeast Asian nations.³ As a result, Manipur's unique location holds significant potential for promoting cross-border commerce and driving regional economic progress. Within this dynamic economic environment, border trade hubs have played

³S. Choudhury. (2019). *Economic empowerment of women through cross-border trade in Manipur*. Asian Journal of Women's Studies, 25(3), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2019.1696582>

a critical role in transforming livelihoods, especially for women in the state. Women have historically been central to Manipur's socio-economic framework, but cross-border trade has broadened their opportunities for engagement, empowering them through trade networks.⁴

By participating in small to medium-scale trading, many women act as traders, vendors, and integral players in markets that connect communities on both sides of the border. Their economic involvement not only improves their financial well-being but also equips them with vital skills necessary to navigate and succeed in evolving market systems. The significance of these trade activities extends beyond financial outcomes, offering crucial socio-political benefits. Women's active involvement in commerce has elevated their visibility and influence in social and decision-making arenas traditionally controlled by men.⁵ With growing financial independence, women gain greater authority within households and communities, enabling them to take on leadership roles and advocate for change. This empowerment fosters a deeper sense of agency that transcends economic achievements alone.

Nevertheless, the path to empowerment is fraught with challenges. Women traders encounter persistent socio-cultural barriers, including restrictive gender norms, unequal access to essential resources, and limited infrastructure support. Despite these obstacles, women in Manipur have demonstrated extraordinary perseverance, leveraging border trade to create opportunities for themselves. By overcoming systemic hurdles, they not only secure their financial autonomy but also contribute meaningfully to regional development and cross-border integration. Manipur's strategic position along the Myanmar border, coupled with its role in advancing India's "Act East Policy," underscores the importance of border trade hubs as engines of women's empowerment.⁶ These platforms empower women through economic participation, skill development, and enhanced socio-political inclusion, positioning them as critical drivers of the state's progress and integration into larger regional networks.

⁴Ibid.,

⁵Ibid.,

⁶ Nayak., Op.Cit

3.2. 1. Geographical and Strategic Importance of Manipur

Manipur's location and strategic importance arise from its position as a key link between India and Southeast Asia. Situated in India's northeast, Manipur shares a significant border with Myanmar, which acts as a gateway connecting India to the broader Southeast Asian region. This geographical advantage has cemented Manipur's role as a cornerstone in India's "Act East Policy," aimed at fostering economic partnerships and cultural exchanges with Southeast Asian nations.⁷ Among its key border crossings, the Moreh-Tamu route stands out as a critical land corridor facilitating bilateral trade between India and Myanmar.⁸ This border post supports both formal and informal trade, with goods such as textiles, handicrafts, farm produce, and daily essentials flowing between the two nations, bolstering local economies and cross-border ties. The development of trade hubs like Moreh, alongside rising centres such as Namphalong and Zokhawthar, further emphasizes Manipur's strategic role. These hubs not only accelerate regional economic cooperation but also drive improvements in infrastructure, connectivity, and logistics. For instance, the Asian Highway 1 (AH1), which traverses through Manipur, enhances trade flow and transit efficiency, strengthening India's engagement with ASEAN economies.⁹ Additionally, the state's proximity to Myanmar makes it a pivotal region for security management, necessitating the regulation of cross-border activities to maintain regional peace and stability.

Manipur's border trade dynamics are also shaped by the active participation of women, who have long played a leading role in the state's economy. The renowned Ima Keithel, or Women's Market, in Imphal, serves as a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit of Manipuri women.¹⁰ Today, their involvement extends to emerging border trade centres, where they operate as business owners, traders, and craft producers, utilizing these platforms to connect with larger markets. This active participation not only reinforces Manipur's economic landscape but also underscores

⁷P.K. Rai & A. Singh. (2021). *Empowering women through border trade in the North-Eastern states of India: A study of Manipur and Mizoram*. *Women's Studies Journal*, 9(2), 76-92.

⁸Ibid.,

⁹Ibid.,

¹⁰Choudhury.,Op.Cit

the potential for inclusive growth led by local communities. Manipur's geographic positioning amplifies its importance as a strategic and economic bridge linking India to Southeast Asia. With growing trade opportunities, infrastructural advancements, and significant cultural contributions, the state plays a vital role in advancing India's regional outreach and economic ambitions.

3.2. 2. A Historical Perspective of Women and Trade in Manipur

Women in Manipur have long held a pivotal place in the region's economic framework, establishing a rich tradition of resilience, enterprise, and independence. Central to this legacy is the *Ima Keithel*—commonly known as the "Mothers' Market"—a centuries-old institution that exemplifies the agency and entrepreneurial drive of Manipuri women.¹¹ Recognized as one of the largest women-led markets globally, the *Ima Keithel* stands as a testament to economic empowerment, where women, referred to as *Imas* (mothers), have maintained vital trade systems, supported family livelihoods, and significantly contributed to the social and economic fabric of Manipur.¹² Their robust involvement in commerce is deeply rooted in cultural traditions, reflecting the matriarchal values that characterize Manipuri society and its unique gender dynamics.

Beyond their roles as traders, *Imas* have historically acted as protectors of tradition and champions of community welfare. Their economic roles have often doubled as platforms for activism and resistance during times of upheaval. A notable example includes the *Nupi Lan* (Women's Wars) of the 20th century when Manipuri women mobilized collectively to challenge oppressive policies under colonial and postcolonial administrations.¹³ As a result, the *Ima Keithel* transcends its identity as a marketplace—it is a space where economic activity converges with advocacy, solidarity, and cultural preservation.¹⁴

¹¹A. Bhowmick & M.S. Devi. (2022). *Women, trade, and empowerment: A study of Manipur's border markets*. South Asian Journal of Social Sciences, 17(3), 21-37.

¹²Ibid.,

¹³P.K. Rai & A. Singh., Op.Cit

¹⁴Ibid.,

In more recent years, Manipuri women's roles in commerce have adapted to economic and geopolitical shifts, particularly with the opening of trade routes along the region's borders and the expansion of regional trade networks. Border markets near Manipur's frontiers have allowed these women to expand their businesses beyond local settings, turning them into active cross-border traders. This evolution has enabled them to engage in the trade of traditional items such as handicrafts, textiles, and food products, as well as modern commodities like electronics.¹⁵ Such cross-border activities highlight their adaptability, resourcefulness, and the increasing integration of Manipur's economy with broader regional and global networks. Nevertheless, this transition into border trade has presented significant challenges.

Women traders often face issues such as unpredictable market demands, regulatory constraints, and security concerns that are common in border zones. Despite these hurdles, Manipuri women demonstrate remarkable resilience, continually adapting to the evolving economic landscape.¹⁶ Their ability to navigate these challenges underscores a historical pattern in which women's economic participation has been central to sustaining livelihoods and promoting regional growth, even amidst the complexities of globalization and border economies.

The story of women's involvement in trade in Manipur reflects their enduring spirit and influence. From the traditional *Ima Keithel* to their expanding roles in cross-border commerce, Manipuri women's contributions extend far beyond economic transactions.¹⁷ They play a crucial role in advancing social empowerment, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering regional progress. By bridging local traditions with modern economic practices and connecting their communities to global markets, Manipuri women continue to shape the historical and economic identity of the region.

¹⁵ A. Bhowmick & M.S. Devi., Op.Cit

¹⁶ Tinneingah Baite (Workers at Moreh Border) was interviewed on 22nd October 2024 by the Scholar.

¹⁷ Ibid.,

3.2.3. Border Trade Centers: An Opportunity for Empowerment

Border Trade Zones (BTZs) are essential nodes situated at cross-border locations, aimed at promoting commerce between adjacent nations. These areas function as entry points for the movement of products, services, and cultural exchanges, presenting notable economic prospects for surrounding areas. BTZs contribute significantly to the development of border regions by stimulating economic progress, generating employment, improving infrastructure, and enhancing the standard of living.¹⁸ Furthermore, these zones can foster regional unity and peace by facilitating cross-border partnerships and mutual understanding. By harnessing the potential of such zones, border territories can evolve from underdeveloped areas to dynamic economic hubs, creating pathways for empowerment and long-term growth.

1. Economic Independence

The trade hubs situated along the border in Manipur offer distinct opportunities for women, particularly in enhancing their economic and social standing. These hubs, essential for facilitating cross-border trade, create a lively setting for women to participate in entrepreneurial ventures, thus fostering their financial autonomy and self-reliance. Within the context of Manipur, these border hubs serve as platforms for women to explore various business opportunities. One key factor of this empowerment is the chance to manage small enterprises that provide consistent income. Historically, women in the region have been integral to the creation of handloom products, organic goods, and locally produced items. With the growth of border trade, women entrepreneurs now have access to new markets, enabling them to sell their goods beyond local borders, increasing their exposure and clientele.

Through these trade hubs, women can market Manipuri handloom products, which are prized for their detailed craftsmanship and cultural significance.¹⁹ Items such as sarees, shawls, and other textiles are in high demand among tourists and traders. Women have become central to the production and distribution of these items, and the border trade hubs offer an essential pathway for expanding their

¹⁸ P.K. Rai & A. Singh., Op.Cit

¹⁹ Ibid.,

reach.²⁰ This not only increases their earnings but also helps preserve their cultural traditions, as women continue to innovate within traditional design frameworks while ensuring these products meet commercial needs.

Moreover, the focus on organic farming and local goods within these trade centres has significantly influenced women's roles in agriculture and small-scale manufacturing.²¹ In rural Manipur, women are often involved in farming, and growing organic vegetables, fruits, and herbs. With the rising demand for organic products both locally and across the border, women now have access to a profitable market. Establishing trading connections has enabled them to sell their goods more efficiently, securing reliable income sources for their families and communities. This has allowed women to take on greater responsibility in both household economic activities and local economic development.

The networks that women develop within these trade hubs further fuel their entrepreneurial drive. These spaces are not only for trade but also for social exchange, support, and collaboration. Women traders come together to form associations and build networks that assist them in navigating the challenges of border trade; these networks provide valuable resources, and help manage obstacles like fluctuating prices, transportation difficulties, and the complexities of cross-border trade regulations.²² By working together, they create a sense of solidarity, which enhances their collective bargaining power and helps them negotiate better conditions for their transactions.

Beyond economic gains, the involvement of women in these trade hubs has wider social ramifications. Running successful businesses grants women more decision-making power within their households and communities.

The financial independence gained through trade boosts their self-confidence and challenges traditional gender expectations, allowing them to take on more influential roles in both family and society.²³ Managing their enterprises enables

²⁰Ibid.,

²¹Nayak.,Op.Cit.

²² Choudhury.,Op.Cit.

²³Ibid.,

women to develop skills in finance, marketing, logistics, and negotiation—skills that benefit them in various areas of life, further promoting their independence and self-assurance.²⁴ Additionally, these trade centres have contributed to dismantling cultural and societal obstacles that often limit women's participation in public life. In Manipur, as in many regions, women have historically been confined to domestic duties. However, the success of women in border trade has shifted this perception, as women now take on visible, active roles in both the economic and social domains. Their involvement in trade has not only raised their status in the community but also opened doors for future generations of women to aim for similar accomplishments.

The border trade hubs in Manipur are more than just commercial centres; they are powerful mechanisms for empowering women economically and socially. Through these hubs, women can earn income, create businesses, and engage in international trade, securing their financial independence. The opportunity to sell Manipuri handloom goods, organic products, and locally made items has given them access to new markets, strengthening their role in local economies.²⁵ Moreover, these hubs foster networks of collaboration, solidarity, and mutual support that are crucial for long-term success. As women continue to thrive in these trade centres, they not only contribute to the prosperity of their families but also challenge traditional gender roles, paving the way for greater gender equality in the region.

2. Skill Development and Capacity Building

In the trade hubs along Manipur's borders, women's empowerment is increasingly becoming a key focus of both government and non-governmental development efforts. These regions, strategically located near countries like Myanmar, offer women a valuable chance to participate in cross-border trade. Empowering women through these trade hubs is a multifaceted process, with a strong emphasis on skills training and capacity building, which improve their economic and

²⁴Miriam, R. L. (2020). The role of cross-border trade in women's empowerment in Manipur. *Journal of Border Studies*, 15(2), 45-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1948325X.2020.1725185>

²⁵Ibid.,

social standing. A major avenue for empowering women in these border trade areas is through access to skill-building programs that enhance their business expertise.²⁶

Female entrepreneurs engaged in cross-border commerce benefit from various governmental initiatives that focus on refining their abilities in crucial business areas. These programs provide targeted training in fields such as finance, packaging, marketing, and logistics. As a result, women involved in trade gain the expertise needed to thrive in competitive markets, both locally and internationally. For instance, financial training helps them manage their finances more effectively, giving them the tools to track earnings and expenditures with precision. Workshops on packaging teach them how to present products more attractively, improving their market appeal.²⁷

Marketing training provides women with insights into consumer behaviour, enabling them to craft effective promotional strategies—a vital skill in the competitive border trade environment.²⁸ Furthermore, logistics courses equip them to manage product distribution and transportation efficiently, minimizing delays and losses, which are particularly important in international commerce. These newly acquired skills not only sharpen their business knowledge but also boost their confidence, enabling them to grow and manage their enterprises. Over time, such education improves their competitiveness, increasing their earning potential and fostering financial independence.²⁹

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women's collectives in Manipur also play a significant role in empowering women entrepreneurs. These groups often organize workshops focused on business management and financial literacy, providing women with essential knowledge about managing finances, understanding credit, saving, and investing.³⁰ Such financial education empowers women to make informed decisions about how to manage their earnings, reinvest in their ventures,

²⁶ A. Jadhav. (2017). Women traders in Northeast India: Challenges and opportunities at the India-Myanmar border. *Asian Journal of Women Studies*, 23(3), 58-75.

²⁷ Ibid.,

²⁸ Ibid.,

²⁹ Miriam., Op.Cit.

³⁰ Ibid.,

and plan for the future. By providing these tools, these programs help women take control of their financial futures and make independent, informed choices.

Women's collectives further enhance this support by offering platforms where women can share experiences, challenges, and successes, fostering solidarity and mutual assistance. These groups also serve as advocates for women, ensuring that their concerns are represented in discussions about trade policies and business opportunities. Through these collectives, women can campaign for better conditions in border trade, creating a more supportive environment for female entrepreneurs.³¹ Together, the efforts of the government and NGOs are helping women in Manipur overcome traditional gender constraints that have often limited their participation in business and trade. As they acquire new skills and attain financial independence, they also gain greater respect and recognition in their communities. This shift not only enhances women's economic positions but also contributes to the broader development of the region by promoting a more inclusive economy.³²

As more women succeed in border trade, they inspire others to follow suit, leading to a cultural transformation where women are increasingly seen as active contributors to the local and national economy, rather than just caregivers. The empowerment of women through skills development thus extends beyond economic benefits, fostering social change and creating a more equitable society where women's contributions are acknowledged and valued.

3. Access to Credit and Microfinance

In Manipur, the border trade hubs, strategically placed at the crossroads of India and neighbouring countries like Myanmar, offer women a distinct opportunity to break free from financial limitations and achieve economic independence.³³ For a long time, women across various parts of India, including Manipur, faced major financial obstacles that hindered their ability to start and manage businesses. Societal norms and gender expectations traditionally confined women to domestic roles, restricting their access to essential resources, such as capital, which is vital for

³¹Jadhav.,Op.Cit.

³²Ibid.,

³³Ibid.,

entrepreneurship. However, the rise of border trade hubs is slowly changing this dynamic by creating new opportunities for women to engage in economic activities and growth.

These trade hubs, under their key location in cross-border commerce, serve as channels for the exchange of goods, services, and ideas between India and its neighbouring countries, fostering an environment conducive to economic activity. One significant advantage for women at these hubs is the opportunity to access credit and microfinance, often facilitated by partnerships between financial institutions, government bodies, and NGOs.³⁴ These initiatives aim to meet the needs of female traders who previously struggled to access traditional banking services due to a lack of collateral, formal education, or a reliable income.

Financial inclusion plays a crucial role in empowering women through these trade centres. Numerous microfinance institutions and government initiatives prioritize women, recognizing that providing them with access to financial resources can lead to broader social and economic benefits. Services such as microloans, subsidized loans, and low-interest credit lines are tailored to small-scale entrepreneurs. These programs are especially important in the context of border trade, where business opportunities are often informal and influenced by fluctuating cross-border dynamics.³⁵

For women engaged in trade at these centres, the availability of capital enables them to expand their businesses in ways previously impossible. By purchasing goods in larger quantities, they can reduce costs and increase profit margins. With credit, women traders can enter new markets and diversify their offerings.³⁶ For example, a woman selling locally made crafts or agricultural goods could use the capital to improve the quality of her products or expand her operations to cater to cross-border demand. This ability to scale up and engage in larger transactions gives women more control over their financial futures, a privilege often denied in traditional settings.

³⁴P.Jain. (2019). Border trade and economic development: Exploring women's participation. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 10(3), 208-224.

³⁵Ibid.,

³⁶Ibid.,

Additionally, financial assistance from these centres helps women cope with economic downturns or unexpected events such as market instability, health crises, or natural disasters.³⁷ By building financial reserves, women can ensure the continuity of their businesses, protecting themselves from falling into poverty during crises. This stability benefits not only individual businesses but also contributes to the overall economic resilience of the region. Furthermore, the economic autonomy gained through access to finance extends beyond financial gain. It elevates women's status in their communities, as they become significant contributors to the local economy.

In a society where economic achievement is often linked to respect and authority, women involved in trade and entrepreneurship gain recognition and influence, empowering them to have a stronger voice in community decisions.³⁸ The confidence fostered by financial independence encourages women to participate more actively in social, political, and civic life.

The partnership between border trade centres and financial institutions goes beyond providing loans. It includes offering financial education programs, workshops, and training sessions that are essential for women to effectively manage and grow their businesses.³⁹ Financial literacy, which includes budgeting, planning, saving, and investing, gives women the tools to make informed financial decisions. These programs also help women understand the nuances of the trade market, such as pricing strategies, negotiation techniques, and the importance of maintaining good credit. As a result, women traders not only gain access to capital but also become more skilled in managing their financial matters, crucial for their long-term success.⁴⁰

In cross-border trade, these opportunities are particularly significant. Women traders in Manipur, involved in commerce with Myanmar and neighbouring areas, often have to navigate complicated regulations, fluctuating exchange rates, and

³⁷ Jadhav., Op.Cit.

³⁸ A, Agarwal. (2017). Cross-border trade and women: The case of the India-Myanmar border. *Indian Journal of International Relations*, 56(2), 134-151.

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Ibid.,

changing trade policies.⁴¹ Financial support from microfinance programs equips them to better handle these challenges, offering them the flexibility to adapt to new conditions, make prompt decisions, and seize opportunities that might otherwise be inaccessible.⁴²

The border trade hubs in Manipur serve as vital drivers of women's economic empowerment. By providing access to credit and microfinance, these hubs help women overcome traditional business barriers, enabling them to participate fully in both regional and global economies. The availability of capital, coupled with financial literacy programs and government-backed support, fosters a sense of self-reliance and confidence. As more women take on entrepreneurial roles and grow their businesses, they are not only transforming their lives but also contributing to the region's broader economic growth. Through the independence provided by these trade centres, women in Manipur are becoming central figures in the border trade economy, driving social change and empowering future generations of female entrepreneurs.

4. Market Linkages and Exposure

The border trade hubs in Manipur, especially those connecting the region to Myanmar, serve as a critical avenue for empowering women by offering various opportunities that significantly improve their socio-economic status.⁴³ One of the primary benefits for women has been enhanced market access and increased exposure. Female traders, many of whom have historically engaged in small-scale, local commerce, are now able to extend their business reach beyond regional markets, reaping substantial benefits from participation in both regional and global trade networks.⁴⁴

Engaging in border trade provides women traders with access to international markets, particularly Myanmar, a key trade partner for Manipur. This exposure to

⁴¹Jadhav.,Op.Cit.

⁴² Ibid.,

⁴³International Labour Organization. (2016).*Promoting decent work for women in border trade and informal economies in India's Northeast*. ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

⁴⁴Ibid.,

global trade practices offers essential learning experiences, helping women understand the workings of larger, more organized markets. Through cross-border commerce, these women gain knowledge of international trade intricacies, including pricing strategies, supply chain logistics, and customs protocols, while also honing their negotiation and communication skills with foreign traders.⁴⁵ This exposure deepens their understanding of international market demands and consumer preferences, allowing them to adapt their products accordingly and maintain competitiveness in the global arena.

In addition to the advantages of foreign market exposure, the border trade centres also create opportunities for women in Manipur to build connections with traders and businesses from other regions. These networks often lead to long-term business collaborations, partnerships, and shared knowledge. The presence of women in these vibrant, cross-border trading environments highlights their growing role as economic agents, as well as their expanding influence in regional trade.⁴⁶ Establishing these international networks not only boosts the confidence of women but also elevates their stature as business leaders, both locally and internationally.

Moreover, events like trade fairs and exhibitions have played a crucial role in empowering women traders in Manipur. These events enable women to present their products to a broader and more diverse audience than would be possible in local markets. At such exhibitions, women entrepreneurs can showcase traditional Manipuri products such as Phanek (the traditional skirt), Rani Phi (a shawl), and various organic agricultural goods to potential buyers from beyond India's borders.⁴⁷

These exhibitions are more than just sales events; they serve as platforms for knowledge exchange, market trend discovery, and refinement of marketing strategies in competitive environments. These trade fairs also offer women the opportunity to highlight Manipur's rich cultural heritage through handwoven textiles, handicrafts, and organic goods. The attention these products receive in larger trade settings not

⁴⁵Ibid.,

⁴⁶Agarwal.,Op.Cit.

⁴⁷S. Bhattacharjee&M. Saha. (2018).Gender dynamics in border trade: Women's access to resources in the Northeast. *Gender Studies Review*, 10(1), 99-116.

only enhances their marketability but also fosters cultural pride. As a result, women in Manipur gain visibility for their craftsmanship, leading to higher demand for their products both domestically and abroad.⁴⁸

While market exposure and business opportunities are primary benefits, the empowerment gained through participation in these trade networks extends beyond economic gains. Women involved in border trade have developed greater financial independence and a stronger sense of security. As they acquire new business skills, they become more self-sufficient and gain more control over their decisions and livelihoods; this shift leads to greater autonomy in their personal and family lives.⁴⁹ Additionally, the increasing number of women in business roles within Manipur's border trade centres is challenging traditional gender roles, transforming how women's work is perceived and valued in the wider community.

The market opportunities and exposure offered by Manipur's border trade centres are transformative, enhancing both the economic and social standing of women.⁵⁰ Through their involvement in international trade networks, women traders are accessing new avenues for growth, expanding their businesses, and establishing themselves as key players in the regional economy. By showcasing traditional products on international stages, they gain recognition and respect, reinforcing their position as influential economic figures within their communities.

5. Collective Empowerment through Women's Groups

In Manipur, border trade hubs have become pivotal in empowering women, providing numerous avenues for participation in economic ventures, cultivating leadership, and promoting collective strength through collaboration and independence.⁵¹ One of the key aspects of women's empowerment within these hubs is the engagement in collective efforts, especially through cooperatives and self-help groups (SHGs). These networks enable women to confront the challenges of border

⁴⁸Ibid.,

⁴⁹Ibid.,

⁵⁰Agarwal.,Op.Cit

⁵¹ T. Saroj. (2020). Economic empowerment of women through cross-border trade in Mizoram and Manipur: An analysis of success stories. *Journal of Social Empowerment*, 14(2), 44-56.

trade, such as unstable market trends, complicated customs procedures, and safety issues. They create a platform for sharing resources, knowledge, and strategies, thereby enhancing their capacity to manage the complexities of trade. By combining their efforts and resources, women can negotiate more effectively with suppliers, customers, and government bodies.

In the traditional economy, where women have typically been confined to domestic roles, involvement in trade through these cooperatives and SHGs represents a significant shift.⁵² This participation not only enhances women's financial autonomy but also strengthens their decision-making power within their households and communities. These groups also offer opportunities to build essential skills such as financial management, leadership, negotiation, and problem-solving. These competencies are vital for navigating the volatile and multifaceted nature of cross-border commerce, where political shifts, trade policies, and international relations can lead to sudden disruptions.⁵³

The solidarity within these groups provides a crucial support system, particularly during times when external factors such as security threats and trade restrictions pose challenges to business operations. The collective strength of these networks offers a safety cushion for women traders who may otherwise face issues such as market instability, social isolation, or personal safety risks.⁵⁴ Through collective bargaining, these groups advocate for improved working conditions, equitable wages, and access to government programs and resources.

Organizations like the Manipur Women's Development Council (MWDC) and other grassroots initiatives have been key in nurturing this collective empowerment.⁵⁵ MWDC, in particular, has been essential in bringing together women traders and advocating for their rights and welfare.⁵⁶ Its efforts to raise awareness of women's roles in the economy and push for more inclusive policies have been instrumental in creating a supportive environment for women in trade. The

⁵²Ibid.,

⁵³S. Bhattacharjee&M. Saha.,Op.Cit.

⁵⁴Ibid.,

⁵⁵Haikhohat (Workers in Border trade, Moreh) was interviewed on 21st October, 2024 by the scholar.

⁵⁶Ibid.,

MWDC has also provided women with essential tools through training, advocacy, and networking to help them navigate the challenges of border trade, enabling them to become successful entrepreneurs.⁵⁷

Additionally, these organizations offer platforms where women can voice their concerns and address systemic barriers such as limited access to credit, harassment, or poor infrastructure. Various grassroots groups, including women's federations and NGOs, contribute to building a network of women traders who collaborate for mutual benefits while also fostering community development. These organizations offer training in business skills, literacy, and financial planning, which are essential for women to succeed in border trade; these platforms enable women to engage in advocacy efforts, pushing for policies and practices that specifically benefit female traders.⁵⁸ The cooperation fostered by these groups has led to the creation of a more inclusive economic system, benefiting women while contributing to regional economic growth.

Through these collective empowerment processes, women in Manipur's border trade centres gain not only financial independence and security but also the confidence to challenge gender-based inequalities in their communities. The networks they form, the skills they acquire, and the support they receive are part of a broader transformation of gender roles, enabling women to redefine their positions both within their families and in the wider economy. By collaborating in organized groups, women traders in Manipur are not only participating in border trade but also reshaping their communities' socio-economic landscape, ensuring that women's voices are acknowledged and their contributions to trade and development are celebrated.

3.2.4. Government Policies and Initiatives

The central and state governments, notably the Government of India and the Government of Manipur, have acknowledged the strategic value of border trade in fostering economic development, regional integration, and strengthening ties with

⁵⁷ Ibid.,

⁵⁸ T. Saroj., Op.Cit.

neighbouring nations, including Myanmar. Both levels of government have implemented numerous policies and initiatives designed to enhance border trade, with a particular emphasis on women's empowerment and sustainable economic progress. These efforts span infrastructure upgrades, economic incentives, regulatory reforms, and capacity-building measures.

Government actions and strategies are essential for fostering economic development and advancing social inclusion. In the case of India and Manipur, both the Indian government and the Manipur state government have implemented various policies to boost border trade and support gender equality.⁵⁹ These strategies focus on enhancing economic cooperation across borders, upgrading infrastructure, and creating an enabling environment for businesses in border areas. At the same time, initiatives aimed at empowering women through specialized programs are working to reduce gender gaps, improve access to resources, and encourage women's engagement in the workforce and business.⁶⁰ These efforts are key to the growth of both the local economy and the broader social structure in these regions.

1. Act East Policy

The Act East Policy, introduced by the Indian government in 2014, was designed to strengthen India's connections with Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. This policy marked a shift from the previous "Look East Policy," with a focus on deepening political, economic, and cultural ties with these countries.⁶¹ A critical aspect of the policy is the development of trade infrastructure along India's northeastern borders, particularly with nations such as Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and China. Among the states benefiting from this initiative, Manipur holds particular importance due to its strategic location as a key gateway for trade between India and Southeast Asia.⁶² The establishment of border trade hubs in Manipur under the Act East Policy has become a vital tool for boosting economic activities and

⁵⁹Ibid.,

⁶⁰Ibid.,

⁶¹ S. Chakrabarti. (2019). Women traders and their economic role in the border regions of Northeast India. *Asian Trade and Economic Review*, 22(1), 14-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42417-019-00006-w>

⁶²Ibid.,

creating opportunities for various social groups, especially women, thus contributing to the region's overall growth.⁶³

Manipur, positioned at the junction of India and Southeast Asia, shares a border with Myanmar, making it a natural conduit for trade between the two regions. Historically, this border has been a key point for cross-border exchanges, though it lacked adequate infrastructure and regulation.⁶⁴ With the Act East Policy's rollout, substantial investments have been made to upgrade and modernize trade infrastructure at several border points, especially in Manipur. The creation of trade hubs at these locations is considered an essential step toward stimulating economic growth in the region. These hubs facilitate the efficient movement of goods such as agricultural products, textiles, handicrafts, and other essential commodities that sustain local livelihoods.⁶⁵

A standout feature of these trade centres is their focus on empowering women. In Manipur, where women have traditionally been active in sectors like agriculture and trade, the modernized border centres offer new avenues for women to engage in formal, profitable trade.⁶⁶ These centres provide women entrepreneurs with access to resources, training, and markets, allowing them to expand their businesses and contribute more significantly to the local economy. Women's involvement in trade at the border centres is multifaceted, ranging from direct trading activities to business management and running small-scale industries.

Women in Manipur, especially in border regions, have long participated in the exchange of goods with Myanmar, but the formalization of these exchanges through trade centres has opened new opportunities for international trade.⁶⁷ This shift has empowered women by overcoming traditional barriers such as limited access to capital, markets, and business skills. These centers are not only places for trading

⁶³ Ibid.,

⁶⁴ Ibid.,

⁶⁵ Haikhohat., Op.Cit.

⁶⁶ Ibid.,

⁶⁷ S. Chakrabarti., Op.Cit

goods but also serve as platforms for networking, and learning about global markets, trade policies, and sustainable business practices.⁶⁸

Beyond economic empowerment, these trade centres also contribute to the social and cultural upliftment of women. In many rural areas of Manipur, women have historically had limited roles in decision-making. However, their increasing involvement in cross-border trade allows them to gain autonomy and influence in their communities.⁶⁹ As women take on more active roles in trade decision-making, they gain recognition and an influential voice in both their households and society. This transformation challenges traditional gender roles and encourages a more inclusive and equal society. The development of these trade hubs in Manipur is not only about infrastructure improvement or economic growth but also about creating a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach to development.⁷⁰ The empowerment of women through these trade centres aligns with India's broader goals of sustainable growth, social inclusion, and gender equality. The government, along with NGOs, plays a crucial role by providing training and capacity-building programs for women traders, equipping them with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of international trade.⁷¹ These efforts help address gender disparities and foster a balanced, sustainable economic growth model.

Women's involvement in cross-border trade at these centres has significant implications for broader regional economic integration. As women take on more active roles in the economy, they contribute to building a more diverse and resilient economy. This is particularly important in Manipur, where economic opportunities have been historically limited and women's participation in the formal economy has been low. By supporting women's involvement in border trade, the Act East Policy contributes to creating a more dynamic and inclusive economic ecosystem, benefiting both women and the broader community.⁷²

⁶⁸Ibid.,

⁶⁹Ibid.,

⁷⁰ N.P. Singh. (2021). The impact of border trade on women's livelihoods: A case study of Manipur. *Northeastern Development Review*, 29(2), 120-136. <https://doi.org/10.1109/NDR.2021.2178849>

⁷¹Ibid.,

⁷²Ibid.,

Furthermore, these trade centres in Manipur serve as a model for other border areas in India, where similar initiatives could be introduced to support women's economic empowerment. They demonstrate that with the right infrastructure, policies, and support systems, women can thrive in the formal economy, leading to economic growth and social development in their communities. The success of Manipur's trade centres could serve as a blueprint for similar programs across other northeastern regions of India and other border areas.⁷³

The border trade hubs in Manipur, under the Act East Policy, represent a transformative change with broad implications for the region's economy and society. By enhancing trade infrastructure and focusing on the empowerment of women, these centres are unlocking new opportunities for women entrepreneurs, contributing to economic growth, gender equality, and regional integration. As India continues to engage with Southeast Asia through the Act East Policy, the role of women in cross-border trade will become an increasingly vital element of the region's economic future.⁷⁴ The success of Manipur's trade centres illustrates how strategic infrastructure investments, combined with targeted support for women, can foster a more inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable future for the region.

2. Schemes for Women Entrepreneurs

In recent times, India has seen a surge in efforts to empower women, particularly in areas like Manipur, where there is a special focus on promoting female entrepreneurship. The state's strategic location near Myanmar has been key in establishing Border Trade Centers, which play a significant role in advancing women's economic independence. These centres create avenues for women to engage in cross-border trade, enhancing their financial autonomy and fostering self-sufficiency. Initiatives from the government, such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and Start-Up India, have been crucial in supporting these

⁷³ S. Chakrabarti.,Op.Cit

⁷⁴Ibid.,

endeavours by offering women structured aid to boost their business skills, financial literacy, and overall entrepreneurial capabilities.⁷⁵

Manipur has historically been a critical trade point due to its rich cultural legacy and its proximity to Myanmar. However, women's involvement in this trade has been limited for a variety of socio-cultural and economic reasons.⁷⁶ To address these issues, Border Trade Centers have been set up, aiming to facilitate more organized and accessible trade, particularly for women from underprivileged communities who have had limited opportunities in mainstream economic activities. These centres offer essential resources such as market access, infrastructure, and training, creating a platform for women to engage in trading local goods such as handicrafts, textiles, and agricultural products that are highly valued in trade with Myanmar.⁷⁷

A vital player in this initiative is the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), which works to improve the livelihoods of rural women across India.⁷⁸ In Manipur, the NRLM helps women organize into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), encouraging collective action that enables them to pool resources for various economic activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale industries.⁷⁹ Through this mission, women are trained in skills, financial management, and entrepreneurship, empowering them to run successful businesses. The NRLM also connects these groups with banks to provide micro-credit, giving them the financial tools necessary to start or expand their ventures.

The Start-Up India program has further nurtured an environment that is conducive to female entrepreneurship. This initiative aims to foster innovation and economic growth by offering financial assistance, mentorship, and networking opportunities, specifically targeting women. In Manipur, Start-Up India helps women entrepreneurs by funding business ventures, especially those based on traditional industries or emerging sectors like organic farming, tourism, and digital services.⁸⁰ It

⁷⁵Ibid.,

⁷⁶Ibid.,

⁷⁷ N.P. Singh.,Op.Cit

⁷⁸Jadhav.,Op.Cit.

⁷⁹Ibid.,

⁸⁰ Miriam.,Op.Cit.

also facilitates connections between women entrepreneurs and investors, providing them with the support they need to navigate the challenges of running a start-up.

In addition to national-level programs, there are numerous local initiatives tailored to assist women entrepreneurs in Manipur. The state government, in partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development agencies, has introduced several schemes designed to promote women's entrepreneurship. These include specialized training in business management, financial planning, digital marketing, and product development. Women are also given opportunities to present their products at exhibitions and trade fairs, gaining access to broader markets both within India and internationally, particularly in Myanmar.⁸¹

The Border Trade Centers, alongside initiatives like NRLM and Start-Up India, address key structural challenges faced by women in Manipur. These include barriers to accessing markets, capital, and business networks, along with entrenched societal attitudes that restrict women's economic involvement.⁸² By offering a supportive environment for women to access resources, training, and mentorship, these programs help dismantle these barriers. Women entrepreneurs, especially from rural or tribal communities, are empowered to take control of their financial futures, building confidence and achieving financial independence.

Through these concerted efforts, women in Manipur are not only enhancing their economic standing but also becoming agents of change within their communities. As they gain more independence, they are better equipped to make decisions that improve their families' well-being, such as investing in education, healthcare, and infrastructure.⁸³ The growing presence of female entrepreneurs in Manipur, supported by the Border Trade Centers and programs like NRLM and Start-Up India, is leading to positive changes in the state's socio-economic landscape. Moreover, these initiatives contribute to the broader goal of achieving gender equality. As women gain visibility and recognition in fields traditionally dominated by men, such

⁸¹Ibid.,

⁸²Ibid.,

⁸³ S. Chakrabarti.,Op.Cit

as trade, agriculture, and technology, they challenge societal stereotypes, encouraging other women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.⁸⁴ This shift in societal attitudes is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society, where women are recognized not just as contributors but as vital drivers of innovation and economic growth.⁸⁵

Ultimately, the Border Trade Centers embody a unique blend of regional potential, government backing, and entrepreneurial ambition. They serve as hubs where women can apply their skills, cultural knowledge, and innovative ideas to create successful businesses. With continued support from programs like NRLM, Start-Up India, and local government initiatives, the future of women's entrepreneurship in Manipur looks bright.⁸⁶ These efforts are establishing a cycle of empowerment that not only elevates women's livelihoods but also contributes to the economic and social progress of their communities and the state as a whole. As more women take leadership roles in business and trade, they will continue to shape the economic and social future of Manipur.

3. *Special Economic Zones (SEZs)*

In recent times, India has seen a surge in efforts to empower women, particularly in areas like Manipur, where there is a special focus on promoting female entrepreneurship. The state's strategic location near Myanmar has been key in establishing Border Trade Centers, which play a significant role in advancing women's economic independence.⁸⁷ These centres create avenues for women to engage in cross-border trade, enhancing their financial autonomy and fostering self-sufficiency. Initiatives from the government, such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and Start-Up India, have been crucial in supporting these endeavours by offering women structured aid to boost their business skills, financial literacy, and overall entrepreneurial capabilities.

⁸⁴India-Myanmar Trade and Investment Centre. (2019). The evolving role of women in Indo-Myanmar border trade. *Regional Economic Report*, 8, 22-29.

⁸⁵Ibid.,

⁸⁶Ibid.,

⁸⁷Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER). (2018). *Annual report 2017-2018*. Government of India.

Manipur has historically been a critical trade point due to its rich cultural legacy and its proximity to Myanmar.⁸⁸ However, women's involvement in this trade has been limited for a variety of socio-cultural and economic reasons. To address these issues, Border Trade Centers have been set up, aiming to facilitate more organized and accessible trade, particularly for women from underprivileged communities who have had limited opportunities in mainstream economic activities. These centres offer essential resources such as market access, infrastructure, and training, creating a platform for women to engage in trading local goods such as handicrafts, textiles, and agricultural products that are highly valued in trade with Myanmar.⁸⁹

A vital player in this initiative is the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), which works to improve the livelihoods of rural women across India. In Manipur, the NRLM helps women organize into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), encouraging collective action that enables them to pool resources for various economic activities such as agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale industries.⁹⁰ Through this mission, women are trained in skills, financial management, and entrepreneurship, empowering them to run successful businesses. The NRLM also connects these groups with banks to provide micro-credit, giving them the financial tools necessary to start or expand their ventures.

The Start-Up India program has further nurtured an environment that is conducive to female entrepreneurship. This initiative aims to foster innovation and economic growth by offering financial assistance, mentorship, and networking opportunities, specifically targeting women.⁹¹ In Manipur, Start-Up India helps women entrepreneurs by funding business ventures, especially those based on traditional industries or emerging sectors like organic farming, tourism, and digital services.⁹² It also facilitates connections between women entrepreneurs and investors, providing them with the support they need to navigate the challenges of running a start-up.

⁸⁸Ibid.,

⁸⁹Ibid.,

⁹⁰Roy & S. Banerjee. (2019). Gender and regional trade agreements: Evidence from the Indo-Myanmar border. *Journal of Asian Economics*, 30(3), 44-60.

⁹¹Ibid.,

⁹²Ibid.,

In addition to national-level programs, there are numerous local initiatives tailored to assist women entrepreneurs in Manipur. The state government, in partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development agencies, has introduced several schemes designed to promote women's entrepreneurship. These include specialized training in business management, financial planning, digital marketing, and product development. Women are also given opportunities to present their products at exhibitions and trade fairs, gaining access to broader markets both within India and internationally, particularly in Myanmar.⁹³

The Border Trade Centers, alongside initiatives like NRLM and Start-Up India, address key structural challenges faced by women in Manipur.⁹⁴ These include barriers to accessing markets, capital, and business networks, along with entrenched societal attitudes that restrict women's economic involvement. By offering a supportive environment for women to access resources, training, and mentorship, these programs help dismantle these barriers. Women entrepreneurs, especially from rural or tribal communities, are empowered to take control of their financial futures, building confidence and achieving financial independence.⁹⁵

Through these concerted efforts, women in Manipur are not only enhancing their economic standing but also becoming agents of change within their communities. As they gain more independence, they are better equipped to make decisions that improve their families' well-being, such as investing in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The growing presence of female entrepreneurs in Manipur, supported by the Border Trade Centers and programs like NRLM and Start-Up India, is leading to positive changes in the state's socio-economic landscape.⁹⁶ Moreover, these initiatives contribute to the broader goal of achieving gender equality. As women gain visibility and recognition in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as trade, agriculture, and technology, they challenge societal stereotypes, encouraging

⁹³ S. Thangjam. (2018). Women's collectives and border trade: Case studies from Manipur. *Journal of Rural Development and Policy Studies*, 9(3), 21-36.

⁹⁴ Ibid.,

⁹⁵ Ibid.,

⁹⁶ Roy & S.Banerjee.,Op.Cit.

other women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.⁹⁷ This shift in societal attitudes is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society, where women are recognized not just as contributors but as vital drivers of innovation and economic growth.

Ultimately, the Border Trade Centers embody a unique blend of regional potential, government backing, and entrepreneurial ambition. They serve as hubs where women can apply their skills, cultural knowledge, and innovative ideas to create successful businesses. With continued support from programs like NRLM, Start-Up India, and local government initiatives, the future of women's entrepreneurship in Manipur looks bright. These efforts are establishing a cycle of empowerment that not only elevates women's livelihoods but also contributes to the economic and social progress of their communities and the state as a whole. As more women take leadership roles in business and trade, they will continue to shape the economic and social future of Manipur.

3.3.The border trade centres for Women's empowerment in Mizoram

The border trade hubs in Mizoram have become vital for both economic growth and social progress, with a particular focus on enhancing women's roles. Located in the northeastern region of India, Mizoram shares borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh, which positions it strategically for cross-border commerce. These trade hubs, especially those along the Myanmar frontier, have evolved into key locations for the exchange of goods and a source of empowerment for women in the area. A distinctive feature of border trade in Mizoram is the active participation of women across various stages of trade activities. Women, particularly from tribal communities, are deeply involved in small-scale businesses within cross-border commerce. This involvement has provided them with the opportunity to gain economic independence and financial security. The development of border trade has created a platform where women can engage in entrepreneurship, ranging from trading merchandise to managing their businesses.

⁹⁷ Ibid.,

The expansion of border trade has helped women in Mizoram assume leadership roles, raising their social status and increasing their autonomy within their families and communities.⁹⁸ The resulting economic empowerment has had far-reaching positive effects, benefiting the education and well-being of women and children in these regions. Beyond financial advantages, border trade hubs also offer women avenues for skills enhancement, exposure to larger markets, and networking opportunities.⁹⁹ Government-led initiatives and support from NGOs have played a crucial role in improving women's participation in trade, providing training and fostering safe, inclusive spaces for their active involvement. The border trade hubs in Mizoram are instrumental in promoting women's empowerment, particularly by creating economic opportunities and enabling women to play a more significant role in regional development.

3.3.1. Historical Context of Border Trade in Mizoram

The historical backdrop of cross-border commerce in Mizoram lays the groundwork for understanding the evolution of these trade practices, especially concerning women's participation and empowerment. In the past, towns like Zokhawthar, Hnahthial, and Champhai were bustling centres of informal cross-border trade, where local Mizos and their neighbours from Myanmar and Bangladesh exchanged goods in unregulated, small-scale transactions.¹⁰⁰ The range of traded items included agricultural products such as rice, vegetables, and fruits, as well as textiles, handicrafts, and other locally crafted goods. Many of these items were produced by Mizoram's women, who played a vital role in sustaining these informal trade systems; these women primarily worked in local markets, selling goods they had grown, produced, or acquired from neighbouring areas.¹⁰¹ Despite their crucial involvement, their contributions were often overlooked due to the informal nature of the trade.

⁹⁸T. M. Singh. (2020). *Women and informal trade in the North-Eastern border regions of India: A case study of Mizoram*. *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 15(2), 128-145.

⁹⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,

Over time, changes in the region's political environment led to the creation of formalized border trade mechanisms in the early 21st century. This shift was driven by the realization that regulated cross-border trade could promote economic growth and improve relations between India and its neighbouring countries. The development of trade hubs in areas like Zokhawthar and Hnahthial marked a new phase in Mizoram's economic development. These trade centres facilitated legitimate commerce with government support in the form of infrastructure, regulations, and customs procedures.¹⁰²

The establishment of these formal trade centres was transformative for women in Mizoram. Previously confined to informal trade, women now had access to new economic opportunities. Their involvement in agriculture and small-scale production expanded into more formal business transactions, which led to greater recognition and respect for their roles within the economy.¹⁰³ These centres allowed women not only to sell products but also to engage in trade logistics, build networks with foreign traders, and contribute to decision-making processes within the trade framework.

Women's active participation in the border trade centres also led to significant social and cultural changes. As they took on more economic responsibilities, their social standing improved, granting them greater financial independence. Many women assumed leadership positions in the trade networks, taking on roles that were traditionally dominated by men.¹⁰⁴ This shift challenged conventional gender roles and highlighted the crucial contributions women were making to the economic prosperity of their communities. Moreover, the government's efforts to formalize the trade led to new opportunities for skill-building among women. These trade centres provided women with access to training programs focused on entrepreneurship, financial management, and business administration, which boosted their confidence and decision-making abilities.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² L.T. Hmar. (2018). *Border trade and women's socio-economic development in Mizoram*. Journal of Northeast India Studies, 8(1), 34-49.

¹⁰³ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁴ Tinneingah., Op.Cit.

¹⁰⁵ L.T. Hmar., Op.Cit.

With this knowledge, women not only participated in border trade but also became business owners, creating jobs and driving economic growth in the region.

The formalization of border trade also expanded women's access to international markets. By simplifying cross-border trade, these centres allowed women to reach customers in neighbouring countries, growing their businesses and increasing their incomes. The expanded trade networks also facilitated the exchange of knowledge and expertise among women traders, strengthening their position in the marketplace.¹⁰⁶ The historical development of border trade in

Mizoram, especially concerning Myanmar and Bangladesh, has played a pivotal role in the empowerment of women in the region. The shift from informal to formal trade systems has provided women with new opportunities to engage in economic activities that were previously beyond their reach.¹⁰⁷ Through their involvement in these trade centres, women have gained visibility, financial independence, and access to essential resources and training, allowing them to challenge traditional gender roles and become key drivers of Mizoram's economic growth.

3.3.2. Economic Empowerment through Border Trade

In Mizoram, trade hubs located at border points have played a crucial role in uplifting women's economic status, enabling them to achieve financial independence and participate more actively in the regional economy. These centres, positioned strategically along the borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh, serve not only as trade hubs but also as essential agents of social and economic change, particularly for women. Their growth has significantly improved women's economic opportunities, allowing them to enter business ventures, tap into larger markets, and enhance their overall quality of life.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,

1. Access to Markets and Economic Opportunities

Previously, many women in rural Mizoram were primarily engaged in subsistence farming or household duties, roles that limited their financial independence. The advent of border trade centres, however, has transformed their economic environment. These centres open doors to expansive markets where local products can reach a wider audience, including both local and international customers. This access has enabled women to grow their businesses and diversify their income, reducing reliance on seasonal crops and unstable local markets that often leave them vulnerable to financial fluctuations.

These trade centres have particularly benefited women by creating avenues for selling agricultural products, crafts, and handwoven items, which are abundant in Mizoram. Women, who once produced goods for personal use or local exchange, can now sell these products on a much larger scale.¹⁰⁹ For instance, women who grow organic produce or medicinal herbs can now reach customers at the trade centres, where demand for natural, locally sourced items is high. Likewise, women skilled in traditional crafts such as weaving and embroidery can display and sell their handmade items, which hold cultural value and attract buyers both locally and from abroad, including tourists.¹¹⁰

A notable outcome of these border trade centres has been the rise in entrepreneurial activity among women. As access to economic opportunities has grown, more women have started their businesses or expanded existing ones. This entrepreneurial shift has been supported by various initiatives that offer training, financial aid, and marketing resources. Many women, once without formal business knowledge, now receive education in areas like financial management, marketing strategies, and customer relations.¹¹¹ These new skills ensure that women are not just participants but also key decision-makers in their businesses.

¹⁰⁹ J.Kaur. (2016). *Women entrepreneurs in the border trade: A case study from Mizoram*. Journal of Economic Development and Empowerment, 14(1), 23-41.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹¹ Ibid.,

Furthermore, these trade centres have allowed women to form cooperative groups, enhancing their collective bargaining power and fostering collaborative ventures. Women traders often form associations to negotiate better prices, share resources, and mitigate business risks.¹¹² Such associations also enable access to group financing, which is more readily available than individual loans, especially in a region with limited banking infrastructure. This collective approach has fostered a sense of unity and mutual support among women traders, helping them to navigate challenges more effectively. The economic empowerment achieved through these border trade centres goes beyond financial success.¹¹³ As women become more economically active, they also gain a higher social status within their communities. Financial autonomy enables women to make decisions about family finances, send children to school, and invest in their family's health and well-being. Moreover, women's growing participation in trade challenges traditional gender roles, contributing to a shift in societal attitudes. As women contribute more to the region's economy, their standing in both their families and communities improves, promoting greater gender equality.¹¹⁴

While the benefits are clear, women in these trade centres still face challenges such as limited access to capital, inadequate infrastructure, and, in some cases, gender-based discrimination. Nevertheless, the fact that these centres provide women with a platform to address these issues is a testament to their increasing role in Mizoram's economy.¹¹⁵ With continued investment in infrastructure, support programs, and policies that encourage women's involvement, these trade centres can further strengthen women's economic empowerment and support the region's overall development.

Mizoram's border trade centres have become vital in promoting women's economic empowerment.¹¹⁶ By providing access to markets, fostering entrepreneurship, and encouraging social change, they contribute to a broader

¹¹²L.Laldingliana. (2019). *Empowering women through informal trade in Mizoram*. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 15(2), 110-126.

¹¹³ Ibid.,

¹¹⁴ Kaur., Op.Cit.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹¹⁶ Laldingliana., Op.Cit.

transformation that challenges traditional gender norms and supports economic independence.¹¹⁷ As these centres grow, they will continue to be a key factor in advancing gender equality and driving economic progress in the region.

2. Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment

The expansion of organized border trade in Mizoram has created new opportunities for women, allowing them to engage in economic sectors that were once predominantly male-dominated. These trade hubs have enabled women to access resources, markets, and entrepreneurial prospects, thus increasing their participation in various business activities.¹¹⁸ Mizoram's strategic location near international borders, particularly with Myanmar and Bangladesh, has made it a key area for cross-border trade, facilitating access to goods from neighbouring countries that would otherwise be hard to obtain.¹¹⁹ Rural women in Mizoram have seized these opportunities, expanding their roles in retail, wholesale, and cross-border trade. Through these activities, women are gaining the tools to become entrepreneurs, taking leadership positions in businesses that cater to both local and international markets. A key element of this empowerment is the growing involvement of women in self-employment and business ownership.¹²⁰

Traditionally, in Mizoram and many parts of India, women's work was confined to domestic duties and farming, with little recognition of their entrepreneurial potential. However, the establishment of organized trade centres has allowed women to venture into business. Many women now own small enterprises such as retail shops, restaurants, and production units, especially in sectors like handicrafts and food production. These trade centres enable them to source raw materials from neighbouring countries, which they then use to create and sell products such as textiles, handwoven fabrics, spices, and traditional foods.¹²¹ The ability to obtain

¹¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹¹⁹ Bordoloi & Dutta. (2022). Trade networks and women's role in local economies: The case of Mizoram. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40(4), 97-115.

¹²⁰ Ibid.,

¹²¹ Ibid.,

international materials has opened new markets for these women, who now sell products both locally and abroad.

Beyond the financial gains, the rise of women-led businesses has contributed to a shift in the social dynamics of Mizoram. Women are no longer just passive participants in the economy; they are taking on leadership roles, running successful businesses, managing staff, and creating wealth within their communities.¹²² This change is influencing the local economy, with women's businesses employing other women, further promoting financial independence for many families. The community-oriented nature of many of these businesses amplifies the social impact, fostering networks of support and collaboration among women entrepreneurs.

Additionally, women's participation in border trade has not been limited to commerce alone but has extended to leadership and decision-making positions. Women in Mizoram have formed cooperatives and women's collectives focused on shared entrepreneurship. These groups often pool their resources, share business insights, and support each other in overcoming challenges like access to credit, marketing, and infrastructure.¹²³ Some of these cooperatives have succeeded in negotiating better deals with suppliers, improving profitability and ensuring long-term sustainability in a competitive market.

Another area where women have made remarkable progress is in the production of traditional crafts, which are now a significant component of cross-border trade. Mizoram is known for its rich handloom weaving and handicraft traditions, which have found strong demand across the border. Women have played a pivotal role in preserving and revitalizing these crafts, often incorporating contemporary designs to meet evolving market trends. This adaptability, combined with their commitment to cultural heritage, has helped women in Mizoram carve a space for themselves in the global market, securing their economic autonomy.¹²⁴ The economic empowerment of women through border trade has had broader implications for the development of

¹²² Ibid.,

¹²³ Mizoram State Government. (2017). *Women in Border Trade: A Study on Empowerment and Challenges*. Mizoram Directorate of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare.

¹²⁴ Ibid.,

Mizoram as a whole. As more women step into entrepreneurial roles, they are reshaping the region's economic landscape by creating jobs, generating income, and contributing to poverty reduction. The stories of women entrepreneurs in Mizoram's border trade hubs exemplify how trade can empower marginalized groups, break down barriers, and foster inclusive growth.¹²⁵

Moreover, the involvement of women in cross-border trade has challenged traditional gender roles in the region. In many rural and tribal areas, women have historically been confined to household duties with limited access to education, employment, or business ownership. The development of trade centres has provided women with greater mobility, both socially and economically.¹²⁶ Their participation in these activities has not only improved their financial situation but also elevated their status in their communities. Women who were once seen solely as homemakers are now recognized as economic contributors, helping to boost the prosperity of their families and communities.

The border trade centres in Mizoram have become crucial platforms for empowering women economically. These centres have allowed women to break free from traditional limitations, start businesses, and engage in entrepreneurial activities that were previously unavailable.¹²⁷ Through their involvement in retail, production, and international trade, women in Mizoram have achieved financial independence, challenged gender norms, and become key players in the region's economic development. The success of these women highlights the transformative potential of cross-border trade in improving the economic and social status of women, not just in Mizoram, but across Northeast India.

3. Economic Independence and Financial Stability

The border trade hubs in Mizoram have become essential centres for economic activities, particularly benefiting women. Their participation has led to significant changes in their economic roles and societal positions. These trade hubs are not just commercial points but key drivers of social and economic change, particularly for

¹²⁵ Ibid.,

¹²⁶ Bordoloi & Dutta., Op.Cit.

¹²⁷ Ibid.,

women. In terms of empowering women, these centres symbolize more than just economic exchange; they reflect a shift toward financial independence, personal freedom, and greater participation in family and community decisions.

The border trade hubs have provided women with a path to economic independence. For many in Mizoram, engaging in border trade goes beyond employment; it is a means to achieve self-sufficiency.¹²⁸ Traditionally, women in rural or border areas of India, including Mizoram, have been confined to domestic roles such as caregiving and managing the household. However, the establishment of these trade hubs has opened opportunities for women to engage in economic activities once dominated by men.¹²⁹ These women are involved in trading, negotiating prices, purchasing goods, and overseeing product sales across borders. Their active participation in trade has allowed them to earn an income that goes beyond household duties, fostering a sense of financial autonomy.

Economic independence is a pillar of women's empowerment in this region. As women take part in cross-border trade, they often earn income that is independent of their husbands or male relatives. This income is frequently used to meet the basic needs of the family, such as food, clothing, and education. The ability to generate their income allows women to make financial decisions independently, an essential element of empowerment.¹³⁰ Financial security offers protection against economic instability and reliance on others, a concern for many women in marginalized communities.

This increased independence has a ripple effect on households and communities. With financial resources at their disposal, women in Mizoram can now play a more significant role in decisions impacting their families. The influence of their financial power extends beyond monetary matters. Empowered by their control over household finances, women are more likely to contribute to decisions regarding their

¹²⁸ India-Myanmar Trade and Investment Centre. (2019). The evolving role of women in Indo-Myanmar border trade. *Regional Economic Report*, 8, 22-29.

¹²⁹ Ibid.,

¹³⁰ Ibid.,

children's education, healthcare, and future.¹³¹ This shift marks a significant departure from traditional gender roles, where financial decisions were often made by men alone. As women gain control over family finances, they can prioritize their children's education, thus securing a brighter future for the next generation. Furthermore, the empowerment of women through border trade has sparked a broader cultural shift.

In many areas, women are increasingly seen as vital decision-makers and active contributors to the local economy; this transformation has challenged traditional gender roles and reshaped the perception of women's place in society.¹³² As business owners and traders, women have changed not only their personal lives but also contributed to altering the broader societal narrative about women's rights and capabilities. Their involvement in border trade demonstrates that women are not passive but active agents of change, contributing meaningfully to both local and national economies.¹³³

In addition to economic empowerment, these trade hubs provide women with the opportunity to acquire valuable skills and knowledge. Many women involved in trade have learned skills such as financial management, negotiation, communication, and logistical planning. These skills can enhance their potential for leadership roles within their communities. Exposure to various facets of trade boosts their confidence, making them capable of managing resources and navigating complex economic environments.¹³⁴ This knowledge not only benefits their business pursuits but also strengthens their roles within families and society, consolidating their authority as decision-makers. Moreover, border trade has connected women to broader markets, allowing them to expand their perspectives and networks. The international nature of trade exposes them to diverse cultures and economies, deepening their understanding of commerce and international relations. This exposure has opened doors for new business ventures, increasing opportunities for economic growth.

¹³¹ D.Lal. (2021). Empowerment through entrepreneurship: Women's businesses in border trade. *Entrepreneurship in South Asia*, 9(1), 45-63.

¹³² Ibid.,

¹³³ Ibid.,

¹³⁴ Ibid.,

The empowerment of women through Mizoram's border trade hubs is not just about individual financial success; it is about collective social progress.¹³⁵ Women's participation in economic activities has fostered a sense of community among traders, with many forming cooperative groups and associations to better manage their trade and advocate for their interests. These groups have become platforms for collective action, enabling women to share knowledge, support one another, and negotiate better terms with suppliers or buyers. In this way, the trade centres have evolved into spaces for social empowerment, as women build stronger networks that improve their bargaining power and visibility within the broader economic landscape.¹³⁶

The transformation witnessed in Mizoram's border trade hubs exemplifies how economic empowerment can bring about wide-reaching changes in families, communities, and societies. By engaging in trade, women have gained financial independence and taken on leadership roles that challenge traditional gender expectations. This shift has led to a more balanced distribution of economic power, where women contribute equally to the economic well-being of their families and communities.¹³⁷ As more women become involved in cross-border trade, the socio-economic structure of Mizoram will likely continue to evolve, with women playing an increasingly pivotal role in shaping its future.¹³⁸

3.3.3. Social Empowerment and Gender Equality

The empowerment of individuals and the pursuit of gender equality in Mizoram are fundamental to the state's socio-political fabric. Mizoram, located in the northeastern part of India, is renowned for its diverse cultural traditions. However, challenges related to gender roles and social inclusion remain prevalent. Yet, disparities between genders persist, especially in terms of employment, decision-making authority, and access to vital resources. The focus of social empowerment in Mizoram is on elevating marginalized communities, especially women, by providing

¹³⁵ Hazarika & A. Deka. (2018). The gendered impact of informal trade in Manipur and Mizoram.

Asian Journal of Development Studies, 9(4), 220-233. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2018/4920865>

¹³⁶ Ibid.,

¹³⁷ Ibid.,

¹³⁸ D.Lal.,Op.Cit.

better access to education, economic prospects, and political involvement.¹³⁹ While progress has been made through policies that promote women's rights, improve healthcare, and encourage greater female leadership, traditional gender biases and underrepresentation in certain fields continue to impede the realization of complete gender equality.

1. Breaking Social Barriers

In Mizoram, a state in northeastern India, the practice of cross-border trade has shifted from being purely economic to serving as a strong catalyst for women's empowerment. This empowerment extends to various aspects of life, particularly social and gender equality, as more women become involved in trade. As a result, women have gained financial independence, while also breaking down entrenched social barriers, enabling them to reshape their roles within their families, communities, and society as a whole.¹⁴⁰ Historically, Mizoram, like many parts of India, operated within a patriarchal system where women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere. Women were typically expected to focus on household tasks, child-rearing, and family duties, while men dominated the public and economic realms. This gendered division of labour restricted women's financial autonomy, personal development, and social mobility. However, the growth of border trade in Mizoram has sparked a transformation, enabling women to step beyond these traditional roles.¹⁴¹ Women's participation in border trade has fundamentally altered how they are viewed in their communities.

Many women are now actively involved in trade, whether as small traders, intermediaries, or business owners dealing with goods across the border. This involvement has increased their economic visibility, making them one of the key players in the region's commerce.¹⁴² As women take on more prominent roles in the marketplace, they challenge outdated stereotypes about their capabilities, demonstrating their skills in business negotiations and financial management. This

¹³⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁰ Hazarika & A. Deka., Op.Cit.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.,

¹⁴² Ibid.,

shift in perception has improved their status within both families and communities, as they gain greater respect in both spheres.¹⁴³

The empowerment women experience through trade has extended beyond financial independence. It has also resulted in social empowerment, with women gaining more control over household decisions such as spending, saving, and investing. This financial autonomy allows them to make choices that improve the well-being of themselves and their families. Additionally, women's success in trade has enhanced their social standing, as they are increasingly recognized as vital contributors to their families and communities' economic stability.¹⁴⁴

By breaking traditional gender roles, women involved in border trade now serve as role models for younger generations, particularly girls. Seeing women thrive in economic ventures encourages a shift in the ambitions of young girls, who now envision themselves as future entrepreneurs, professionals, or leaders. This shift in mindset can create a lasting impact on future generations, promoting an environment where young women are motivated to pursue careers, engage in trade, and challenge restrictive gender norms.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, women's involvement in border trade plays a significant role in challenging societal norms surrounding gender relations. These women have become trailblazers, not only in trade but in redefining what is possible for women in a patriarchal society.

The nature of trade often requires collaboration with other traders, including men, providing women the opportunity to assert themselves in spaces traditionally dominated by men. This interaction fosters a sense of equality and respect, breaking down the gender-based divisions of the past and allowing women to be recognized for their professional achievements.¹⁴⁶ The rise of women-led businesses in border trade has also elevated women's roles in local governance and decision-making. As

¹⁴³D.Lal.,Op.Cit.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.,

¹⁴⁵National Statistical Office. (2019).*Women and Economic Participation in the Northeast: A Statistical Overview*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.,

they gain economic independence and become increasingly influential in regional trade, women are beginning to assert their influence in political spheres, advocating for policies that reflect their needs and concerns. This has had a significant impact on gender equality, as women are no longer seen solely as caretakers of the home but as vital participants in the region's economic and social development.¹⁴⁷

In the broader context of gender equality, the empowerment of women in Mizoram through border trade aligns with global movements advocating for equal opportunities for women in all aspects of society. Mizoram's experience demonstrates how economic activities such as trade can serve as a powerful tool for advancing gender equality, providing women with the means to break through traditional barriers. These women, empowered by their involvement in trade, are now able to fully participate in society, engaging in political, economic, and social spheres in once unimaginable ways.

Women's participation in Mizoram's border trade has proven to be a transformative force, not only for the women involved but for society as a whole.¹⁴⁸ It has contributed to reshaping social structures by challenging gender stereotypes and creating new spaces for women to assert their presence. While challenges remain, such as access to capital and societal resistance to women taking on traditionally male roles, the continued involvement of women in trade represents a significant step toward a more inclusive and equitable society in Mizoram—one where women can break societal barriers, achieve greater empowerment, and contribute to the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

2. Improved Decision-Making Power

The centres of cross-border trade, once primarily known for facilitating the exchange of goods, have gradually become pivotal venues for women to elevate their social, economic, and political status. Located along Mizoram's borders, these trade hubs offer women opportunities to participate in commerce, achieve financial autonomy, and improve their roles within society. The positive outcomes of this

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁸ Z. Lalremruati. (2020). Women in the border economy: A case study of Mizoram. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(42), 14-20.

empowerment are not limited to the economic sphere but extend to political and social realms, fostering gender equality and contributing to transformative changes in the region.¹⁴⁹

The increasing involvement of women in border trade is especially noteworthy in a socio-cultural context where women, particularly in northeastern India, including Mizoram, historically faced restricted access to formal economic opportunities. Traditionally, women's responsibilities were often confined to the domestic sphere, with few options for economic independence. However, with the growth of border trade, new possibilities have emerged for women in Mizoram to challenge these constraints, empowering them to confidently engage in the public economic domain.¹⁵⁰ By accessing goods, markets, and business opportunities, women have seen a boost in their incomes, granting them a level of financial independence that was previously unattainable.

Financial autonomy stands as a critical tool for women's empowerment. In Mizoram, women participating in border trade have experienced a shift in their roles within households due to their income contributions. Once financially dependent on their male counterparts, these women now play an active role in supporting their families' economic well-being. This change has promoted equality and respect within families, as women's financial input is now seen as essential for the family's survival and prosperity. Women involved in border trade no longer simply adhere to household decisions; they now actively participate in shaping key family decisions, including those concerning education, welfare, and other critical family matters.

The financial freedom gained by women has also translated into greater decision-making authority within their communities. Mizoram's women, particularly those engaged in cross-border trade, have begun asserting themselves in local governance.¹⁵¹ In the past, political and governance structures in many villages were male-dominated, with women largely excluded from decision-making roles.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁵¹ S. Mukherjee. (2017). *Empowering women through entrepreneurship in Northeast India: Prospects and challenges*. Routledge.

However, as women have gained economic independence through trade, they have started asserting their presence in local political structures. Women are now integral to community organizations, self-help groups, and development initiatives, all of which play a crucial role in addressing community issues like health, education, infrastructure, and overall well-being. A key development in Mizoram is that women have moved beyond being mere participants in these initiatives to becoming leaders. Their ability to generate income and make independent financial choices has instilled in them a sense of confidence, which they now channel into active involvement in community decision-making processes.¹⁵² Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles in community organizations, influencing decisions that impact local economies, social structures, and the overall welfare of the population. Their leadership capabilities are now widely recognized, leading to greater responsibilities and further empowerment.¹⁵³

The role of women in self-help groups (SHGs) and community development projects exemplifies how border trade has driven social empowerment. SHGs, which are grassroots initiatives designed to encourage mutual support and collective action, have been instrumental in bolstering women's financial and social standing. These groups often provide small loans, savings programs, and skills training, all of which enable women to enhance their financial stability and gain the resources necessary to advocate for their rights in broader community matters. In addition, women's involvement in local governance has played a key part in advancing gender equality in Mizoram. Historically, decision-making at the community level was largely controlled by men, with limited involvement from women. However, as women's economic power has increased through border trade, they have gained representation in village councils and other leadership positions. These roles enable women to influence resource allocation, policy development, and the implementation of

¹⁵² Ibid.,

¹⁵³ Ibid.,

programs that promote women's rights and address the needs of marginalized groups.¹⁵⁴

Beyond economic empowerment, border trade has helped shift traditional gender norms in Mizoram. In many communities, women engaged in trade are now viewed not just as homemakers but as active contributors to the economy and society. This shift in perception has far-reaching implications for gender equality, as it challenges longstanding stereotypes about women's roles in both the family and society. As more women enter the trade sector and assume leadership positions, they inspire others to follow suit and dismantle the rigid gender roles that have historically confined women to the domestic realm.¹⁵⁵ The border trade in Mizoram has been instrumental in empowering women, offering them the resources needed to achieve financial independence, social equality, and political participation. The ripple effects of this empowerment have extended beyond economics, leading to substantial progress in gender equality and women's involvement in community decision-making.¹⁵⁶ As more women continue to engage in trade and ascend to leadership positions, they are contributing to the creation of a more inclusive, equal, and just society in Mizoram, where women's voices are heard, respected, and valued.

3. Access to Education and Health

The establishment of Border Trade Centers in Mizoram has emerged as a powerful means of promoting women's empowerment, enhancing both their social and economic standing. This empowerment extends beyond mere financial independence, impacting areas such as access to education, healthcare, and societal roles. In Mizoram, where women have traditionally been confined to domestic responsibilities and caregiving, the creation of these trade hubs provides them with the chance to engage in the public domain and assert their economic autonomy. Border trade, which involves the exchange of goods across borders, has proven to be a significant driver of women's economic involvement in Mizoram.¹⁵⁷ These trade

¹⁵⁴ K. Zoramthanga & D. Lalthangpuui. (2022). Borderland women in Mizoram: Trade and empowerment. *Journal of Asian Borderlands Studies*, 9(1), 25-40.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁷

centres serve as platforms where women actively participate in commerce, gaining financial independence while also becoming essential contributors to their households and communities. As women in Mizoram gain control over economic resources, their perception of their roles within both the family and society evolves; this newfound economic independence opens opportunities that reach beyond finances, including making decisions related to children's education and healthcare.¹⁵⁸

The financial stability derived from participation in border trade centres has empowered women to place greater importance on their children's education, especially that of their daughters. Education has long been a path to upward social mobility and breaking cycles of poverty. For women in Mizoram, this translates into the opportunity to provide their daughters with previously unavailable chances. Many women traders have used their earnings to support their children's schooling, understanding that investing in their daughters' futures can lead to significant societal change.¹⁵⁹ As these girls gain an education, they are more likely to challenge gender norms, which helps to alter the societal expectations for women and encourages a more equitable future. Equally impactful are the improvements in health.

By gaining economic independence through border trade, women can afford better healthcare for themselves and their families. Access to quality medical services, often limited in rural areas, improves the well-being of the household. The ability to pay for healthcare and preventative care reduces illness-related burdens, enabling women to remain active in the economy and further supporting their social and financial empowerment. The enhanced access to both education and healthcare is interlinked. When a woman gains the financial freedom to access healthcare and ensure her children attend school, she is not only supporting her family's well-being but also contributing to the community's long-term development.¹⁶⁰ The children, especially daughters, who benefit from improved health and education, will likely

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁹ P. Sen. & R. Datta. (2022). Border economies and women's agency: Insights from Mizoram. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 45(3), 89-105.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.,

drive change in future generations, challenging gender biases and paving the way for women to occupy leadership roles in politics, business, and the arts.

Moreover, this empowerment has a communal dimension. As more women participate in border trade, they build networks that promote solidarity and collective action. These networks allow women to pool resources, offer mutual support, and collaborate to overcome challenges.¹⁶¹ Such unity strengthens their collective voice in local governance and policymaking, further advancing gender equality within the community. Women involved in trade centres often advocate for policies that enhance women's rights, including access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. In the broader picture of gender equality, the active participation of women in border trade centres challenges the entrenched patriarchal structures that have limited women's opportunities in Mizoram.¹⁶² As women gain financial independence and assume a more visible role in economic activities, the divide between the public and private spheres becomes less pronounced, paving the way for a more inclusive society. The success of these initiatives shows that when women are provided with the necessary tools and opportunities, they can become catalysts for change, improving not only their own lives but also contributing to their communities' growth and the empowerment of future generations.

The Border Trade Centers in Mizoram offer women a unique chance to achieve economic independence, which in turn fosters social empowerment and promotes gender equality. As women engage in trade, they invest in the education and healthcare of their families, particularly their daughters, creating a continuous cycle of empowerment that benefits future generations. By providing women with the means to challenge traditional gender roles, these centres help advance the broader goal of gender equality and contribute to the development of a society where women thrive. Through their involvement in border trade, women in Mizoram are actively shaping their futures and contributing to the creation of a more balanced and just society.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Ibid.,

¹⁶² Ibid.,

¹⁶³ P. Sen. & R. Datta., Op.Cit.

3.3.4. Capacity Building and Skill Development

In Mizoram, fostering local community growth, especially for women, has increasingly relied on initiatives aimed at improving skills and building capacity, particularly in the context of cross-border commerce. As women become more involved in this trade, they acquire diverse skills, including financial management, entrepreneurship, and negotiation. These previously limited opportunities not only boost their involvement in the local economy but also promote greater independence and self-sufficiency.¹⁶⁴ Border trade serves as a valuable avenue for women to expand their societal roles, offering both personal and professional development. Beyond financial freedom, these skill-building efforts contribute to social empowerment and support the advancement of gender equality in Mizoram.

1. *Training in Trade and Negotiation Skills*

The Border Trade Centers in Mizoram that focus on empowering women play a vital role in supporting women involved in cross-border commerce. Strategically placed along the border areas, these centres have become key hubs for economic activity, providing women with access to vital resources, opportunities, and the support necessary to succeed in trade.¹⁶⁵ Beyond functioning as marketplaces, these centres serve as spaces for skills development, knowledge building, and the cultivation of essential business acumen needed for thriving in the competitive cross-border trade environment.¹⁶⁶ A key focus is training in trade and negotiation, vital skills that enable women to navigate the complexities of cross-border commerce effectively.

Historically, women have been central to border trade in Mizoram, particularly in transactions with neighbouring countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh. However, their participation was limited by various societal, economic, and cultural obstacles. The creation of border trade centres has shifted this paradigm, offering women a conducive environment to learn, grow, and engage in trade. These centres not only

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁵ Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2017). *Border trade and inclusive growth in South Asia*. ADB Publications.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.,

provide economic empowerment but also contribute to social change, promoting gender equality in a sector that was once male-dominated. A major strategy for women's empowerment at these centres is capacity building, which includes providing women with the skills and resources necessary to manage and expand their businesses.¹⁶⁷ This approach incorporates training, mentorship, and essential resources, equipping women to succeed. The training programs emphasize critical areas like negotiation, financial management, and marketing strategies. These skills are crucial for women to excel in cross-border trade and build confidence in a traditionally male-dominated business environment.¹⁶⁸ Negotiation training is particularly important, as it allows women to engage effectively with traders and buyers, securing better deals. In the cross-border trade context, where language barriers, cultural differences, and fluctuating exchange rates can pose challenges, negotiating effectively is essential. Women are taught how to approach negotiations with confidence, interpret market trends, and make strategic decisions that will benefit their businesses. The training is delivered by a range of stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and business experts, who understand the intricacies of border trade.¹⁶⁹

Additionally, financial management is an area where many women traders have previously lacked exposure. Financial literacy is essential for the growth and sustainability of any business. Through targeted programs, women are taught how to manage their finances, track expenses, and reinvest profits. This knowledge allows women to run their businesses efficiently, make informed financial decisions, and ensure long-term sustainability. With greater control over their financial resources, women are empowered to grow their businesses independently and compete with their male counterparts.¹⁷⁰ Marketing is another critical skill developed at the centres. With the increasing prominence of digital platforms, women traders are trained in marketing their products to both local and international markets. These training sessions cover topics like customer preferences, branding, and digital tools for

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁹ UN Women. (2017). *Economic empowerment of women in trade: Challenges and pathways*. United Nations.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.,

broader outreach. By honing their marketing skills, women can expand their market reach, increasing sales and promoting business growth.

The training provided by these centres not only focuses on technical skills but also boosts women's confidence. Participants often report feeling more empowered, a shift that extends beyond business; this newfound confidence allows women to engage in their communities, take on leadership roles, and advocate for women's rights and welfare.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, these programs help women build networks with other traders, fostering collaboration and a sense of solidarity. These networks are vital for sharing knowledge, addressing challenges, and identifying new business opportunities. In addition to formal training, many centres offer mentorship programs, where experienced women traders guide newcomers. Mentorship provides valuable insights into navigating the complexities of the trade environment and helps women overcome challenges. This mentorship creates a strong sense of community and ensures that women do not face the hurdles of border trade alone. The impact of these programs extends beyond the individual women involved. As they succeed, they contribute to the local economy by creating jobs, generating income, and stimulating trade.¹⁷² This economic empowerment benefits families and communities, as women reinvest earnings in healthcare, education, and essential services. The empowerment of women in border trade is instrumental in breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable economic growth in Mizoram.¹⁷³

The involvement of government agencies and NGOs has been pivotal in the success of these initiatives. Government support has ensured the creation of necessary infrastructure and policies to sustain these programs, while NGOs bring expertise in women's empowerment and community development. This collaboration has resulted in a robust support system for women traders, offering not only training but also access to resources, networks, and continued support. The Border Trade Centers in Mizoram have transformed the landscape for women in cross-border trade. By focusing on training in trade, negotiation, financial management, and

¹⁷¹ Ibid.,

¹⁷² P. Sen. & R. Datta.,Op.Cit.

¹⁷³ Ibid.,

marketing, these centres equip women with the skills necessary to succeed. They not only empower individual women but also contribute to the broader economic development of the region, fostering gender equality and creating a more inclusive and prosperous society.¹⁷⁴ Through ongoing capacity-building efforts, the future of women in Mizoram's border trade looks increasingly promising.

2. *Entrepreneurial Development Programs*

The Border Trade Centers for Women's Empowerment in Mizoram have emerged as a key strategy to enhance economic self-sufficiency, independence, and growth for women in the area. These centres go beyond just trade and business—they aim to empower women to become active participants in the local economy, especially through border trade. This geographic advantage has been leveraged to offer women the chance to become entrepreneurs and engage in trade, creating a unique environment that redefines traditional gender roles and challenges barriers to women's involvement in economic activities.

Central to these empowerment efforts are programs focused on building women's skills and capacities. These initiatives are crucial in providing women with the necessary knowledge and tools to thrive in the business world. From basic literacy and numeracy to specialized skills in financial management, marketing, and border trade operations, these programs aim to cover a wide array of competencies. The approach is not only theoretical; it emphasizes practical application to ensure women gain the confidence to participate in all aspects of trade. Through workshops, training sessions, and hands-on learning, women acquire the skills needed to succeed in cross-border commerce and grow competitive in the market.¹⁷⁵ In addition, entrepreneurial development programs have played a transformative role in elevating women from small-scale traders to major players in regional and national markets. Traditionally, women in Mizoram, like in many parts of India, were mostly engaged in informal, subsistence-based economic roles, such as handicrafts, agriculture, or small retail businesses.¹⁷⁶ However, the advent of border trade has opened up new

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁵ Zoramthanga, K. & Lalthangpuui., Op.Cit.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.,

business opportunities. These programs are designed to help women gain the expertise to manage and expand their businesses, with support in areas such as financial literacy, access to capital, and networking. This comprehensive support system enables women to tap into broader markets, both within India and across the border.¹⁷⁷

A major aspect of these initiatives is the financial literacy training provided to women. Many of the entrepreneurs in Mizoram come from rural areas with limited access to formal education or financial services. The financial training equips women to manage their business finances, plan for growth, handle budgeting, and secure funding.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, they are taught how to negotiate effectively, manage cash flow, and make strategic decisions about pricing and sales. This training ensures that women do more than just participate in trade—they are equipped to sustain and grow their businesses. Besides financial training, these programs also facilitate market access and networking, both of which are essential for business growth.¹⁷⁹ Women involved in border trade often struggle with limited networks and lack exposure to larger commercial operations. These empowerment programs address these challenges by connecting women with industry professionals, suppliers, and potential customers from both India and beyond. This exposure allows women to learn about emerging market trends, expand their business prospects, and build valuable relationships that can support their growth.¹⁸⁰

The results of these efforts have been remarkable. Many women who once operated small-scale businesses have expanded into larger, successful enterprises that contribute significantly to the regional and national economies.¹⁸¹ These women have become role models, proving that with the right resources and support, they can overcome traditional gender roles and create thriving businesses. The success of these women has sparked a broader movement, increasing women's participation in the formal economy. By helping women become key players in border trade, these

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁸ Mukherjee.,Op.Cit.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁰ Lalremruati.,Op.Cit.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.,

programs have had far-reaching socio-economic effects. As women become more economically independent, they can improve their families' quality of life, invest in education, and contribute to their communities.¹⁸² This growing financial autonomy has also supported gender equality, as women entrepreneurs challenge traditional norms and inspire others to follow their example.¹⁸³

The success of the Border Trade Centers for Women's Empowerment in Mizoram is evident in the rising number of women-led businesses that not only succeed but are also driving regional economic growth.¹⁸⁴ The combination of capacity-building, skill development, and entrepreneurial support has created an environment where women are not just participants, but active agents of change in their communities. By continuing to offer essential resources and opportunities, Mizoram is paving the way for a future where women play a central role in cross-border trade, economic progress, and societal development.¹⁸⁵

3.4.Conclusion

The border trade hubs in Manipur present a significant opportunity for advancing women's empowerment, supporting both regional growth goals and gender equality aims. These hubs offer women a chance to gain economic autonomy, enhance their skills, and access markets, positioning them as crucial instruments for promoting inclusive progress. Nonetheless, overcoming obstacles like inadequate infrastructure, societal gender norms, and knowledge disparities is crucial for ensuring women traders can fully capitalize on the potential of border trade. With ongoing policy backing, investments in infrastructure, and the strengthening of women's networks, Manipur's border trade hubs can evolve into powerful drivers of empowerment and economic growth for women in the region. The participation of Manipuri women in border trade showcases their resilience, creativity, and collective resolve to reshape their socio-economic roles, not only within the state but also across international boundaries.

¹⁸² Ibid.,

¹⁸³ Hazarika & Deka.,Op.Cit.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁵ Miriam.,Op.Cit.

Likewise, Border trading hubs in Mizoram have significantly impacted the empowerment of women. By providing economic prospects, opportunities for upward mobility, and the ability to acquire new skills, women in the region have achieved greater autonomy and visibility, defying conventional gender expectations while contributing to the area's overall growth. Nonetheless, for these trade hubs to fully harness their potential in empowering women, it is crucial to overcome obstacles like restricted access to financial resources, societal opposition, and inadequate infrastructure. Continued efforts from governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities can enhance the role of women in cross-border trade, leading to broader economic and social development for Mizoram.

Chapter IV

Role of Women in Border Trade and Trade Centres between India and Myanmar from a Women's Perspective

This chapter discusses the perspectives of Women in Border Trade. The role of women in border trade, i.e. formal and informal trade, is also mentioned in detail. The needs and steps for the empowerment of women in border trade is also discussed. It presents a qualitative study on the role of women and Border Trade and Border Trade centres in Mizoram and Manipur. This chapter underlines the gender perspectives of Border Trade and Border Trade Centres.

4.1. Introduction

Trade between India and Myanmar along their shared border holds substantial economic and social significance, shaping the dynamics of their bilateral relationship. This exchange traces its origins to historical interactions, with the border areas acting as key points for the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural practices for centuries. Over the years, border trade has evolved into an integral part of the economic structure, particularly for the northeastern states of India and Myanmar's border communities. It has expanded beyond mere commercial exchanges to become a vital element of regional cooperation between South Asia and Southeast Asia. From an economic standpoint, border trade between India and Myanmar serves to link two distinct markets.

India offers Myanmar access to a vast consumer market and a diverse range of goods, while Myanmar provides India with a strategic gateway to Southeast Asia. The goods exchanged include agricultural products, textiles, electronics, machinery, and raw materials. This trade is crucial not only for the broader national economies but also for the local economies on both sides of the border, as it generates employment, encourages entrepreneurship, and drives the development of infrastructure in remote border areas.

Women are often drawn to cross-border commerce due to its unofficial, approachable, and adaptable framework. This type of trade provides opportunities for income generation without requiring substantial startup funds or advanced schooling, making it especially accessible to women from underserved or rural backgrounds. The exchange of commonly used products such as food, garments, and everyday household goods aligns well with the expertise and familiarity many women already possess. Additionally, the flexible and community-based nature of this commerce allows women to manage both their entrepreneurial efforts and family obligations. Trust-based relationships and strong local connections in border regions also play a key role in facilitating women's involvement and prosperity in these markets.

In many cases, women are more active than men in trade hubs near borders, largely due to a combination of practical needs and available opportunities. These marketplaces offer income-generating possibilities that can be adapted around caregiving and domestic roles, making them especially viable for women managing household duties. The goods and services exchanged—such as agricultural produce, fabrics, and everyday essentials—tend to reflect areas where women already have knowledge or experience. Furthermore, the unofficial setup of many of these trade environments lowers entry barriers, which is crucial for those without formal training, financial resources, or access to structured employment. In various regions, cultural expectations and local traditions even encourage female participation in these spaces more than in formal job sectors, allowing women to engage in commerce with a degree of independence and community backing.

On a social level, border trade promotes deeper connections between the populations of both nations, fostering the exchange of culture, knowledge, and traditions. As goods move across the border, so do ideas and people, helping to cultivate greater mutual understanding and collaboration between the various ethnic groups and communities in these regions. Over time, these interactions have contributed to a sense of shared identity, with the trade centres serving as venues for both commercial and cultural exchanges. Additionally, the India-Myanmar border trade plays a key role in strengthening security and stability in the region. Through the formalization of trade and increased cooperation, both governments have

enhanced their diplomatic relations, promoting a peaceful and stable atmosphere in the border areas. This trade also supports India's "Act East" policy, which focuses on enhancing ties with Southeast Asia, while contributing to Myanmar's economic development and further integrating it into regional supply chains.

Trading posts near borders play a crucial role in the social and economic fabric of frontier regions, functioning not only as centers of commerce but also as gathering points for diverse groups. They bolster local economies by creating avenues for earnings, particularly benefiting small vendors many of whom are women. These trade zones typically revolve around the circulation of basic consumer items, making them indispensable for day-to-day living and financial sustenance. In addition to their economic role, these places also encourage interaction across cultural and community lines, helping to build relationships and foster exchange of ideas and traditions. Such cross-community engagement can nurture a sense of shared identity and contribute to peace in border areas. Where formal jobs are scarce, this kind of informal trade offers an essential means of support, combining economic necessity with social connection.

Moreover, the trade between India and Myanmar along their border is not merely an exchange of goods; it represents a complex and evolving relationship that is vital for both the economic progress and social cohesion of the border regions.¹ It bridges the two nations and cultures, driving mutual growth, fostering regional collaboration, and promoting shared prosperity. Trade hubs along the India-Myanmar border are strategically positioned locations that enable the flow of goods, services, and people between the two nations. These centres act as central points for cross-border commerce, serving as crucial access points for trade between India and Myanmar. Essentially, these hubs operate as organized markets where merchants, suppliers, and buyers gather to engage in transactions. Over time, these spots have transformed from informal trading areas into more structured and regulated zones,

¹ P. Lalpekhui. (2022). Negotiating Gender Role: Participation of Women in Border-Trade in Indo-Myanmar Borderland. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, VIII (1).

where processes such as customs procedures, infrastructure, and commercial activities are streamlined to facilitate smoother exchanges.²

On the India-Myanmar border, trade hubs are typically situated at key geographical locations that are important to both countries. Towns like Moreh in India's Manipur state, for instance, serve as essential places where goods and services from India converge with those from Myanmar. These hubs are where a variety of products, including agricultural items, textiles, electronics, machinery, and raw materials, are exchanged. The goods passing through these centres are often a combination of locally produced and internationally sourced items, with both formal and informal trade occurring depending on the goods and the regulatory environment.³ These hubs provide vital infrastructure, including storage facilities, transport systems, customs offices, and marketplaces, all of which help manage the flow of goods. They also act as logistical centres, where transportation networks such as roads, bridges, and railways play a key role in moving products efficiently between the two nations. At these hubs, customs laws and tariffs are enforced to ensure trade is conducted in a lawful and organized manner, easing the process for traders and ensuring adherence to both domestic and international trade regulations.

In addition to their economic role, these trade hubs also serve as venues for cultural and social exchanges. Given the proximity of border communities, these centres often witness interactions between individuals from different regions and ethnic backgrounds, fostering the sharing of ideas, traditions, and customs. This promotes a deeper sense of cooperation and understanding between the populations of both countries. The significance of these trade hubs has grown in recent years as both India and Myanmar have made efforts to strengthen their economic relations, with the India-Myanmar border trade playing a crucial part in India's "Act East"

²Ibid.,

³Ibid.,

policy.⁴ This initiative seeks to improve trade and connectivity with Southeast Asia, and the trade hubs are pivotal in bringing this vision to life.

As infrastructure continues to improve and trade agreements become more robust, these centres are expected to play an even greater role in regional trade and integration. Furthermore, the trade hubs along the India-Myanmar border are dynamic and multifaceted spaces that serve not only as centres of commerce but also as contributors to regional stability, cultural exchange, and the strengthening of bilateral relations.⁵ They are vital to understanding the changing landscape of cross-border trade in the region and the economic development of both India and Myanmar.

Paying attention to the roles of women in cross-border trade, particularly in areas like the India-Myanmar border, is essential, as women often play a significant part in informal economies that fuel local and regional commerce, even though their contributions are frequently overlooked or undervalued. In many border regions, women are key figures in small-scale trading activities, from overseeing family-owned businesses to managing daily transactions in marketplaces and trade hubs. They are commonly responsible for running retail stores, handling agricultural goods, and facilitating local trade, much of which occurs outside formal economic frameworks.

Understanding women's perspectives offers a fuller picture of the trade landscape.⁶ Women bring valuable insights, shaped by their distinct experiences, such as overcoming obstacles to accessing resources, negotiating deals, or balancing family duties with business responsibilities.⁷ By engaging with their voices, researchers and policymakers can better identify the challenges women face—like limited access to financing, lack of education or training, and social or cultural

⁴S,Mitra. (2023). The Indo-Myanmar Borderlands: Border Trade, Urbanisation and Ethnic Politics in Mizoram, India. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 46(2), 445–463.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2023.2180592>

⁵Ibid.,

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷Lalpekhlu.,Op.Cit

barriers—and work toward solutions that empower them to contribute more fully to the economy.

Women involved in border trade often form social networks that go beyond business, which help to strengthen community resilience and play an important role in conflict resolution and maintaining stability in border areas, which are frequently affected by instability. Their participation in trade is also vital for supporting family livelihoods, particularly in regions where men may leave for work or pursue other types of employment away from home. Recognizing women's roles is crucial for promoting inclusive economic growth. Incorporating women into economic development strategies can have far-reaching benefits, not only for families but for the broader community.⁸ When women gain economic power, they typically reinvest their earnings into their households, education, and local infrastructure, contributing to sustainable socioeconomic development. Moreover, in border regions, women's participation can help reduce gender imbalances in economic opportunities, leading to greater regional stability and prosperity. Focusing on women's involvement in cross-border trade is not just about addressing gender inequality but also about creating more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable economic systems. Women's experiences and insights provide critical knowledge that can shape more equitable economic policies, enabling the full potential of cross-border trade in areas like the India-Myanmar border.

4.2. Importance of Border Trade

Border trade plays a crucial role in fostering regional growth, acting as a key pathway for economic and social interactions between neighbouring nations. In areas such as the India-Myanmar border, this trade serves not only as an economic lifeline but also as a vital catalyst for local development, contributing to prosperity, job creation, and social unity in often remote areas. By facilitating the exchange of goods, services, and ideas, border trade positions these regions as essential hubs for cross-border collaboration. Its influence is especially evident within local

⁸Mitra.,Op.Cit.

communities, including marginalized groups like women, who play an integral role in the informal economy and the functioning of local trade systems.⁹

At its heart, border trade connects local communities to broader regional and global markets. In regions like the northeastern states of India and Myanmar's border areas, these trade routes facilitate the exchange of a diverse range of goods, such as agricultural products, textiles, consumer goods, electronics, and raw materials.¹⁰ This exchange provides vital resources to areas that might otherwise lack access, improving living standards and stimulating local economic activity. Furthermore, border trade strengthens regional partnerships by fostering interdependent relations between neighbouring countries, promoting peace and stability in the process.

The socio-economic significance of border trade extends well beyond the exchange of goods. It helps develop vital infrastructure, creates job opportunities, and enhances the overall progress of the region. Infrastructure projects such as the construction of roads, bridges, warehouses, and customs facilities, essential for efficient trade, bring long-lasting benefits to local populations. These developments not only streamline the flow of goods but also improve access to essential services like healthcare and education in previously isolated areas. Towns like Moreh in India and Tamu in Myanmar have seen notable infrastructure advancements and improvements in public services, directly driven by increased trade activity.¹¹

Local economies greatly benefit from the employment generated by border trade. Many residents in border communities find work in customs, transportation, retail, and trading businesses tied to cross-border trade. Although the formal sector plays a large role in these job opportunities, a significant portion of economic activity remains informal. Small-scale traders, shop owners, and labourers involved in informal trade contribute greatly to the region's economic well-being, providing

⁹Ibid.,

¹⁰Ibid.,

¹¹Khwaitrakpam Goutam Singh. (2023). Indo-Myanmar border trade and Moreh in Manipur. *rajasthali journal*, 4(2).<https://rajasthali.marudharacollege.ac.in/papers/Volume-2/Issue-4/08-08.pdf>

locals with means to improve their livelihoods, especially in places where formal employment opportunities are scarce.¹²

A particularly important aspect of the socio-economic impact of border trade is its effect on women. In border communities, women often take on critical roles in the informal economy, working as traders, shopkeepers, vendors, and market facilitators. They play a central role in small-scale trade, particularly in sectors like agriculture, textiles, and handicrafts. Women's involvement in the informal economy is essential for maintaining local livelihoods, as they manage family-run businesses and contribute to household income, especially in areas where men may migrate for work or where formal job opportunities for women are limited.¹³

Despite the significant role women play, their contributions to border trade are often underappreciated. However, their participation has far-reaching social and economic implications. By working in trade, women not only earn money for their families but also contribute to the local economy, promoting financial independence. Additionally, women often establish networks of mutual support and collaboration, helping to strengthen community ties and creating an environment of shared prosperity. Their involvement in trade reduces reliance on male family members, empowering women with greater control over their economic decisions and financial well-being. Nonetheless, women's participation in border trade is not without its challenges. Many women face obstacles such as limited access to credit, inadequate training, and the added burden of balancing work with family responsibilities.¹⁴

Furthermore, traditional gender roles and societal norms can restrict women's access to leadership roles in trade and commerce. These barriers hinder the full economic empowerment of women, despite their vital contributions. Therefore, policies that address these issues—such as improving access to finance, offering educational and vocational training, and enhancing legal rights—can unlock the potential of women in border trade and promote more inclusive regional development.

¹²Ibid.,

¹³Ibid.,

¹⁴Lalpekhui.,Op.Cit

The socio-economic impact of border trade also extends to fostering a more cohesive and peaceful social environment. As trade connects people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, it promotes cross-border cooperation and cultural exchange. In border regions, where ethnic, linguistic, and cultural similarities often exist on both sides, trade acts as a unifying force that bridges divides and fosters mutual understanding. Women, in particular, frequently facilitate this social exchange, serving as bridges for dialogue, collaboration, and peacebuilding in these areas. Furthermore, the growth of trade centres and cross-border trade networks can help alleviate poverty in these regions. As markets expand and new economic opportunities arise, the benefits are often distributed across broad segments of society. However, to ensure that all communities, especially marginalized ones like women, can benefit from this growth, it is essential to include them in the development process.

The significance of border trade reaches far beyond the mere exchange of goods. It is a key driver of regional development, fostering infrastructure growth, creating jobs, and improving living standards in border areas. For local communities, especially women, border trade offers essential opportunities for economic engagement, empowerment, and social development. To fully harness the potential of border trade, it is critical to address the challenges women face and implement policies that support their inclusion and empowerment within this key sector.¹⁵ By acknowledging the vital role women play in cross-border trade, nations can create more equitable and sustainable development in their border regions, leading to greater prosperity, peace, and social unity.

4.3. Historical Gender Roles in Border Trade

Gender roles in communities along the India-Myanmar border, especially in states like Manipur and Mizoram, have been shaped by a mix of historical, cultural, and socio-economic influences. These areas, home to distinct ethnic groups and traditional social structures, provide a valuable perspective on how gender roles

¹⁵Ibid.,

affect women's participation in cross-border trade.¹⁶ The intersection of history, evolving economic conditions, and cultural traditions have created a complex environment where women play a significant role in local economies but still face constraints imposed by entrenched gender norms and societal expectations. Historically, the gender roles in these border regions differ from those seen in much of India.

In the northeastern region of India, women hold a pivotal position in shaping the flow of trade along border areas, influencing both economic activity and the broader social landscape. The unregulated, flexible nature of this commerce fits naturally within the region's cultural and societal traditions, where women, especially those from indigenous groups, have long been active in local markets and communal affairs. In states such as Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur, it's common to see women running vendor stalls, moving merchandise, and engaging in trade negotiations, both within local settings and across nearby international borders. Their involvement extends beyond mere livelihood; it strengthens their voice and visibility in society.

These trading zones offer a gateway for women to step into public roles, achieve greater financial self-reliance, and provide for their households. Despite facing hurdles like inadequate transport systems, restrictive regulations, and occasional security issues, these women adeptly manoeuvre through intricate trade pathways and maintain robust cross-border ties with neighbouring countries like Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. In this setting, traditional gender expectations are both upheld and transformed, as women blend customary duties with business savvy, becoming vital pillars of the regional trade framework.

Historically, border trade, which involved goods such as agricultural products, textiles, and later, industrial items, was largely structured in ways that reflected male dominance in commercial and economic realms. While women have always been involved in agriculture and family-run enterprises, their participation in formal, profitable aspects of cross-border trade remained limited. In the early stages,

¹⁶P.Kumar & R.Venkatesh. (2022). Barriers to women's participation in border trade: Analyzing the India-Myanmar trade corridor. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 57(6), 53-59.

cross-border trade between India and Myanmar was largely informal, driven by small-scale traders moving goods across the border. Markets in towns like Moreh (India) and Tamu (Myanmar) typically saw women working in smaller, local markets, often focused on selling agricultural produce or handmade goods.¹⁷ Their work was generally informal and localized, revolving around retail rather than large-scale trade, negotiation, or the movement of goods between countries. This distinction between informal, localized trading managed by women and formal, male-dominated trade networks became a defining feature of gender roles in these border trade systems.¹⁸

In these communities, the roles of women were traditionally confined to managing household economies and small-scale commercial activities, while men held control over the larger, more visible aspects of trade. Men typically engaged in high-level transactions with traders from Myanmar, navigated customs processes, and served as brokers or entrepreneurs involved in larger-scale trade.¹⁹ This division of labour reflected historical economic patterns, with men being seen as the key figures in external commerce, while women's work was largely perceived as supplementary, confined to smaller, informal market transactions. Despite this, women in these border regions have traditionally had more autonomy compared to other parts of India. While their involvement in cross-border trade was often limited to informal and small-scale activities, it played a vital role in sustaining local economies. Women worked as primary traders in agricultural markets, selling goods such as fruits, vegetables, and crafts.²⁰ Their contributions were essential not just for sustaining local communities but also for ensuring households had access to the products they needed. In some cases, women even ran their businesses, often with family support, contributing to the local economic network.

With the formalization of trade routes between India and Myanmar, particularly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, women's roles in cross-border commerce began to shift. Trade centres like Moreh in Manipur started to open new

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰ Mitra., Op.Cit.

opportunities for women to participate in cross-border trade more directly. However, even with these changes, women still faced significant barriers to accessing the more lucrative and influential parts of the economy. While women could engage in retail and small-scale trade, higher-value activities like negotiating trade agreements, dealing with government officials, and managing large-scale imports and exports were still dominated by men.

In both Manipur and Mizoram, women continue to play essential roles in family businesses, small-scale retail, and informal markets, particularly in the transportation and retail of agricultural products and household goods. These activities remain central to the local economy, but women still face structural challenges that limit their involvement in the broader commercial network. Many women lack access to finance, education, and formal business training, and societal expectations often limit their ability to control larger-scale trade operations.²¹

However, recent changes have expanded women's roles in the border trade. Policies aimed at enhancing cross-border trade and improving infrastructure have opened up more opportunities for women. In many border areas, women are now more visible in trade centres and local markets, not just as traders but also in roles related to trade management, logistics, and operations.²² Women in Manipur and Mizoram are increasingly participating in running businesses, transporting goods, and even engaging in small-scale cross-border transactions. This shift reflects a broader trend towards greater empowerment for women in these border regions, as they gain more opportunities to take on entrepreneurial roles and control the economic outcomes of their work.

Nevertheless, women continue to face barriers to accessing leadership roles and higher levels of economic decision-making. Traditional gender roles, limited access to capital, and the ongoing demands of domestic responsibilities continue to limit their ability to participate fully in the broader commercial sphere. While women are becoming more visible in retail and small-scale businesses, they remain largely absent from leadership positions in cross-border trade networks, where men continue

²¹Ibid.,

²²Ibid.,

to dominate due to their control over finances, trade routes, and key decision-making processes.²³

The gender dynamics that affect women's participation in border trade are also influenced by broader socio-economic factors such as education, mobility, and legal rights. Women's limited access to formal education and business training restricts their ability to expand their businesses and take advantage of more lucrative opportunities.²⁴ Additionally, societal expectations that women balance domestic duties with work outside the home further limit their ability to fully engage in trade, reducing their available time and resources to grow their enterprises.

The gender dynamics in the border communities of Manipur and Mizoram have been shaped by a combination of progressive matrilineal traditions, patriarchal economic structures, and evolving trade patterns. While women have long played a role in trade, their participation has been largely limited to informal, small-scale sectors, with limited access to leadership positions in formal trade networks. As the border trade continues to formalize and local development opportunities increase, women's participation has grown, though challenges remain. To unlock the full potential of women in the India-Myanmar border trade, it is crucial to address barriers such as limited access to finance, education, and leadership roles, ensuring women can fully capitalize on the opportunities that arise from this vital economic sector.²⁵

4.4. Women's Roles in Border Trade

The influence of women in border commerce is a significant yet frequently overlooked dimension of cross-border trade. In numerous regions, particularly in less developed areas, women have emerged as essential contributors to the maintenance and expansion of informal trade at border crossings. Their participation is driven by a mix of necessity, opportunity, and cultural practices, as they navigate these trade zones to provide for their families, bolster local economies, and exercise their

²³ Ibid.,

²⁴ Gautam., Op.Cit

²⁵ Joshi & Paliwal. (2021). Women's involvement in border trade hubs: The case of Moreh and Tamu. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 47(3), 87-104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14727460.2021.1938291>

autonomy. Whether through selling products, moving goods, or overseeing small-scale enterprises, women engaged in border trade show remarkable resilience and resourcefulness, transforming what is often a difficult environment into one that fosters empowerment and economic engagement.

4.4.1. Women as Informal Traders

Women have long been an essential part of informal trade in border markets, particularly in regions like Manipur and Mizoram, where cross-border transactions between India and Myanmar have been a cornerstone of local economies. These areas, distinguished by their unique cultural and geographical locations along the India-Myanmar border, offer a distinct perspective on the role of women in informal trade. In these communities, women have made substantial contributions to the informal economy, managing small enterprises, running family-operated stalls, selling agricultural products, and overseeing daily operations in the markets that serve as central hubs for cross-border trade.²⁶ Although often underappreciated, this informal trade is vital to the socio-economic well-being of these regions, and women's involvement spans various functions, from retail management to influencing the dynamics of border market economies.

The historical role of women in trade in Manipur and Mizoram has been shaped by both socio-economic forces and cultural practices. This division of labour meant that women's participation in trade was largely limited to informal or low-capital activities, though their contributions were undeniably important. In both Manipur and Mizoram, women have consistently played pivotal roles in local markets, participating in informal trade by selling foodstuffs, textiles, agricultural products, and local crafts. These markets, typically located near the border and sustained by small-scale traders, are crucial for linking the economies of India and Myanmar.²⁷

In Manipur, Moreh has been a vital trading centre, with women involved in retailing a variety of goods, from vegetables and spices to handicrafts and textiles.

²⁶Ibid.,

²⁷Ibid.,

Likewise, in Mizoram, women participate in local markets, offering products like betel nuts, vegetables, and traditional garments. Their involvement in these informal markets has often been driven by necessity, as women seek to supplement household incomes or maintain economic stability in areas where formal employment opportunities are scarce.²⁸ Women in these border areas typically engage in trade within informal settings, unregulated by formal economic systems, yet indispensable to the local economy.

In Moreh, for example, women often run small stalls or shops, selling goods that they either produce or acquire through informal trade networks with Myanmar. These products range from local produce like fruits and vegetables to manufactured items, including textiles, footwear, and electronics. The informal nature of this trade allows women to engage in relatively low-risk business activities, frequently in collaboration with other women or family members, and provides them with an opportunity to participate in the economy without facing the formal barriers that exist in more regulated markets.²⁹

One of the main reasons women are so active in informal trade is the flexibility it offers. Informal trade typically requires less capital investment and business expertise than formal trade, making it more accessible to women with limited financial resources. Additionally, women often work within their immediate social networks, relying on family and community connections to facilitate their participation. This network-based system enables women to source goods, share market knowledge, and collaborate with others. Many women in informal border trade operate family-run businesses, taking on important roles in both production and retail, ensuring goods move from production to the consumer.³⁰ These arrangements not only bolster the local economy but also cultivate a sense of communal interdependence among women in these border regions.

Women in informal trade also frequently bridge the gap between the formal and informal economies. In areas like Moreh, where formal trade is subject to

²⁸Mitra.,Op.Cit.

²⁹Ibid.,

³⁰Ibid.,

government regulations and customs control, women often engage in informal trading practices that exist outside of the formal economic system, but which are crucial to its function. This may include activities such as smuggling, barter trade, or other informal exchanges that bypass official regulations. While these exchanges may not be officially recognized, they are essential for the local population, providing access to goods and services that might otherwise be inaccessible. This situation highlights the paradox of border economies, where women are largely confined to informal trade, yet their roles are vital to keeping these economies operational.

Despite their critical role in border trade, women involved in informal trade at the border face several challenges. A significant obstacle is the lack of access to capital. Because much of their trade is informal, women often rely on personal savings or credit from local networks to fund their businesses, limiting their ability to scale up operations. The absence of formal financial services, such as bank loans or credit facilities, curtails women's entrepreneurial potential and keeps them tied to small-scale ventures.³¹ Furthermore, many women lack formal training in business or trade, which limits their ability to navigate more competitive or formal sectors of the economy.

Another challenge is the persistent gender discrimination and societal expectations that curtail women's economic autonomy. While women in these regions have ample experience running businesses, they are often excluded from high-level decision-making within trade networks. Commercial decisions, such as negotiating deals or managing larger transactions, are still primarily male-dominated, with men typically holding financial and managerial control.³² Although women contribute significantly to the local economy, their roles are often marginalized within the broader context of cross-border trade, where men tend to dominate as traders and business owners. This dynamic reinforces the gender divide in the trade economy, confining women to smaller, less visible roles.

³¹Lalpekhui.,Op.Cit

³²Ibid.,

Additionally, the political and regulatory environment at the India-Myanmar border complicates women's participation in informal trade. Border regions are often marked by geopolitical and economic tensions, which can lead to fluctuating regulations, unpredictable shifts in customs procedures, and occasional instability. Women engaged in informal trade may struggle to adapt to these changes, especially when dealing with border security or customs officers. Since their trade often operates outside the official channels, they are vulnerable to exploitation or harassment by authorities, making their work more precarious. The significance of women in informal trade at the India-Myanmar border has gained attention in recent years. As border trade becomes more structured and incorporated into national and regional economic policies, efforts to support female traders and improve their participation in cross-border commerce have increased.³³ Initiatives have been launched to provide women with access to microloans, financial literacy education, and entrepreneurial support. In some cases, women's groups and cooperatives have been formed to strengthen the bargaining power of female traders and establish networks for goods and services exchange. These efforts aim to empower women in the trade economy and address the financial and logistical challenges they face.

Moreover, there is growing recognition that empowering women in informal border trade is crucial for broader economic development in these regions. Supporting women traders helps to increase the economic resilience of the community, as women often reinvest their earnings into their families and local projects.³⁴ Women's involvement in informal trade also fosters greater social and cultural exchange between India and Myanmar, contributing to improved cross-border relationships and regional stability. So, women's roles in informal trade at the India-Myanmar border are essential to the functioning of local economies in both Manipur and Mizoram. Their participation in small-scale retail, agriculture, and other informal trade activities forms a critical part of the border economies, which are

³³Ibid.,

³⁴D.Singh & Agarwal. (2021). Border trade as a driver of women's economic empowerment: A case study of trade centers in the India-Myanmar region. *South Asian Journal of Development*, 19(3), 74-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09712168.2021.1910719>

often centred on community-based exchanges.³⁵ Although women face numerous challenges, such as limited access to capital, training, and decision-making power, their contributions remain indispensable. As the border regions' economic landscape evolves and women's access to resources and opportunities improves, there is significant potential for women to take on an even more prominent role in shaping the future of cross-border trade.

4.4.2. Women in Formal Border Trade and Enterprise

The involvement of women in formal border trade and business enterprises, particularly along the India-Myanmar border in areas such as Manipur and Mizoram, is an evolving and vital component of the socio-economic framework in these regions. As cross-border trade between India and Myanmar transitions from informal to more structured and regulated economic activities, women have increasingly discovered avenues to broaden their engagement in higher-level business operations, cross-border transactions, and entrepreneurship.³⁶ While challenges persist, women's growing participation in formal border trade marks a significant step toward greater economic empowerment and the dismantling of traditional gender roles. This transformation sheds light on how women in Manipur, Mizoram, and other border areas are adjusting to the rising demands of cross-border trade and establishing new economic roles.

In the past, women in border communities like Manipur and Mizoram were primarily involved in the informal sector, engaging in small-scale trade, often within local markets or dealing with low-value goods.³⁷ These women typically operated in less regulated environments, participating in retail activities or trading agricultural products, textiles, and locally made crafts. The informal nature of their transactions meant limited capital investment, with women typically relying on family structures or local networks. While their contributions were crucial to the community's economy, they were often overlooked within the formal business sector. Despite this,

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ Ibid.,

³⁷ Ibid.,

these informal trading activities played an essential role in sustaining the local economy, though they were not viewed as part of the formal economic structure.³⁸

The economic landscape in these border areas has since transformed. With the formalization of trade policies, infrastructure improvements, and increased regional economic cooperation, new opportunities have emerged for women to enter more structured business sectors. As trade routes have expanded and formalized commercial activities have developed, women have increasingly engaged in regulated aspects of cross-border trade. This change has been especially evident in places like Moreh in Manipur, which has grown into a key centre for India-Myanmar trade, and in Mizoram, where improved connectivity to Myanmar has led to more regulated trade exchanges.

Women's participation in formalized border trade and businesses can be traced to a combination of government initiatives, improved infrastructure, and changes in global supply chains. Both Manipur and Mizoram have seen the introduction of programs and policies designed to boost border trade, such as the development of trade centres and the promotion of cross-border commerce. These efforts have created more regulated market environments where women are now able to take part in higher-value transactions. At the same time, India's "Act East" policy, aimed at fostering deeper economic ties with Southeast Asia, has created a favourable environment for women entrepreneurs in border regions to engage more fully in the formal economy. These women have established shops, set up retail outlets, and engaged in wholesale trading of goods like textiles, spices, food products, and even electronics.³⁹ These businesses are now regulated within Indian trade laws, with many women involved in larger transactions that cross the India-Myanmar border, adhering to official customs procedures and trade agreements.⁴⁰

Women in these regions are also branching out into various entrepreneurial activities beyond retail. For instance, in Moreh, some women have started importing goods from Myanmar, including clothing, footwear, and furniture, which they sell

³⁸ Lalpekhlu, Op.Cit.

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Ibid.,

locally or distribute to other parts of India. These women have created supply chains that depend on both formal and informal networks, negotiating with suppliers in Myanmar and handling logistics to ensure compliance with regulations. Their ability to manage businesses that require collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including Myanmar-based traders, government officials, and logistics firms, reflects the significant evolution in their role in the broader economy.⁴¹ The formalization of border trade has also facilitated women stepping into leadership roles within entrepreneurial ventures. In the past, women were mainly involved in the day-to-day operations of family-run businesses or small-scale trading.

However, with the rise of cross-border trade centres, women have begun to create their businesses and lead in their respective industries. This shift is particularly noticeable in places like Moreh, where women have established large retail operations offering a variety of goods, ranging from food items to electronics, often dealing directly with suppliers in Myanmar and managing the logistics and customs processes related to cross-border trade.⁴² These female entrepreneurs are not only responsible for running these businesses but also act as role models for other women in their communities, encouraging them to pursue similar ventures.

A key factor in the increase of women's involvement in formal border trade is the growing access to education and business training. As local communities become more connected to the broader economy through formal trade routes, women are gaining access to skills and knowledge that were previously unavailable. Government programs and initiatives by non-governmental organizations have been instrumental in providing women with training in business skills, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. These programs equip women with the tools needed to manage their businesses effectively, navigate the complexities of cross-border trade, and handle the formalities of international transactions.

For instance, the establishment of institutions such as Border Trade Centers and various government-backed initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship in northeastern India has helped women gain confidence in navigating formal trade

⁴¹Ibid.,

⁴²D.Singh & Agarwal., Op.Cit

systems. These programs offer workshops, financial aid, and market access, empowering women to undertake larger projects, expand their businesses, and connect with broader networks in both India and Myanmar.⁴³ Moreover, the rise of digital technology has opened new doors for women in formal border trade.

With the increasing prevalence of mobile phones, e-commerce platforms, and digital payment systems, women are now able to reach broader markets beyond their local areas. Many women engaged in formal cross-border trade are leveraging technology to grow their businesses. They use mobile phones to connect with suppliers in Myanmar, stay informed on trade regulations, and manage financial transactions. E-commerce platforms provide them with the opportunity to sell goods to consumers across various regions of India, and digital payment systems streamline cross-border transactions, making them easier and more secure.⁴⁴

Despite these advancements, challenges persist for women in formal border trade. Although women have made significant progress in formalizing their businesses, they still face barriers such as limited access to financing, persistent patriarchal social norms, and the complexities of dealing with border security and customs procedures. A major obstacle to success in formal trade is limited access to credit and financial resources. Many women entrepreneurs continue to depend on informal loans or family savings to fund their businesses, restricting their capacity to expand. Without access to formal financial institutions, women face difficulties obtaining loans or capital to grow their businesses and compete within the formal market.

Additionally, gender-based divisions of labour and social expectations surrounding women's roles in family and community life continue to limit their full participation in business activities. Women are often expected to juggle the demands of running a business while fulfilling traditional roles related to caregiving, household duties, and family care. This dual responsibility can limit the time and energy women can dedicate to their businesses, especially as they navigate the more

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ Ibid.,

formal aspects of cross-border trade, which require substantial time, mobility, and organizational skills.

The growing involvement of women in formal border trade and businesses along the India-Myanmar border represents a significant transformation in the economic landscape of regions like Manipur and Mizoram. As trade between India and Myanmar becomes more formalized, women have found increasing opportunities to participate in the higher-value aspects of cross-border commerce, including business management, entrepreneurship, and cross-border transactions.⁴⁵ While challenges remain, especially in terms of access to financial resources and societal gender norms, the increasing presence of women in the formal economy signifies a positive shift toward gender equality in border trade. As women continue to break down barriers, their growing influence in formal trade will undoubtedly shape the future of the India-Myanmar border economy, making it more inclusive, dynamic, and diverse.

4.5. Women's Works in the Border Trade Centre

The participation of women in the service sector at trade hubs in regions like Mizoram and Manipur, located along the India-Myanmar border, has become an integral component of the rapidly expanding cross-border economy. The creation and growth of trade hubs such as Moreh in Manipur and Zokhawthar in Mizoram have fostered a vibrant environment where women are stepping up to take on key roles in providing essential services that ensure the seamless operation of cross-border trade. These services include transportation, logistics, hospitality, and other functions critical to commerce and trade. Over time, women in these areas have moved beyond traditional roles, increasingly engaging in structured and entrepreneurial activities within the service sector, contributing to the local economy and challenging established gender expectations.

In the past, women in border communities like those in Mizoram and Manipur were largely involved in informal trade or household chores. Many women participated in small-scale local trading or agricultural work. However, as the

⁴⁵Ibid.,

region's border trade centres became more structured and formalized, women began to seize new opportunities in providing services that support the growing flow of goods and people across the India-Myanmar border.⁴⁶ The evolving trade dynamics, now deeply interconnected with Southeast Asia through Myanmar, demand a diverse range of services, and women have emerged as key contributors to meeting these needs. A prominent area where women in the service sector at border trade centres have made significant contributions is transportation and logistics.

Traditionally, this sector was male-dominated, with male truck drivers, porters, and logistics managers forming the majority of workers. Yet, as the demand for transportation services has risen with the increasing trade activity in border areas, women have begun entering the sector, often starting their small businesses or joining family-operated transport services.⁴⁷ In Moreh, for instance, women are actively involved in managing transport services that facilitate the movement of goods and passengers between India and Myanmar. They operate buses, taxis, and freight vehicles, ensuring the efficient and safe transport of people and products.

Women have also launched their transport enterprises, providing essential services to traders and the local community. These services are vital for the operation of trade hubs, where the demand for dependable and affordable transportation is consistently growing. Many women in Mizoram and Manipur are now tasked with organizing the transportation of goods across the border, coordinating with truck drivers, handling customs documentation, and ensuring timely delivery.⁴⁸ These women navigate the challenges of complex cross-border regulations, security checks, and fluctuating infrastructure, demonstrating adaptability and contributing to the smooth running of the border economy.

Besides transport and logistics, women at border trade centres have also tapped into the hospitality industry. With the rise in trade, the need for services like accommodation, food, and related functions has increased. Responding to this

⁴⁶ Thapa, & Koirala. (2021). Policy and women's empowerment in cross-border trade: India-Myanmar trade dynamic. *Asian Economic Policy Review*, 15(2), 213-227. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aep.1825>

⁴⁷ Ibid.,

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

growing demand, many women have opened guesthouses, hotels, and restaurants in trade hubs like Moreh and Zokhawthar. These women-operated hospitality businesses cater not only to traders and businesspeople but also to tourists, officials, and others visiting these regions for trade-related purposes.⁴⁹ Women in the hospitality sector provide a wide range of services, from lodging to meals, creating an environment that is both functional and welcoming.

Drawing on the cultural heritage of Mizoram and Manipur, many women entrepreneurs have incorporated local cuisine, arts, and traditions into their hospitality businesses, offering visitors a chance to experience the region's culture while providing essential services. These businesses are often family-run, with women managing daily operations, handling bookings, preparing food, and ensuring a comfortable and memorable experience for guests. Their work not only benefits their families but also fosters cross-cultural exchange in these border trade centres.

In addition to hospitality, women have become key players in retail services, offering products like clothing, crafts, electronics, and local goods.⁵⁰ These retail operations are essential to trade centres, where both local and international traders require a variety of services. Women manage small shops, market stalls, and retail outlets, providing goods necessary for everyday life or catering to the needs of traders. Many women source products from both India and Myanmar, sometimes acting as intermediaries in cross-border transactions, purchasing items in bulk and selling them locally. Their role in retail helps establish a connected local economy, where goods easily flow between the two countries.

Furthermore, women at border trade hubs have also ventured into critical service areas such as banking, finance, and telecommunications. In an increasingly digital economy, women are stepping into roles involving financial services like money transfers, currency exchange, and digital payments, all essential components of cross-border trade. In Moreh and Zokhawthar, women have become trusted providers of financial services, assisting traders with currency exchanges and

⁴⁹Ibid.,

⁵⁰Ibid.,

managing financial transactions between India and Myanmar.⁵¹ These women play a crucial role in facilitating economic activities, ensuring that traders have access to the necessary financial services while operating within a regulated framework. Women have also found opportunities in administrative and governmental services, such as customs brokering, clearing goods, and handling paperwork.

Their work ensures that goods pass through the border in compliance with Indian and Myanmar regulations. Women involved in these roles assist with documentation, facilitate customs clearance, and coordinate with government agencies to ensure that goods are inspected, evaluated, and approved for export or import.⁵² This level of involvement in trade's bureaucratic processes has placed women at the heart of border trade operations, and their contributions are critical to ensuring the smooth flow of transactions.

In addition to operational roles, women in the service sector at border trade hubs are increasingly taking on leadership positions within businesses. As trade and commerce have expanded in these regions, many women have turned small enterprises into larger, more successful ventures, overseeing operations, managing teams, and negotiating contracts. Their entrepreneurial drive and leadership have raised the profile of women in these communities, helping foster a more inclusive and diverse economy in the border trade regions.⁵³

Despite these significant contributions, women in the service sector at border trade hubs face a variety of challenges. One major barrier is the cultural expectation that women prioritize family duties over their careers. Many women are expected to juggle their business commitments with traditional household responsibilities, which can limit the time and resources they have to grow their enterprises. Additionally, societal views on women in leadership or non-traditional roles may still present challenges, as some women encounter resistance from male colleagues or members of their communities.

⁵¹ A. Sharma. (2022). Women traders in informal markets along the India-Myanmar border: Exploring networks and power structures. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 37(1), 45-61.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2022.1832547>

⁵² Ibid.,

⁵³ Ibid.,

Access to capital also remains a challenge for women entrepreneurs in the service sector. While men traditionally hold most of the financial decision-making power, women often struggle to secure loans or credit to start or expand their businesses. The lack of collateral, the absence of formal business training, and gender biases in financial institutions can make it difficult for women to access the funds they need to scale their businesses.⁵⁴ Moreover, women in the service sector at trade hubs face unique safety and security challenges, particularly in areas where infrastructure is still under development. The logistics and transportation sectors, for instance, require women to work in sometimes hazardous and insecure conditions, dealing with poorly developed roads, interacting with numerous border stakeholders, and managing complex logistical challenges. These risks may deter some women from fully exploiting opportunities in the service sector.

Despite these obstacles, there has been a clear shift in the role of women in the service sector at border trade hubs. Greater access to training and education, through both government programs and local non-governmental organizations, has empowered many women to develop the skills they need to succeed. Programs designed to improve women's business skills, financial literacy, and leadership capabilities have helped bridge the gaps that previously hindered their economic involvement. These initiatives, combined with the support from family and community networks, have encouraged women to pursue careers in the service sector with renewed confidence and determination.⁵⁵

Women's involvement in the service sector at border trade hubs in Mizoram and Manipur has become an essential element of the economic landscape in these areas. Whether in transport, hospitality, retail, or administration, women play a vital role in ensuring the smooth functioning of cross-border trade.⁵⁶ Their entrepreneurial spirit, resilience, and adaptability have enabled them to challenge traditional gender norms and secure significant roles in the formal economy. Although challenges remain, particularly regarding access to capital and societal expectations, the

⁵⁴Ibid.,

⁵⁵Thapa & Koirala.,Op.Cit

⁵⁶Ibid.,

growing presence of women in the service sector has the potential to transform the economic dynamics of border communities, leading to greater gender equality and empowerment. As trade continues to thrive and infrastructure in these regions improves, women's contributions in the service sector will only become more integral to the development of the India-Myanmar border economy.

4.6. Women's Empowerment through Border trade

Through cross-border trade, women experience a transformative shift, gaining financial autonomy, societal recognition, and increased influence over their personal and professional lives. In areas where formal job options are scarce, this type of trade provides women with opportunities to take on active roles as economic leaders, overseeing businesses, brokering deals, and building networks that enhance both their economic and social positions. This empowerment extends beyond financial benefits, promoting increased self-esteem, decision-making authority, and the power to shape their communities. As women become more involved in border trade, they not only support local economies but also challenge conventional gender roles, setting the stage for wider social transformation.

4.6.1. Social

Cross-border trade has significantly impacted the societal standing of women in both Manipur and Mizoram. Historically, women in these areas were confined to household roles with limited engagement in public or economic activities. However, the increasing participation of women in border trade has allowed them to break free from domestic confines and assume prominent leadership positions within their communities. In markets such as Ima Keithel, where women have traditionally been the backbone of commerce, they not only engage in business but also act as strong representations of female entrepreneurship and empowerment. These markets have become central to the community, with women managing stalls or businesses often regarded as key figures not just in economic affairs but also in social and cultural matters.⁵⁷ In regions where women have traditionally been sidelined, this visibility

⁵⁷Ibid.,

has had a profound effect on how they are perceived and valued within their communities.

The empowerment women experience through border trade extends beyond financial contributions. As women gain recognition for their economic roles, they also become influential in local governance and policymaking. Women engaged in border trade frequently take on vital roles in advocating for improved infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other community services. With their increasing prominence in business, they are extending their influence to broader social issues, ensuring that the voices of women and marginalized groups are heard and acted upon.⁵⁸ This newfound recognition and visibility also promote solidarity among women. Many women involved in border trade have formed collectives and support networks that foster cooperation and mutual assistance. These groups serve not only as economic collaborations but also as forums for discussing social matters, sharing knowledge, and organizing collective efforts. In this way, participating in trade becomes a form of social connection and support, which helps reinforce the community's social fabric.

One of the most profound effects of women's involvement in border trade is the increased autonomy they gain, both within the household and outside of it. Many women's participation in trade has allowed them to take on greater responsibility in financial decision-making within their families. This increased control over finances enables them to have a more significant say in shaping their futures and that of their children, especially regarding education, health, and overall well-being.⁵⁹ Through the financial independence gained via trade, women in Manipur and Mizoram are now able to invest in education, not only for their children but also for themselves. Many women, once confined to domestic roles, can now pursue skill development, language courses, or even higher education, broadening their opportunities and expanding their horizons.⁶⁰ This pursuit of knowledge is particularly crucial as it

⁵⁸Ibid.,

⁵⁹P.Kaur. (2021). Women in border trade: A study of empowerment and challenges at India-Myanmar trade centers. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1), 82-96.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/jws.2021.3104256>

⁶⁰Ibid.,

enhances their leverage, empowering them to engage more effectively in both the economic sphere and their local communities.

The independence gained through trade also enables women to challenge the traditional gender norms that have historically placed them in subordinate roles within the family. The financial and social power they accumulate allows them to make significant decisions, whether concerning family matters, their children's future, or social activities.⁶¹ In many cases, these women are viewed not only as caregivers but also as influential decision-makers and leaders in both their households and communities.

4.6.2. Economic

The economic empowerment women gain from border trade in Manipur and Mizoram has had a transformative effect, not only on the women themselves but also on their families, local communities, and to a degree, the larger regional economy. The benefits women derive from engaging in border trade go far beyond financial gains—they also boost their social mobility, self-reliance, and long-term goals. By analyzing the role of women in this informal trade economy, one can observe how border trade fosters economic independence, entrepreneurial opportunities, and overall economic growth in these states.⁶² A key aspect of economic empowerment through border trade is the financial autonomy it provides to women. Before participating in trade, many women in Manipur and Mizoram were confined to traditional household roles with little control over family finances or economic decisions. Border trade has created an avenue for women to achieve financial independence, enabling them to earn an income that is not reliant on male family members.

Through their involvement in trade, women in these states have gained more authority over household finances. This newfound financial freedom empowers them to make crucial decisions about their families' well-being. They no longer just fulfil caregiving and homemaking duties but are actively contributing to their families'

⁶¹Ibid.,

⁶²Ibid.,

economic stability. In many cases, women involved in border trade become the primary earners in their households, especially when men are engaged in larger-scale or seasonal trade.⁶³ In homes where women control the family finances, a more equitable distribution of power is often observed. Furthermore, the income generated through trade allows women to invest in other vital areas of their lives, such as education, healthcare, and upward mobility. Many women use their earnings to support their children's education, giving the next generation access to more opportunities than they had. This investment in their children's future is one of the most powerful forms of economic empowerment, ensuring that future generations are better equipped to succeed in both formal and informal economic settings.

As women continue to manage businesses and engage in the broader economy, their ability to accumulate wealth and save for future needs brings a sense of financial security that was once unavailable. This financial resilience is especially important in a region where access to government welfare programs or formal safety nets is limited. The independence women gain through trade not only empowers them personally but also provides a sustainable economic foundation for their families. In addition to financial independence, border trade has opened doors for entrepreneurial opportunities.

In both Manipur and Mizoram, women have leveraged the resources they gain through cross-border trade to grow their businesses and explore new ventures. Many women begin with small retail or agricultural enterprises, but as their economic standing improves, they can expand their operations. For instance, women who start by selling vegetables or handmade products in local markets may branch out into wholesale trade, sourcing goods from Myanmar and reselling them to other parts of India. Others may diversify their businesses by adding processing and packaging services, increasing the value of raw materials before distributing them in regional markets. This entrepreneurial drive has helped create a more diversified

⁶³Ibid.,

local economy, where women are no longer solely dependent on local supply chains but are actively building and broadening their commercial networks.⁶⁴

These entrepreneurial efforts also benefit the regional economy. As women scale their businesses, they create new job opportunities, particularly for other women and marginalized groups. These enterprises often serve as economic hubs, driving the growth of local infrastructure, markets, and social services. Consequently, the success of women-led businesses has a ripple effect, benefiting not just the women involved but also the communities they belong to. Additionally, women in both states have become increasingly integrated into regional and international trade networks. As their businesses expand, they build connections with suppliers, exporters, and traders from neighbouring countries, opening up new markets and distribution channels.⁶⁵ By broadening their reach beyond local borders, these women contribute to a more interconnected regional economy and strengthen socio-economic ties between India and its neighbouring countries. In this way, women involved in border trade not only enhance their empowerment but also play a key role in the economic integration of the region.

The economic empowerment of women through border trade in Manipur and Mizoram highlights the resilience and entrepreneurial spirit of women in these regions. Border trade has provided them with financial independence, visibility, and economic opportunities that were previously out of reach. Through their involvement in cross-border commerce, women have taken control of their livelihoods, contributed to the prosperity of their families, and increased their influence within their communities.⁶⁶ Although challenges persist, such as the informal nature of trade and exposure to external risks, the overall impact of border trade on women's economic empowerment has been significant. As these women continue to grow their businesses, improve their financial standing, and contribute to the wider regional economy, they are not only shaping their own futures but are also

⁶⁴ Thapa & Koirala., Op.Cit

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

⁶⁶ A. Chaubey. & M. Singh. (2020). Gender, trade, and economic networks: The role of women in the India-Myanmar borderlands. *Journal of South Asian Economic Development*, 17(2), 56-71.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0973184920913065>

transforming the economic landscape of Manipur, Mizoram, and the broader northeast region of India. Empowerment through border trade has thus become a powerful tool for achieving economic independence, self-reliance, and long-term socio-economic progress.

4.6.3. Education and Skills development

The process of skill development for women engaged in cross-border trade in Manipur and Mizoram centres around gaining practical, hands-on expertise directly relevant to their economic activities. These skills are often nurtured through daily interactions with suppliers, customers, and market dynamics, requiring women to think critically, adapt swiftly to shifting conditions, and make quick, well-informed decisions.⁶⁷ In regions like Manipur and Mizoram, managing small-scale trade operations equips women with essential business skills. Operating in informal markets, they learn to manage inventory, source goods, set prices, and provide customer service—skills typically linked to formal business operations, but developed organically within informal economies.⁶⁸ Women involved in cross-border trade acquire proficiency in negotiating with suppliers, managing cash flow, and making purchasing decisions that respond to supply and demand fluctuations. These experiences endow them with a practical understanding of business management that many women in more formal sectors may not possess.

Moreover, cross-border trade necessitates effective logistical planning. Women engaged in trade often oversee the transportation of goods, coordinate with local transporters, and ensure efficient delivery of products to markets. This aspect of trade sharpens their organizational and planning abilities, which are key to running any business. As their confidence and capabilities grow, many women expand their businesses, prompting them to adopt more advanced management practices, including human resources, marketing, and customer relations.⁶⁹ A distinctive feature of cross-border trade is its inherent requirement for cross-cultural communication.

⁶⁷ Mehta.,Op.Cit

⁶⁸ Ibid.,

⁶⁹ A. Chaubey. & M. Singh..Op.Cit

Women involved in trade between India and Myanmar, for example, navigate diverse cultures, languages, and business practices.

In areas like Manipur and Mizoram, where languages such as Meitei, Mizo, and tribal dialects are spoken, women often learn at least basic knowledge of languages like Burmese, Hindi, and even English to facilitate communication with traders and customers. The need to understand different languages and cultures for trade interactions motivates women to acquire language skills that would otherwise be inaccessible. Many women involved in cross-border trade become multilingual, speaking regional languages alongside those of neighbouring countries. This multilingualism enhances their ability to negotiate better deals, build trust with foreign suppliers, and expand their market reach beyond local boundaries.⁷⁰

Beyond language skills, women also gain important cultural insights. Understanding the customs, values, and business etiquette of trading partners is crucial for success in informal economies. In markets such as Imphal or Aizawl, where diverse backgrounds are prevalent, women who engage respectfully with both customers and suppliers increase their social capital. This cultural fluency enables them to forge lasting relationships with traders, suppliers, and clients, which is vital for business growth. Cross-border trade provides an ideal platform for women to develop advanced financial competencies that go beyond basic literacy. Managing a business requires a thorough understanding of budgeting, profit and loss management, cash flow, and long-term financial decisions.⁷¹ These skills are essential for business growth, yet they are often hard to come by through formal education, particularly in rural regions where access to financial education is limited.

As women actively engage in trade, they naturally acquire the skills necessary to manage their businesses. They learn to track expenses, profits, and losses, make pricing and discount decisions, and ensure the sustainability of their operations. For women running stalls or retail businesses in border markets, handling cash and making quick calculations becomes second nature. As their businesses expand, they gain experience with more complex financial practices, such as

⁷⁰Ibid.,

⁷¹Ibid.,

accounting, inventory management, and even tax preparation. This financial knowledge empowers women to make informed decisions about reinvesting in their businesses, diversifying their product offerings, or expanding into new markets.⁷²

For many, financial expertise gained through border trade is crucial to the success and longevity of their businesses. Women who once lacked knowledge in areas such as banking, loans, and credit are now adept at managing finances and securing credit from informal financial sources. This financial empowerment is an important step toward economic independence.

In addition to practical skills, women involved in border trade are often exposed to the fundamental elements of entrepreneurship. Many women begin in informal markets and eventually grow their businesses into established independent ventures. This process not only teaches women to manage businesses but also how to think like entrepreneurs. They learn to spot market opportunities, adapt to changing trends, and innovate in ways that provide a competitive edge.⁷³ For instance, a woman selling agricultural products may diversify her offerings or add value through packaging, processing, or delivery services. Entrepreneurship also requires women to make calculated risks, whether it's expanding their product range, entering new markets, or investing in improved equipment. These decisions require analysis, foresight, and a strong understanding of both local and international market trends. As women in border trade environments become more entrepreneurial, they develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that benefit them both personally and professionally.

As their businesses grow, many women begin to hire other women or family members, creating new jobs within their communities. This business expansion requires the development of leadership and managerial skills. Women involved in cross-border trade often find themselves supervising staff, managing conflicts, and ensuring business efficiency. These responsibilities necessitate the development of communication, leadership, and conflict resolution skills, all essential for effective

⁷² Mehta., Op.Cit

⁷³ Ibid.,

management. Although the informal nature of border trade often means that skill development happens through self-teaching or observation, women in Manipur and Mizoram have also gained access to various training programs and support networks designed to enhance their trade-related skills. These programs are often organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, and sometimes local government agencies, all recognizing the value of empowering women economically.

Several NGOs in both states have launched initiatives focused on providing skills training for women entrepreneurs. These programs cover areas such as digital literacy, financial management, marketing, and leadership.⁷⁴ By participating in these initiatives, women gain access to resources that help sharpen their entrepreneurial skills. Some programs also focus on integrating technology into border trade, teaching women to use smartphones, social media, and online platforms to market their goods or reach new customers.

Networking among women traders is another key component of skill development. Women in border trade often create informal or formal networks through which they can exchange resources, knowledge, and experiences. These networks provide opportunities to share business ideas, learn from one another's successes and challenges, and collaborate on larger ventures.⁷⁵ By connecting with other traders, women can access new markets, suppliers, and business opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach.

The educational and skill development benefits stemming from border trade have been pivotal in empowering women in Manipur and Mizoram. Through their involvement in trade, women acquire essential skills in business management, financial literacy, communication, and entrepreneurship. These abilities, developed organically through their marketplace participation, are crucial to their success as business owners and community leaders.⁷⁶ Additionally, the cross-cultural nature of border trade exposes women to new languages, customs, and opportunities, enhancing their personal and professional growth.

⁷⁴ Ibid.,

⁷⁵ Kumar & Venkatesh., Op.Cit

⁷⁶ Ibid.,

Although challenges such as limited formal education options and the informal nature of trade persist, the influence of border trade on women's skill development remains profound. As more women gain access to training programs and support systems, their involvement in border trade is likely to continue advancing their educational and economic empowerment, creating lasting positive changes for themselves, their families, and their communities.⁷⁷ Through their participation, women in Manipur and Mizoram are not only transforming their futures but also contributing to the broader social and economic progress of the region.

4.7. Perspectives of Women towards border trade

The views of women regarding border trade are influenced by a variety of economic, cultural, and social dynamics. For numerous women, engaging in cross-border trade presents a distinct opportunity to participate in commerce, granting them financial autonomy and access to markets that might otherwise be unavailable. However, this involvement frequently comes with substantial challenges, such as limited access to necessary resources, gender discrimination, and the physical and emotional strain of the trade. Despite these difficulties, many women regard border trade as an essential way to support their families, enhance social mobility, and contribute to the local economy. Nonetheless, their experiences are often overlooked, as women bear the dual responsibility of managing household duties while coping with the demands of trade. Through these varied perspectives, women's views on border trade highlight both the potential for empowerment and the ongoing obstacles that prevent their full participation in the economic arena.

⁷⁷Ibid.,

Table No.4.1. Demographic Information

Sl No	Classification	Categories	No of respondents (210)	
			Number	Percentage
1	Age Group	Below 18	25	11.90
		18-40	78	37.14
		Above 40	107	50.95
2	Marital Status	Never Married	29	13.81
		Married	101	48.10
		Widowed	63	30.00
		Separated/ Divorce	17	8.10
3	Education	Illiterate	38	18.10
		Primary School	108	51.43
		High School	34	16.19
		Higher Secondary School	18	8.57
		Graduate and above	12	5.71
4	Occupation	Trader/Businesswoman	70	33.33
		Labourer/Worker in a trade centre	97	46.19
		Government Service	12	5.71
		Entrepreneur	24	11.43
		Other	7	3.33

Source: Fieldwork(10th January, 2025).

The table above (Table 1) shows that nearly half of the respondents (50.95 per cent) are aged 40 years and above. This indicates that women involved in border trade tend to be middle-aged rather than youth. Additionally, half of the respondents (51.43 per cent) have a primary education, while only a small proportion (5.71 per

cent) hold a degree or higher qualification. This suggests that highly educated women are less likely to participate in border trade. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents (46.19 per cent) identify their primary occupation as labourers or workers in trade centres such as Moreh and Zokhawthar.

4.7.1. Economic Perspectives

Women participating in border trade is a crucial way to sustain themselves financially, enabling them to provide for their families and attain a certain level of financial freedom. In areas where formal job opportunities are scarce, many women have turned to border trade as a means to tap into new markets, engage in business ventures, and elevate their social status. However, despite the potential economic benefits, women frequently encounter considerable obstacles such as gender discrimination, limited access to funding, and the limitations imposed by informal trading settings. The economic landscape of border trade is often intricate, as women must navigate not only market demands but also regulatory challenges and societal norms. While border trade offers a space for women to engage economically, their experiences are shaped by a blend of resilience, adaptability, and a continuous effort to overcome systemic barriers in trade spaces that are predominantly male-driven.

Table No. 4.2. Economic Perspectives

Sl No	Classification	Categories	No of respondents		
			Number	Total	Percentage
1	What is your primary economic activity at the border or trade centre?	Selling goods (agriculture, textiles, electronics, etc.)	52	24.76	
		Transporting goods across the border	85	40.48	
		Producing or manufacturing goods for trade	12	5.71	
		Service-related business (e.g., accommodation, food)	61	29.05	
2	Do you think your involvement in cross-border trade has helped	Yes, significantly	108	51.43	
		Yes, to some extent	68	32.38	
		No, not much	22	10.48	

	to improve your financial stability?	Not at all	12	5.71
3	Has cross-border trade provided you with greater economic independence?	Yes, it has	102	48.57
		No, it hasn't	24	11.43
		Somewhat	73	34.76
		Not at all	11	5.24
4	How does your involvement in trade impact your household economy?	Significantly improves household income	107	50.95
		Moderately improves household income	70	33.33
		No significant impact	18	8.57
		Not at all	10	4.76

Source: Fieldwork(10th January, 2025).

The table above (Table 2) shows that nearly half of the respondents (40.48 per cent) identify transporting goods across the border as their primary economic activity at the border or trade centre. Additionally, 29.05 per cent of respondents engage in service-related businesses (e.g., accommodation, food services), while a small percentage (5.71 per cent) focus on producing or manufacturing goods for trade. Furthermore, half of the respondents (51.43 per cent) believe that their involvement in cross-border trade has contributed to improving their financial stability. In contrast, 5.71% of respondents feel that their participation in cross-border trade has not enhanced their financial situation. Moreover, nearly half of the respondents (48.57 per cent) argue that cross-border trade has provided them with greater economic independence, while only a small percentage (11.43 per cent) believe it has not. Lastly, half of the respondents (50.95 per cent) feel that their involvement in trade has had a positive impact on their household economy.

4.7.3. Social Perspectives

For women engaged in border trade, this activity presents a distinct chance to expand their social circles, establish new connections, and foster a sense of belonging within both their local communities and across borders. Yet, their involvement in this informal economy is influenced by societal expectations, with women often assigned specific roles and duties linked to their gender. Social norms can serve to both empower and limit women in these trading settings, as they balance family responsibilities, societal perceptions of women's economic roles, and the

stigma that sometimes accompanies cross-border trade. Despite these obstacles, women involved in border trade often create strong social networks that not only bolster their economic endeavours but also reinforce their social identity and sense of empowerment. These networks offer opportunities for cooperation and collective negotiation, helping women to navigate the social and economic challenges they face while simultaneously elevating their standing within their families and communities.

Table No. 4.3. Social Perspectives

Sl No	Classification	Categories	No of respondents	
			Number	Percentage
1	Do you think women in your community are generally encouraged to participate in border trade?	Yes, they are encouraged	50	23.81
		No, they face discouragement	67	31.90
		It depends on the situation	81	38.57
		No Idea	12	5.71
2	What social challenges do women face when participating in border trade?	Lack of social support (family, community)	62	29.52
		Cultural barriers to women's work outside the home	86	40.95
		Limited access to networks or social capital	13	6.19
		Gender bias and stereotypes	49	23.33
3	Do you feel women in border trade are viewed differently than men in your community?	Yes, women are respected	54	25.71
		Perception is the same	74	35.24
		Women are not respected as much	60	28.57
		No Idea	22	10.48

Source: Fieldwork(10th January, 2025).

The table above (Table 3) shows that 38.57 per cent of respondents believe that women in their community are generally encouraged to participate in border trade, depending on the situation. On the other hand, 31.90 per cent of respondents feel that women in their community face discouragement. Additionally, 40.95 per cent of respondents identify cultural barriers to women's work outside the home as the main social challenge they face when participating in border trade. Furthermore, 29.52 per cent of respondents report that a lack of social support (from family or the community) is another social challenge they encounter. Moreover, 25.71 per cent of respondents believe that there is no perceived difference between men and women in the context of border trade within their community. However, 28.57 per cent of respondents feel that women are not as respected as men in this regard. Finally, 35.24 per cent of respondents believe there is no significant difference between men and women in the border trade context.

4.7.4. Empowerment Perspectives

For many women, participating in border trade opens up opportunities for financial independence, enabling them to break free from traditional gender expectations and take charge of their economic futures. By engaging in this trade, women often gain greater control over their decision-making, improve their social position, and boost their independence both within their families and in the wider community. However, while border trade offers a route to empowerment, it also presents considerable obstacles, including restricted access to resources, gender-based discrimination, and the physical strain of the trade. Despite these hurdles, women involved in border trade display remarkable resilience, as they navigate complex socio-economic landscapes and balance the need for financial stability with their quest for personal empowerment. Their journeys in border trade symbolize a larger shift toward acknowledging and supporting women's agency, as they carve out spaces for themselves in markets that have traditionally been male-dominated.

Table No. 4.4. Empowerment Perspectives

Sl No	Classification	Categories	No of respondents	
			Number	Percentage
1	Do you believe women have equal opportunities as men in the border trade?	Yes, women and men have equal opportunities	81	38.57
		No, women face more challenges	50	23.81
		Somewhat, but women's opportunities are limited	63	30.00
		No Idea	16	7.62
2	Have you encountered any gender-based discrimination in your involvement with border trade?	Yes, frequently	48	22.86
		Sometimes	84	40.00
		No, never	64	30.48
		No Idea	14	6.67
3	Has your participation in cross-border trade contributed to your empowerment as a woman?	Yes, it has greatly empowered me	94	44.76
		Yes, to some extent	71	33.81
		No, it has not contributed significantly	35	16.67
		No Idea	10	4.76
4	Do you think that increased participation of women in cross-border trade will change the power dynamics in your community?	Yes, it will empower women and change power dynamics	89	42.38
		No, it will not change power dynamics	38	18.10
		Yes, to some extent	67	31.90
		No Idea	16	7.62

Source: Fieldwork (11th January, 2025).

The table above (Table 4) shows that 38.57 per cent of respondents believe that women have equal opportunities to men in border trade. In contrast, 30.00 per cent argue that women's opportunities are more limited compared to men's. Similarly, 40.00 per cent of respondents reported that women sometimes face gender-based discrimination in their involvement in border trade, while 30.48 per cent said they have not encountered gender-based discrimination in this context. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents (44.76 per cent) believe that participation in cross-border trade has contributed to the empowerment of women. On the other hand, 16.67 per cent feel that their participation in cross-border trade

has not contributed to women's empowerment. Additionally, almost half of the respondents (42.38 per cent) think that increased participation of women in cross-border trade will change the power dynamics in their community, while a smaller proportion (18.10 per cent) believe that such participation will not alter the community's power dynamics.

4.7.5. Future Perspectives

Women engaged in border trade view it as a means to secure improved opportunities for themselves and future generations, imagining a future where they can grow their businesses, achieve more financial independence, and challenge traditional gender norms. As border trade evolves with shifting policies, technological advancements, and changing market demands, women are increasingly focusing on how they can use these developments to their benefit, advocating for more inclusive policies and enhanced access to resources. While the future appears to hold great potential for increased empowerment, women still face the challenge of navigating uncertainties, including fluctuating trade regulations, economic volatility, and ongoing gender-related barriers. Despite these challenges, many women remain hopeful about the future, motivated by the desire for deeper involvement in the broader economy and the aspiration that their contributions will be more widely acknowledged and valued in the years to come.

Table No. 4.5. Future Perspectives

Sl No	Classification	Categories	No of respondents	
			Number	Percentage
1	What do you envision for the future of women's involvement in border trade between India and Myanmar?	Increased participation and empowerment	88	41.90
		Equal opportunities and recognition for women	69	32.86
		With little change, men will continue to dominate the trade	34	16.19
		No Idea	19	9.05
2	What are the key areas where women need more support to	Financial support (loans, grants, etc)	67	31.90
		Training and capacity building	55	26.19

	thrive in cross-border trade?	Enhanced security and protection measures	80	38.10
		Others	8	3.81
3	Would you encourage more women to get involved in border trade activities?	Yes, definitely	68	32.38
		Yes, but with caution	98	46.67
		No, it's too risky or challenging	36	17.14
		No Idea	8	3.81

Source: Fieldwork(11th January, 2025).

The table above (Table 5) indicates that 41.90 per cent of respondents believe the future of women's involvement in border trade between India and Myanmar will involve increased female participation and empowerment. In contrast, 16.19 per cent of respondents feel there will be minimal change, with men continuing to dominate the trade. Additionally, 38.10 per cent of respondents think that women will require enhanced security and protection measures to thrive in cross-border trade. Furthermore, 31.90 per cent of respondents believe women need financial support (such as loans and grants) to succeed in cross-border trade. Moreover, nearly half of the respondents (46.67 per cent) argue that more women should be encouraged to participate in border trade activities, though with caution. On the other hand, 17.14 per cent of respondents feel that it is too risky or challenging for women to engage in border trade activities.

4.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, women play an essential and dynamic role in the border trade and trade hubs between India and Myanmar, making significant contributions to local economies and influencing the social structure of these areas. Their views on border trade are influenced by both the economic opportunities it presents and the ongoing challenges they face, such as gender discrimination, restricted access to resources, and the informal nature of cross-border commerce. Despite these obstacles, many women see border trade as a path to financial independence, greater social mobility, and more control over decisions within their households and communities. Their participation in trade centres helps strengthen social connections, foster mutual assistance, and build a sense of unity among women, creating spaces for collective negotiation and empowerment. While challenges remain, the resilience

and flexibility shown by women in these border regions underline their vital role in stimulating economic growth and fostering community development. As trade relations between India and Myanmar continue to evolve, the perspectives of women will remain central in shaping the future of border trade, with growing acknowledgement of their contributions and a greater push for policies that foster equality and opportunity.

Chapter V

Challenges and Prospects of Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres

The present chapter discuss the challenges and prospects of women workers in the border trade centre of Mizoram and Manipur. This trade zones located along the border in Mizoram and Manipur hold vital importance for the economy of northeastern India, particularly concerning Myanmar. These locations serve purposes that go beyond economic transactions—they are deeply rooted in the area's geography, cultural heritage, political dynamics, and long-standing transnational relationships. Understanding these trade hubs requires viewing them as reflections of broader societal and economic patterns, not merely as marketplaces.

5.1. Introduction

In Mizoram, Zokhawthar acts as the main center for border trade. Meanwhile, Manipur's town of Moreh in the Tengenoupal area is the key point of commercial exchange. Both sites play integral roles in the framework of India's Act East initiative, designed to enhance ties—both economic and strategic—with Southeast Asian nations. Trade at these centers includes both legal and informal exchanges, often blurring the boundary between regulated and unregulated commerce. Popular traded items include areca nuts, consumer electronics, textiles, and general household goods—many of which have circulated across borders for generations, long before any official trade pacts were implemented.

The operations at these centers are strongly shaped by ethnic connections, particularly among communities such as the Chin, Mizo, and Naga, whose relationships span national boundaries. These kinship-based networks foster trust, smoothing the way for informal trading activities. However, issues such as poor infrastructure, inefficient customs and banking facilities, and instability on the Myanmar side continue to hamper the growth of formal trade systems.

Gender roles within these trade environments add another dimension of complexity. Women are key participants in the border economy, though their

presence often goes unnoticed. Unlike men, who tend to handle large-scale transport and logistics, women are more engaged in small-scale vending, cross-border carrying, and informal barter systems. Their contributions are frequently precarious and lack official recognition or protection, exposing them to various vulnerabilities such as harassment and legal ambiguity. Nevertheless, women at these trade points are far from passive. Many exhibit remarkable adaptability and entrepreneurship in response to changing markets and social shifts. In both states, women often band together through cooperatives or self-help groups, which provide them with some degree of financial independence and collective strength—even within traditionally male-dominated commercial spaces.

Despite this, societal norms and entrenched gender roles continue to limit their freedom of movement and influence in the trade hierarchy. Men are more likely to pursue high-value trading opportunities and travel longer distances, while women usually operate closer to home in lower-margin segments. The border trading hubs in Mizoram and Manipur provide a unique insight into the intersection of economy, identity, and gender in a cross-border context. They are dynamic, community-driven ecosystems where informal commerce thrives, and where women's roles, although frequently underappreciated, are essential to both the economic and social fabric of the region.

With the expansion of global and regional trade networks, border trade hubs have emerged as vital economic centres, enabling the movement of goods and services. Women are increasingly becoming key participants in these areas, taking on various roles that range from small-scale commerce to physically demanding labour. Their engagement supports household earnings, stimulates local economies, and fosters cross-border interactions. Despite their growing involvement, women in border trade zones continue to encounter multiple challenges. Cultural expectations, financial instability, and safety concerns frequently restrict their mobility and ability to negotiate fair terms.¹ Many contend with insufficient infrastructure, limited access to financial resources, and vulnerability to exploitation within informal labour

¹ Amnesty International. (2024, March). *Southern Africa: Women informal cross-border traders are facing monumental challenges*. Amnesty International. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/southern-africa-women-cross-border-traders/>

settings. Furthermore, gaps in policy implementation and weak labour rights enforcement further intensify these difficulties, making it harder for them to attain financial security and career advancement.

However, prospects for women in these economic hubs remain promising. Strengthened regional collaboration, policy improvements, and well-designed interventions could enhance their participation and overall working conditions. Strategies that encourage gender-responsive trade policies, provide skill-building opportunities, and expand access to financial assistance can equip women with the tools needed to thrive in border commerce.² Reinforcing institutional frameworks and ensuring a safer, more inclusive trading environment could significantly improve their economic standing. By tackling existing obstacles and capitalizing on emerging possibilities, women can assume a more prominent role in cross-border trade, driving both local and national economic advancement.³

5.2. Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres of Moreh

Due to its strategically significant position along the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, Moreh serves as a crucial conduit for both formal and informal economic interactions, enabling the exchange of goods, services, and individuals between India and Myanmar. Within this economic framework, women workers hold a key role, making notable contributions to the border trade sector through various activities, yet they frequently remain overlooked in terms of recognition, earnings, and working conditions.⁴ Women's involvement in border trade is not a recent development; rather, it has longstanding historical and socio-economic foundations. In Moreh, women have traditionally participated in trade-related tasks such as retailing, carrying goods, transport services, and market vending.⁵ Women from diverse ethnic groups, including Meitei, Kuki, Naga, etc., are active in Moreh's busy commercial hubs, particularly at the Namphalong market on the Myanmar side and the Moreh market on the Indian side. These traders not only facilitate

² Ibid.,

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Gairola, G., Ganguly, A. N., & Mohapatra, B. (2022). *Cross-Border Trade in Moreh, Manipur: A Study of Socio-Economic Transformation*. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Negative Results*, 13(4), 835–843.

⁵ Ibid.,

commercial transactions but also navigate intricate socio-political landscapes shaped by the region's history of ethnic tensions and security issues.

Despite their significant role in maintaining cross-border trade, women workers in Moreh encounter numerous obstacles. Informal employment arrangements, lack of social protections, gender biases, and border security measures heavily influence their working conditions. Many women engage in small-scale trade, personally transporting goods across the border, yet they often face stringent border policies and unpredictable market shifts. The unregulated nature of their work frequently excludes them from access to financial services, legal safeguards, and institutional support. Additionally, ongoing geopolitical tensions between India and Myanmar, fluctuating border regulations, and disruptions linked to insurgencies further complicate their economic activities.

Moreover, societal expectations and traditional gender norms shape women's experiences in the border trade sector. Female traders are often perceived as supplementary income earners, leading to their contributions being undervalued compared to those of men.⁶ Despite these challenges, women have managed to establish strong networks of mutual support and economic adaptability. Various organizations and women's groups in Manipur have advocated for improved working conditions, though systemic barriers persist.⁷

5.3. Challenges of Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres of Moreh

Nestled along the border in Manipur, India, Moreh functions as an essential nexus for trade between India and Myanmar. Its prime geographical position has led to an influx of merchants and labourers, with women representing a critical segment of the workforce. Despite their vital role in maintaining cross-border commerce, these women encounter a range of obstacles that adversely affect both their financial stability and social progress. The following discussion examines the multifaceted challenges—spanning economic, social, security, and health domains—that female workers in Moreh's border trade areas face.

⁶ Lalpekhui, C. (2018). *Participation of Women in Border-Trade in Indo-Myanmar Borderland*. *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 8(1), 127–134.

⁷ Ibid.,

5.3.1. Low Wages and Income Instability

This bustling trade hub sees a high level of participation from women, who play a crucial role in sustaining commercial activities. Despite their indispensable contributions to trade, these women encounter various difficulties, with meagre earnings and financial instability being among the most significant concerns. The unpredictable nature of their work, economic uncertainties, and the regulatory measures governing cross-border transactions collectively contribute to their precarious financial circumstances.⁸ In Moreh, many women engage in small-scale enterprises, daily wage work, or informal trading.⁹ A large number operate roadside stalls, sell items procured from across the border, or assist in transporting and exchanging goods. For many of these women, their earnings are the primary source of financial support for their families, making their income vital for household survival. However, fluctuations in earnings are common due to shifting trade policies, changes in currency values, and government-imposed limitations.

One of the key factors behind the low wages in Moreh's border economy is the informal structure of employment.¹⁰ Many women work without official contracts or stable job arrangements, exposing them to wage exploitation. Business owners and traders, aware of the surplus labour supply, often impose low pay rates, knowing that workers lack the means to negotiate better terms.¹¹ The absence of labour unions or organized advocacy groups worsens the situation, as there are few channels through which women can push for fair wages or improved working conditions. Financial unpredictability remains a persistent issue for women working in Moreh.¹² The ever-changing dynamics of border trade result in unstable earnings. Commercial exchanges between India and Myanmar are frequently influenced by political developments, policy adjustments, and security concerns. Temporary trade suspensions, restrictions on particular products, and sudden regulatory shifts can cause a sharp decline in trade volumes, directly affecting the livelihoods of women in

⁸ Ibid.,

⁹ Nengkhohoi Baite (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th January, 2025.

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ Lalpekhlui, Op.Cit

¹² Nengboiching (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025.

the sector.¹³ When trade slows or comes to a standstill, many women find themselves without alternative income sources, exacerbating their financial struggles.

Another major challenge stems from currency fluctuations. Since trade activities in Moreh involve multiple currencies, including the Indian rupee, Myanmar kyat, and sometimes the US dollar, changes in exchange rates can significantly impact earnings.¹⁴ A depreciation in the Myanmar kyat, for instance, can lead to reduced profits for those dealing in Burmese products, which in turn affects the wages of those involved in their handling and sale.¹⁵ This financial uncertainty makes it difficult for women to plan, accumulate savings, or invest in opportunities for economic advancement.

5.3.2. Lack of Financial Support

The persistent shortage of financial assistance also remains a major obstacle, limiting opportunities for business growth, stable earnings, and overall economic independence.¹⁶ Access to financial resources plays a crucial role in determining entrepreneurial success, yet a large number of women in Moreh encounter difficulties when seeking loans or credit from banks and other financial providers.¹⁷ This challenge arises due to several interrelated issues, such as the absence of collateral, limited knowledge of financial services, and complex bureaucratic procedures that disproportionately impact women. Unlike men, many women engaged in border trade do not own fixed assets like land or property, which are often essential for securing bank loans.¹⁸

In societies where inheritance laws typically favour men, women are left without legally recognized properties, making it significantly harder to access financial support. Even in cases where they do hold assets, complications with documentation and family-related constraints further limit their ability to use these

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ Nengkhohoi .,Op.Cit.

¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶ Lalpekhui.,Op.Cit

¹⁷ Nengboiching.,Op.Cit.

¹⁸ Lamneihei (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025.

assets as leverage for credit.¹⁹ Beyond collateral-related concerns, a substantial number of women traders face financial illiteracy, preventing them from taking advantage of credit programs, government financial aid, and microfinance opportunities.²⁰ Many of these women come from economically weaker backgrounds with limited exposure to formal education, making it difficult for them to navigate banking systems. The extensive paperwork involved in loan applications—submitting forms, providing identification, and meeting regulatory standards—often discourages them from applying. Financial institutions tend to view these women as high-risk borrowers due to their lack of formal financial records, fluctuating incomes, and insufficient employment history, making banks hesitant to lend to them.²¹

Inefficiencies in administrative processes further hinder women traders in Moreh from obtaining financial support.²² Even when credit options exist, the prolonged approval timelines, excessive documentation requirements, and unclear selection criteria create barriers. Additionally, subtle gender biases within financial institutions often lead to preferential treatment for male traders. Language barriers further complicate matters, as many women traders belong to indigenous or ethnic minority communities and may not be fluent in the official language used by financial institutions, making it harder to access necessary information or complete applications correctly.²³ Due to these financial constraints, many women involved in trade in Moreh are forced to turn to informal credit sources, such as local lenders or community-based financing networks.²⁴ While these alternatives provide faster access to funds, they usually come with steep interest rates, trapping women in cycles of debt. The high borrowing costs from these informal channels erode profit margins and lead to long-term financial instability. Without affordable credit, women struggle to scale up their businesses, invest in quality goods, or withstand market

¹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ Nengboiching, Op.Cit.

²² Ibid.,

²³ Hatneikim Mate (Workers at Moreh border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025.

²⁴ Ibid.,

fluctuations, reinforcing their financial vulnerability and dependence on small-scale trading.²⁵

The consequences of limited financial access extend beyond business challenges. Women who cannot secure stable funding often face greater economic insecurity, increasing their exposure to exploitative labour practices. Many of them undertake physically demanding work under precarious conditions, lacking formal contracts or social security benefits. Their financial instability also affects their families, as a significant number of women in Moreh's trade sector serve as primary income earners, supporting children, elderly relatives, or other dependents.²⁶ Without adequate financial support, they struggle to afford essential services such as education, healthcare, and daily necessities for their families. To address these financial barriers, targeted efforts from both government bodies and financial institutions are necessary.

Financial products tailored specifically for women traders, featuring flexible collateral conditions and streamlined loan application processes, are crucial. Expanding microfinance programs, improving financial literacy training, and establishing women-friendly banking services can help close the financial gap.²⁷ Additionally, policies that encourage gender-inclusive economic participation—such as grants and subsidies for female entrepreneurs—can ease financial pressures and promote business growth.²⁸ Breaking down these financial barriers is not only an economic priority but also a critical step toward fostering gender equality and broader social inclusion. Ensuring that women traders have equitable access to financial resources will empower them to achieve financial independence while also contributing to regional economic development, fostering a more resilient and inclusive trade environment.

²⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶ Lamneihoi .,Op.Cit

²⁷ Ibid.,

²⁸ Hatneikim Mate.,Op.Cit

5.3.3. Competitions with larger Traders

Women engaged in trade at Moreh usually operate on a modest scale, dealing in goods such as fabrics, edible items, beauty products, and everyday household essentials. Many of them step into this sector out of economic necessity, often serving as the primary earners in their families.²⁹ However, despite their perseverance and resourcefulness, they face stiff competition from larger merchants who can bring in bulk shipments, securing favourable trade terms, and exert considerable influence over pricing. The strong presence of these financially well-positioned entities reshapes the business landscape, leaving small-scale women traders at a disadvantage.³⁰ A major hurdle for these women is securing financial resources. Wealthier traders, often backed by substantial capital or institutional funding, can afford to stockpile products, adjust prices flexibly, and even offer credit to customers, solidifying their market dominance. Women traders, in contrast, frequently depend on personal savings or high-interest microloans, restricting their ability to buy in large quantities and stay competitive; this financial limitation prevents them from expanding their enterprises and often forces them to operate within extremely tight profit margins.³¹

Additionally, access to well-established trade networks presents another obstacle. Larger businesses maintain strong relationships with suppliers, wholesalers, and even regulatory bodies, allowing them to navigate bureaucratic procedures smoothly and gain preferential treatment in cross-border trade.³² In contrast, women traders—lacking these strategic connections—frequently encounter delays due to regulatory red tape.³³ Furthermore, logistical advantages such as transportation and storage solutions remain more accessible to well-financed traders who can afford bulk shipments and secure warehouse space, while smaller traders struggle with limited mobility and inventory management. Price competition further intensifies their struggles. Bigger traders benefit from economies of scale, reducing their per-

²⁹ Ibid.,

³⁰ Ibid.,

³¹ Tingneivah Mate (Workers at Moreh border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th January, 2025.

³² Ibid.,

³³ Ibid.,

unit costs and enabling them to sell goods at rates smaller traders cannot afford to match. Women traders, constrained by lower purchasing power, cannot afford to significantly lower their prices without suffering financial losses.³⁴ As a result, they are often pushed to the fringes of the market, catering to niche consumer bases or relying on local buyers with fluctuating purchasing power.

Another key challenge lies in the informal nature of their enterprises. Many of these women run unregistered businesses, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by market forces and local authorities.³⁵ Without formal recognition or legal protections, they are exposed to arbitrary taxation, extortion, and other forms of harassment from officials and competitors.³⁶ Meanwhile, larger businesses, which operate within formalized frameworks, can interact with policymakers and regulators in ways that smaller traders cannot.

5.3.4. Gender Discrimination and Patriarchal Constraints

A significant hurdle faced by women engaged in trade within Moreh's border markets is the prevalence of gender-based barriers. Women frequently encounter difficulties in accessing profitable business opportunities, as key trade networks and high-value commodities are largely controlled by men. This dominance limits women's ability to access financial resources and participate in crucial decision-making processes. With restricted financial autonomy, many women are compelled to operate as small-scale vendors or take on low-paying roles such as packaging, loading, and informal retail activities.³⁷ These jobs often offer little stability, making it challenging for women to achieve long-term financial security. Additionally, women traders in Moreh struggle to obtain credit and essential financial services. Many lack independent financial records or property ownership, which prevents them from securing loans to grow their businesses.³⁸ Traditional banking institutions tend to prioritize male traders who possess collateral and well-established networks,

³⁴ Hatneikim Mate.,Op.Cit

³⁵ Ibid.,

³⁶ Tingneivah Mate.,Op.Cit

³⁷ NengrovahKipgen (Residents of Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th January, 2025.

³⁸ Ibid.,

leaving women reliant on informal lending systems that charge steep interest rates.³⁹ This cycle of financial exclusion only deepens their economic hardships.

Deep-seated societal norms further restrict women's participation in the trade sector. Decision-making spaces, including market committees and trade organizations, are largely male-dominated, leaving women with minimal influence over policies that shape their livelihoods.⁴⁰ Women traders are frequently sidelined in discussions regarding trade policies, market regulations, and resource allocation, making them vulnerable to exploitation by intermediaries and regulatory authorities. The lack of female representation in formal trade bodies weakens their ability to advocate for equitable wages, improved working conditions, and protection against workplace harassment.⁴¹ Cultural expectations surrounding women's roles also impose constraints on their economic independence. Many women must juggle household responsibilities alongside their trade activities, which limits the time they can dedicate to business expansion.⁴² Unlike men, who have the freedom to travel across the border to seek new trade prospects, women often face restrictions from their families or communities, reinforcing gender-based disparities in economic opportunities.⁴³ This limited mobility reduces their chances of establishing business networks, negotiating favourable deals, and staying informed about shifting market trends.

Harassment and gender-based violence present further challenges for women working in Moreh's trade hubs.⁴⁴ The absence of institutional safeguards to address such abuses discourages women from actively engaging in trade. In some cases, corrupt practices disproportionately affect women, as they are forced to comply with unfair demands or pay additional unofficial fees to secure business permits and market access.⁴⁵ These systemic obstacles create an even more challenging business environment for female traders. Beyond socio-economic and structural hurdles,

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Hatneikim Mate.,Op.Cit

⁴¹ Ibid.,

⁴² Tingneivah Mate.,Op.Cit

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ NengrovahKipgen.,Op.Cit

⁴⁵ Ibid.,

women traders in Moreh contend with inadequate infrastructure that hampers their ability to conduct business efficiently.⁴⁶ Insufficient market facilities, lack of sanitation, and inadequate storage spaces pose significant difficulties, particularly for women who spend extended hours in these environments. The absence of safe working spaces increases their exposure to risks such as theft, exploitation, and health hazards. Additionally, unpredictable border regulations and shifting trade policies create instability, making it difficult for women to achieve long-term business sustainability.⁴⁷

5.3.5. Border Instability and Conflict

Moreh has long been a border town marked by volatility, frequently witnessing tensions and unrest linked to insurgency. Ethnic divisions, military interventions, and territorial disputes contribute to the fragile security situation. Such instability significantly impacts women involved in cross-border commerce.⁴⁸ Whenever conflicts intensify, trading activities often come to a halt, causing severe economic strain on those dependent on daily transactions. Women, many of whom sustain themselves through small-scale vending or daily wage labour, face immediate financial difficulties due to abrupt disruptions in trade.⁴⁹ Unlike men, who may have alternative income sources or connections to political networks that provide financial support, women often find themselves without a safety net. The heavy militarization of Moreh adds another layer of hardship, as the presence of armed personnel, insurgent factions, and numerous security checkpoints fosters an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear.⁵⁰

Apart from the external challenges posed by insurgency and border-related disputes, women engaged in trade in Moreh also face deeply rooted societal norms that limit their economic autonomy.⁵¹ In many cases, men dominate leadership positions in trade associations, negotiations, and decision-making bodies, leaving

⁴⁶ Ibid.,

⁴⁷ Hatneikim Mate., Op.Cit

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

⁴⁹ Touthang (Workers at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

⁵⁰ Ibid.,

⁵¹ Ibid.,

women sidelined from formal economic structures. Even when actively involved in commerce, their contributions often go unrecognized, and they are typically confined to less influential roles such as vending, loading goods, or engaging in informal transactions.⁵² This exclusion from decision-making leaves them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, including unfair pricing, restricted access to financial resources, and coercion by male-dominated trade groups.⁵³ Additionally, cultural expectations regarding domestic responsibilities compel women to juggle household duties alongside their economic pursuits. Childcare, elder care, and household management disproportionately fall on their shoulders, leaving them with limited opportunities to expand their business endeavours.⁵⁴

Beyond these structural challenges, women engaged in border trade in Moreh encounter practical difficulties related to infrastructure, market access, and financial support. Poor transportation systems, unpredictable border policies, and the lack of proper storage facilities pose significant obstacles, particularly for small-scale female traders operating with minimal resources.⁵⁵ Frequent border closures due to security threats or diplomatic issues between India and Myanmar further intensify these struggles, often leading to sudden financial losses. Many women lack financial literacy and have limited access to formal credit institutions, forcing them to depend on informal money lenders who charge extremely high interest rates.⁵⁶ Additionally, the absence of financial initiatives designed specifically to support women traders restricts their capacity to scale up their businesses or invest in improved trade facilities.

5.3.5. Lack of Legal Protection

One of the most serious challenges faced by women engaged in trade activities in Moreh's commercial hubs is the widespread prevalence of exploitative labour conditions. A significant number of these women are employed in informal settings where traders or employers establish working terms without any contractual

⁵²NengrovahKipgen.,Op.Cit

⁵³ Ibid.,

⁵⁴NeichongGuite (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th January, 2025.

⁵⁵ Ibid.,

⁵⁶ Ibid.,

guarantees.⁵⁷ The lack of legal protections leaves them vulnerable to inconsistent wages, excessive work hours, and hazardous conditions.⁵⁸ Since their employment falls outside the scope of labour regulations, they are denied essential benefits such as maternity leave, healthcare assistance, and minimum wage entitlements.⁵⁹

Despite their substantial contributions to commerce, their work remains largely unrecognized, and the absence of concrete policies only deepens their marginalization. Given Moreh's status as a border town with a strong presence of security personnel, merchants, and individuals involved in illicit trade, women are particularly susceptible to threats and coercion.⁶⁰ Fear of repercussions often deters them from seeking justice. Additionally, the absence of gender-sensitive law enforcement mechanisms means that complaints, when made, are frequently disregarded. The presence of multiple regulatory bodies—ranging from local law enforcement to customs and border security—creates confusion over jurisdiction, further complicating efforts to secure justice for those facing mistreatment.⁶¹

Economic hardship forces many to enter informal trading arrangements without a full understanding of the risks. Trafficking networks exploit this vulnerability, offering deceptive assurances of steady employment or profitable trade ventures, only to entrap women in abusive conditions. The border's porous nature facilitates such activities, allowing them to continue largely unchecked.⁶² Despite legal frameworks and international agreements designed to combat trafficking, enforcement remains ineffective. Corruption and weak coordination between authorities on both sides of the border further hinder efforts to address the problem.⁶³ Women who become victims of trafficking frequently find themselves without any legal support, as they lack documentation or formal recognition as workers.

Unfair financial practices also significantly impact women traders, extending beyond workplace exploitation into business transactions. Many depend on informal

⁵⁷ LhingboithemLhouvum (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

⁵⁸ Ibid.,

⁵⁹ Ibid.,

⁶⁰ NeichongGuite

⁶¹ Ibid.,

⁶² LhingboithemLhouvum., Op.Cit

⁶³ Ibid.,

lending systems to sustain their trade, as official banking services are either inaccessible or too complex due to bureaucratic obstacles.⁶⁴ Exploitative lenders and intermediaries take advantage of their situation by offering loans with excessive interest rates, keeping them trapped in debt cycles. The absence of financial education programs and institutional support makes it difficult for these women to escape predatory lending arrangements.⁶⁵ Furthermore, because many operate without formal business registration, they are excluded from government aid programs or economic relief measures that could provide stability.

5.3.6. Poor Working Conditions

Women engaged in Moreh's border trade frequently operate in cramped and unsanitary conditions that pose risks to their safety. The infrastructure supporting these trade hubs is far from adequate, with market areas that are poorly maintained and lacking fundamental amenities such as proper air circulation, access to clean water, and necessary sanitation.⁶⁶ Many of these workers carry out their tasks in tightly packed stalls or exposed spaces, offering little to no shelter from extreme weather conditions like intense heat and heavy downpours. Prolonged exposure to such elements not only impacts their well-being but also diminishes their overall efficiency.⁶⁷

Moreover, the limited workspace is often cluttered with goods, restricting movement and heightening the likelihood of accidents. In such overcrowded settings, workers frequently face risks such as tripping over misplaced items or sustaining injuries due to the disorganized arrangement of merchandise.⁶⁸ The absence of adequate safety protocols further intensifies these hazards, leaving women particularly vulnerable to workplace dangers. Additionally, poor hygiene in these trading areas fosters the spread of illnesses.⁶⁹ With insufficient access to clean drinking water and sanitary facilities, many workers endure long hours without basic

⁶⁴NeihhoiBaite (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th January, 2025

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

⁶⁶Hatkim (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

⁶⁷ Ibid.,

⁶⁸ Ibid.,

⁶⁹NeihhoiBaite.,Op.Cit

hygiene provisions, significantly raising their susceptibility to infections and health complications.

5.4. Prospects of Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres of Moreh

Moreh has transformed into a vibrant commercial hub, driving substantial economic interactions. The trade centres at the border serve as key facilitators of business, operating through both regulated and unregulated trade channels. Within this economic framework, women workers have become an indispensable part of the workforce. Understanding their roles, the obstacles they face, and their opportunities are essential, particularly in the broader discourse of regional economic expansion and gender inclusivity.

Women engaged in Moreh's trade sector take on diverse responsibilities, from managing small retail enterprises to performing physically demanding tasks like handling cargo, sorting, and packaging merchandise.⁷⁰ Many are also active in the service industry, operating tea stalls, eateries, and lodging facilities that accommodate traders and visitors. Furthermore, women significantly contribute to informal trade networks, often bridging the gap between local vendors and cross-border merchants from Myanmar.⁷¹

Although their role is vital, women's involvement frequently goes unrecognized due to systemic barriers such as limited acknowledgement, insufficient policy measures, and unequal access to economic advantages. Nevertheless, evolving economic strategies and regional trade collaborations present new possibilities for integrating women workers more effectively into Moreh's border trade environment.

5.4.1. Government Initiatives and Trade Agreements

Government initiatives, including regional outreach strategies and cross-border trade agreements between India and Myanmar, have played a crucial role in boosting economic activity in Moreh. These measures have created new avenues for both women entrepreneurs and labourers, contributing to local development. The

⁷⁰ S. Bhattacharjee. (2019). *Women workers in the border trade centres of Moreh: Gender dynamics and economic empowerment*. Journal of International Border Studies, 14(2), 112–131.

⁷¹ Ibid.,

Indian government introduced a strategic policy aimed at strengthening commercial and cultural ties with Southeast Asian nations.⁷² This initiative has led to the expansion of trade hubs like Moreh, enhancing infrastructure, improving transportation networks, and encouraging cross-border commerce.

Consequently, fresh employment opportunities have emerged, particularly for women in sectors such as retail, hospitality, and logistics. More women in Moreh are now engaging in small-scale trade, dealing in textiles, handicrafts, and consumer goods sourced from Myanmar. Such enterprises have become a vital source of income, fostering financial independence and enabling women to take on more active roles in both family decision-making and community affairs.⁷³

A major factor driving women's increased participation in border trade is the government's focus on simplifying and regulating trade mechanisms. Agreements between India and Myanmar have facilitated smoother business operations by reducing bureaucratic obstacles and enhancing ease of trade.⁷⁴ More efficient customs procedures, upgraded market infrastructure, and access to financial support have empowered women traders to scale their businesses with greater confidence. Additionally, the establishment of self-help groups and cooperative networks has encouraged collective economic engagement, providing women with resources, skill-building opportunities, and improved market access.⁷⁵

Despite these advancements, women in Moreh continue to encounter significant hurdles. Limited access to financial assistance, insufficient awareness of available government programs, and cultural constraints often restrict their full participation in trade. The lack of strong financial support structures makes business expansion difficult, preventing women from entering larger trade ventures. Moreover, security issues and periodic border disruptions impact commerce, posing risks to those who rely on daily transactions for their livelihood.⁷⁶ Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from government bodies and civil society

⁷² Ibid.,

⁷³ NeihlingHaokip (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

⁷⁴ S. Bhattacharjee.,Op.Cit

⁷⁵ Ibid.,

⁷⁶ NeihlingHaokip .,Op.Cit

organizations to ensure that women traders receive the necessary training, financial aid, and policy support.

To further improve opportunities for women in Moreh's trade sector, targeted strategies focused on skill development, financial accessibility, and capacity enhancement are essential. Government-backed microfinance schemes, training on trade regulations, and infrastructural advancements can significantly bolster women's involvement in economic activities.⁷⁷ Additionally, fostering direct collaborations between women entrepreneurs from India and Myanmar can contribute to a more resilient and inclusive trade environment.⁷⁸ Moreh's economic landscape is evolving, shaped by trade agreements and broader regional policies. These initiatives have opened new pathways for women to engage in business and commerce. Although challenges persist, a well-structured policy framework combined with strategic interventions can enhance women's role in border trade, leading to broader economic inclusion and regional prosperity.

5.4.2. Rise of Women-led Cooperatives and Self-Help Groups

Over time, commercial activities in Moreh have undergone significant changes, creating valuable economic prospects for diverse groups. Among these, women workers have increasingly taken on pivotal roles, utilizing cooperative networks and self-help groups (SHGs) to navigate financial and societal challenges. The emergence of women-led trade organizations in Moreh reflects a notable transformation in gender dynamics within the region's commercial environment, strengthening their negotiating power, access to financial resources, and overall influence in trade-related activities.⁷⁹

Although female participation in cross-border trade is not a new occurrence, their roles have traditionally been restricted to supporting functions within informal sectors, often overshadowed by male-dominated business structures. However, the growth of cooperative groups and SHGs has empowered women to secure a stronger

⁷⁷ S. Bhattacharjee.,Op.Cit

⁷⁸ Ibid.,

⁷⁹ Hoineivah (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

foothold as key economic contributors.⁸⁰ These collectives serve as crucial platforms where women can consolidate financial resources, mitigate risks, and negotiate improved trade conditions with suppliers, brokers, and financial institutions. More importantly, these groups foster unity and mutual support, establishing a foundation that encourages entrepreneurship among women traders who would otherwise struggle to compete in complex and often exploitative market conditions.⁸¹ A key advantage of women-led trade cooperatives in Moreh lies in their enhanced ability to negotiate favourable trade terms.

Historically, individual female traders encountered difficulties in setting competitive prices, gaining access to wholesale markets, and managing transportation costs. Large-scale traders and intermediaries often dictated unfavourable terms, leaving small-scale women entrepreneurs in vulnerable financial positions.⁸² Through collective action, however, women traders have gained leverage, enabling them to arrange bulk purchasing, optimize distribution channels, and establish fair pricing structures.⁸³ This collective approach has significantly increased their earnings and reduced dependency on intermediaries who previously exploited their financial constraints.

Another important aspect of these women-driven trade groups is their capacity to provide shared resources that alleviate operational difficulties. Many female traders in Moreh face barriers such as inadequate access to storage facilities, transport logistics, and credit—key elements for sustaining a viable trading business. Cooperatives and SHGs help overcome these challenges by pooling financial and logistical resources, allowing members to invest in joint storage units, arrange cost-effective transport, and initiate collective business ventures.⁸⁴ These efforts minimize individual overhead costs and enhance business expansion opportunities. Additionally, these networks facilitate knowledge-sharing and informal training in

⁸⁰ Ibid.,

⁸¹ Ibid.,

⁸² NeihlingHaokip .,Op.Cit

⁸³ Ibid.,

⁸⁴ Hoineivah.,Op.Cit

financial literacy, market analysis, and business strategies, further equipping women traders with essential skills to thrive in competitive trade environments.

Beyond economic empowerment, the influence of women-led cooperatives and SHGs has contributed to a broader social transformation in Moreh.⁸⁵ Women who were previously confined to domestic responsibilities are now gaining recognition as business leaders and decision-makers in the commercial sector. The visibility of successful female traders has inspired younger generations to view entrepreneurship as a viable career option, challenging traditional gender roles.⁸⁶ Additionally, these collectives provide a platform for women to address social issues such as workplace discrimination, domestic violence, and healthcare access, reinforcing the connection between economic empowerment and social progress.

As policymakers and development organizations increasingly acknowledge the transformative role of women in trade, efforts are being made to institutionalize and strengthen women-led cooperatives and SHGs in Moreh. Initiatives focused on improving access to credit, offering skill development programs, and enhancing infrastructure support for women traders can further reinforce their contributions to the region's economy.⁸⁷

Additionally, integrating gender-inclusive policies into cross-border trade agreements will be crucial in ensuring that women's economic roles receive proper recognition and support.⁸⁸ The growth of women-led trade collectives in Moreh's border economy is part of a wider movement toward female economic empowerment in frontier markets. By harnessing collective bargaining power, financial accessibility, and shared resources, women are not only transforming their livelihoods but also contributing to the broader socio-economic progress of the region. The continued success of these trade networks will pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable commercial landscape in Moreh and beyond.

⁸⁵ Nemchin (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

⁸⁶ Ibid.,

⁸⁷ Ibid.,

⁸⁸ Hoineivah., Op.Cit

5.4.3. Skill Development Programs

To ensure that women become active participants in the trade economy and benefit from new opportunities, various government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have introduced specialized training programs.⁸⁹ These initiatives are designed to equip women with essential skills that enable them to engage more effectively in trade, improve their financial management abilities, and develop their entrepreneurial potential. In Moreh, trade is largely driven by informal economic activities, where women play a crucial role as shop owners, market vendors, and cross-border traders.

Many of these women come from ethnic backgrounds with a long history of small-scale commerce. Despite their significant involvement, they often encounter obstacles related to managing finances, understanding legal procedures, and gaining access to broader markets. To address these challenges, structured training programs have been implemented, offering guidance on navigating the complexities of the trading sector. Government-led initiatives, particularly under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), have launched targeted programs for women engaged in border trade.⁹⁰ These training modules cover essential business aspects such as bookkeeping, taxation, digital transactions, and marketing techniques. By acquiring these skills, women traders can maintain accurate financial records, manage their stock more efficiently, and transition to modern payment methods, ultimately improving their business efficiency and profitability.⁹¹

Additionally, NGOs operating in Moreh have taken an active role in conducting grassroots training tailored to the needs of women traders. Organizations like the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and local women's cooperatives have introduced workshops focused on negotiation tactics, supply chain coordination, and product diversification.⁹² Many of these programs highlight the

⁸⁹ JalomTouthang (Workers at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

⁹⁰ M.Chingkhamsang & D. Moirangthem. (2017). *Women at the crossroads: The changing landscape of border trade in Moreh*. Asian Journal of Gender Studies, 5(4), 350–367.

⁹¹ Ibid.,

⁹² Ibid.,

importance of networking, encouraging women to collaborate and establish cooperative business models to strengthen their collective bargaining power. One of the most notable impacts of these training programs is in fostering entrepreneurship.

Many women engaged in cross-border trade begin as small-scale merchants with limited business expansion knowledge. To bridge this gap, specialized training has been introduced to provide insights into product sourcing, logistics management, and securing financial support. Women are also guided on how to access government-backed financial assistance programs such as the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), which provides micro-entrepreneurs with credit facilities.⁹³ The ability to secure funding plays a vital role in helping women expand their businesses beyond subsistence-level trade.

Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives emphasize the importance of modern trade practices, including digital transactions and e-commerce. With commerce becoming increasingly digitized, women who previously relied on cash dealings are now being trained to utilize online banking, mobile payment apps, and digital marketplaces.⁹⁴ This transition not only enhances transaction security but also broadens their customer reach, enabling them to engage in digital cross-border trade. Financial literacy is another crucial component of these training programs.

Many women traders in Moreh have limited access to formal banking institutions and often depend on informal lending sources with high-interest rates.⁹⁵ To address this issue, training sessions focus on educating women about savings, investment strategies, and credit management. By becoming familiar with formal financial services, women can access lower-interest loans and move towards greater economic independence. Several NGOs have also partnered with banks to facilitate access to financial products, ensuring that women benefit from schemes aimed at supporting small enterprises.⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibid.,

⁹⁴ NeneihHaokip (Workers at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th January, 2025

⁹⁵ Ibid.,

⁹⁶ Ibid.,

Beyond business skills, these initiatives also cover legal awareness and regulatory aspects of cross-border trade. Given Moreh's strategic role in international commerce, women traders must be well-versed in the trade policies governing transactions between India and Myanmar. Training sessions include topics such as customs procedures, tariff structures, and trade agreements, helping women conduct business within legal frameworks while protecting them from potential exploitation.⁹⁷ Moreover, women are informed about their rights as entrepreneurs and workers, empowering them to challenge unfair trade practices and discrimination.

Skill development programs have played a pivotal role in enhancing the capabilities of women traders in Moreh's border economy. By providing training in financial management, entrepreneurship, and legal frameworks, these initiatives have empowered women to participate more actively in the trade sector.⁹⁸ However, continued efforts are required to address existing barriers and ensure that women can fully capitalize on emerging economic opportunities. With ongoing support from the government, NGOs, and international organizations, the role of women in Moreh's border trade is expected to grow, contributing to broader economic progress and gender inclusivity in the region.⁹⁹

5.4.4. Improved Infrastructure and Policy Advocacy

In recent times, continuous efforts to enhance trade-related facilities—such as transportation networks, storage spaces, and financial services—combined with initiatives pushing for policy modifications, have created fresh opportunities for women to engage in cross-border commerce. A key element shaping women's participation in this sector is the quality of infrastructure. Strengthened connectivity between Moreh and other commercial hubs, both within India and across the border

⁹⁷ Teresa Mate (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th January, 2025

⁹⁸ Ibid.,

⁹⁹ D.L.Devi. (2016). *Emergence of women in the trade markets of Moreh: Challenges and opportunities* (Master's thesis). Manipur University.

in Myanmar, has directly influenced the accessibility and efficiency of trade routes.¹⁰⁰

Authorities have launched multiple projects aimed at modernizing roadways, leading to smoother transit and fewer logistical obstacles. Well-maintained roads allow women traders—many of whom operate small-scale retail businesses—to transport goods with greater ease, lessening their reliance on intermediaries.¹⁰¹ Additionally, the development of storage facilities has provided safer, more organized environments for merchandise. Women entrepreneurs, often facing security risks when handling perishable or high-value items, significantly benefit from these structured trading spaces.¹⁰²

Another critical aspect of infrastructure advancement is the broadening of banking and financial services. Traditionally, female traders in border markets like Moreh have depended on informal moneylenders, who often impose high interest rates and unfavourable terms.¹⁰³ The establishment of official banking institutions, digital financial systems, and microcredit opportunities has granted women greater financial autonomy in trade. Easier access to loans and improved transaction methods have enabled them to scale their businesses, shifting from small-scale informal trading to structured, sustainable enterprises.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, financial education programs and campaigns promoting digital transactions have equipped women with the knowledge needed to navigate modern financial systems, further strengthening their role in commerce.¹⁰⁵

Policy-driven initiatives have also played a vital role in increasing women's participation in trade.¹⁰⁶ Over the years, various stakeholders—including governmental organizations, NGOs, and international trade bodies—have worked to

¹⁰⁰ K.Haokip. (2022). *Intersectionality and labor: Women's experiences in Moreh's border trade*. Gender, Work & Organization, 29(2), 134–152.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,

¹⁰² D.L.Devi.,Op.Cit

¹⁰³ R.Kiyam, & L. Nongthombam. (2018). *Socio-economic transformation in Moreh: The impact of border trade on women workers*. Manipur Studies Review, 10(1), 45–67.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁵ Teresa.,Op.Cit

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,

implement policies that address gender-specific challenges in cross-border commerce. These initiatives have aimed at simplifying bureaucratic processes, minimizing the burden of documentation, and creating women-friendly workspaces in trading hubs.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, policy reforms have sought to ensure that female traders gain representation in trade unions and decision-making platforms.¹⁰⁸ By advocating for their inclusion in policy dialogues, these efforts have contributed to a more equitable business landscape.

Furthermore, trade facilitation measures—such as streamlined customs procedures and reduced tariffs on commonly traded goods—have encouraged more women to participate in commerce. A significant number of female traders in Moreh specialize in textiles, handicrafts, agricultural produce, and consumer goods.¹⁰⁹ By lowering tax burdens and offering preferential treatment for these commodities, policymakers have helped make their businesses more competitive and financially viable. Moreover, training programs focused on entrepreneurship, capacity-building, and market expansion have equipped women with the necessary skills to strengthen their trade networks and explore new commercial opportunities.¹¹⁰

Looking ahead, the future appears optimistic for women involved in Moreh's border trade sector. With ongoing infrastructure investments, expanded financial access, and proactive policy interventions, female traders are set to play a more prominent role in shaping the region's economic dynamics. Sustaining this momentum requires a collaborative effort among government institutions, local communities, and global stakeholders.¹¹¹ By fostering a supportive ecosystem for women in trade, Moreh has the potential to become a model for inclusive economic growth in border regions across South Asia. Ultimately, enhancing women's participation in commerce not only improves their economic well-being but also contributes to broader regional prosperity and gender equity in trade.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁸ R.Kiyam, & L. Nongthombam., Op.Cit

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,

¹¹⁰ SonkimVaiphei (Traders at Moreh) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th january, 2025

¹¹¹ Ibid.,

5.5. Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres of Zokhawthar, Mizoram

The Zokhawthar border trade centre in Mizoram, positioned along the India-Myanmar frontier, has developed into a key point for economic transactions. Following the enforcement of the India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement, commercial activities in Zokhawthar have expanded considerably, generating job opportunities for a wide array of workers.¹¹² Among them, women have played a vital role in influencing the economic dynamics of the area. However, their involvement in cross-border trade comes with both economic prospects and social challenges. Women participating in trade activities at Zokhawthar engage in multiple roles, including small-scale commerce, goods transportation, running tea stalls, working as carriers, and managing retail outlets.¹¹³ Many women entrepreneurs operate in the unregulated sector, dealing in textiles, groceries, and other daily necessities. Their contributions have been instrumental in boosting family earnings and supporting the region's economic expansion.¹¹⁴

A large share of trade in Zokhawthar takes place outside formal channels, with women frequently conducting business without official regulation. Acting as intermediaries between local markets and Myanmar-based traders, these women facilitate the movement of goods such as betel nuts, fabrics, and processed food items.¹¹⁵ Despite their pivotal role in trade, their economic contributions often go undocumented in official records. Beyond trading, women are also involved in strenuous activities like carrying goods across the border.¹¹⁶ Many transport merchandise on foot, especially in areas where transport infrastructure is lacking. Although this type of labour is essential for maintaining trade operations, it also exposes women to physical strain, health concerns, and financial instability.

¹¹²D.Choudhury, & S. Das. (2021). *Women and cross-border trade: A study of the impact on women workers in North-East India*. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(2), 145-159.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1859273>

¹¹³ Ibid.,

¹¹⁴K.Thangliana. (2022). *Policy implications for enhancing women's participation in border trade: Perspectives from Mizoram*. *International Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(4), 300-315.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2022.2045067>

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹¹⁶ Ibid.,

5.6. Challenges of Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres of Zokhawthar, Mizoram

In Mizoram, the town of Zokhawthar serves as a key hub for trade across the Myanmar border, significantly contributing to commerce in the region. However, women working in this sector encounter multiple obstacles that restrict their financial independence and overall welfare. This write-up explores the social, economic, cultural, and systemic difficulties experienced by women involved in border trade within Zokhawthar.

5.6.1. Balancing Work and Domestic Responsibilities

The challenge of managing both professional and household duties influences women's participation, efficiency, and career progression in trade-related businesses. Economic pressures drive many women into trade, yet their responsibilities at home largely remain unchanged. In Mizo society, as in many other regions of India, tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and elder care are traditionally considered the domain of women. This societal expectation places a significant strain on female traders, who are expected to fulfil domestic duties alongside their business activities. As a result, many struggle to dedicate sufficient time and energy to their work, which hinders their professional growth and financial independence.

In Zokhawthar, women traders often face difficulties due to inadequate childcare and support systems.¹¹⁷ Many bring their children to the marketplace, which interferes with their ability to negotiate deals and interact with customers effectively. The absence of proper childcare facilities forces mothers to simultaneously care for their children while managing their businesses.¹¹⁸ This situation is even more challenging for single mothers or those whose spouses work away from home, as they bear the full weight of both economic and household responsibilities.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷T. Rodinthangi (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹¹⁹ Ibid.,

The unpredictable nature of border trade adds another layer of difficulty. Business operations in Zokhawthar are influenced by regulatory shifts, political developments, and fluctuating market demand.¹²⁰ Unlike salaried employment, which offers financial security, trade is fraught with uncertainties. Women traders, already balancing household obligations, struggle to adapt to sudden disruptions due to limited flexibility and resources. When trade slows down or faces setbacks, women are often the first to be impacted, as their income is directly tied to household expenses.¹²¹

Access to financial resources remains a major hurdle for women in this sector. While men often have broader financial networks, women frequently face obstacles in securing loans or credit to expand their businesses. Many do not own property or assets, making it difficult to provide collateral for financial support. This limitation restricts their ability to invest in larger stock, sustain their trade during downturns, or diversify their business ventures.¹²² As a result, many female traders remain in small-scale operations, earning enough to support their families but with little opportunity for substantial growth.

Physical and logistical difficulties further complicate the situation for women in border trade. Business activities frequently require travel, sometimes across long distances or international borders, which can be physically demanding and pose safety concerns. Limited access to secure transportation, along with risks of harassment and exploitation, makes mobility a challenge for women.¹²³

Additionally, customs procedures and border checkpoints can be complex, and women—who may have less familiarity with bureaucratic processes—often face additional difficulties in navigating these systems. Social perceptions also play a role in restricting women's progress in trade. Despite their contributions to the economy,

¹²⁰ Kumar, S., & Nair, P. (2023). *Women's empowerment and economic development in border areas: Insights from Mizoram*. *South Asian Journal of Development Studies*, 12(1), 65-82.

¹²¹ Ibid.,

¹²² Neihzuali (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

¹²³ Ibid.,

female traders are often seen as supplementary earners rather than primary financial providers.¹²⁴ This mindset discourages them from expanding their businesses or competing in larger markets. Even within their households, their work may go unrecognized, leading to a lack of encouragement or support from family members.

5.6.2. Job Security and Low Wages

The trading hubs at Zokhawthar play an essential role in enabling cross-border economic activities and commercial interactions. However, for the women engaged in these trading spaces, employment remains unstable, marked by job uncertainty and inadequate earnings. The difficulties they encounter are rooted in systemic disparities, economic unpredictability, and policy-induced ambiguities that shape the region's trade landscape. Women working in Zokhawthar's border trade zones primarily participate in small-scale trading, daily wage labour, and informal employment.¹²⁵ Their responsibilities include working as porters, street vendors, store helpers, and manual labourers handling goods transported across the border. Additionally, many women are engaged in processing and packaging commodities such as betel nuts, fabrics, and household essentials. Although their work is integral to maintaining smooth trade operations, their contributions often go unrecognized and are met with minimal financial compensation.¹²⁶

A significant concern for these women is the instability of their employment. The nature of cross-border commerce is highly unpredictable, subject to sudden shifts in government policies, fluctuating currency exchange rates, and trade limitations imposed by authorities in India or Myanmar.¹²⁷ For instance, abrupt bans on certain products, like betel nuts or livestock, can lead to mass job losses overnight. Furthermore, border shutdowns due to political conflicts or health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have underscored the vulnerability of individuals

¹²⁴ Ibid.,

¹²⁵ Singkhumi (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 12th November, 2024

¹²⁶ Ibid.,

¹²⁷ Lallawmtluangi (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

dependent on trade-related work.¹²⁸ Unlike those in formal employment sectors, women in these trading zones lack work contracts, social security benefits, and legal protections, making them especially prone to financial instability.

Adding to the problem of job insecurity is the issue of inadequate wages. Women in Zokhawthar's trade sector frequently earn substantially less than men, even when performing identical tasks.¹²⁹ The wage disparity is exacerbated by the informal nature of their work, which lacks standardized pay rates and regulatory oversight. Many employers, often small business operators with limited profit margins, justify paying women lower wages based on the assumption that their earnings are supplementary rather than primary household income.¹³⁰ This notion overlooks the fact that many women are the primary or sole providers for their families.

Moreover, the physically demanding nature of their labour does not equate to fair remuneration. Many women carry heavy loads across the border under extreme weather conditions, yet they receive no health benefits, accident insurance, or maternity leave.¹³¹ The lack of worker protections exacerbates their financial precarity, making it difficult to cope with rising living costs in an area frequently affected by inflation and price fluctuations on essential goods.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach. Policy measures that introduce legal safeguards, establish minimum wage standards, and extend social security benefits to informal workers could significantly enhance economic stability.¹³² Encouraging the formation of women-led cooperatives and labour unions could strengthen their bargaining power, enabling them to advocate for better working conditions. Additionally, gender-inclusive trade policies that acknowledge and support women's contributions in cross-border commerce could foster a more equitable economic environment. In short, while Zokhawthar's trading

¹²⁸ Ibid.,

¹²⁹ Ibid.,

¹³⁰ Ibid.,

¹³¹ Singkhumi., Op.Cit.

¹³² Lalthlamuani (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

hubs serve as crucial economic centres, the women forming a vital part of this trade network continue to face considerable challenges.¹³³

Employment instability, wage disparities, lack of worker protections, and societal limitations impede their financial progress and overall well-being. Without targeted policy interventions and systemic reforms, these women will remain trapped in cycles of economic hardship despite their essential role in sustaining the region's trade economy.¹³⁴ Ensuring fair wages, stable employment, and social protections is not only an issue of economic justice but also a crucial step toward fostering inclusive and sustainable development in Mizoram's border areas.¹³⁵

5.6.3. Lack of Social Security and Welfare Benefits

In Zokhawthar's bustling trade hubs, many women sustain their livelihoods as street vendors, porters, assistants, or small-scale merchants; many participate in cross-border trade, transporting goods from Myanmar or assisting local traders within the marketplace.¹³⁶ Unlike those employed in formal industries, these women lack access to structured wages, health coverage, maternity leave, or retirement benefits. The absence of such protections leaves them financially vulnerable, especially during economic slumps, trade restrictions, or health crises.¹³⁷ With no financial safety nets in place, any interruption in trade—whether caused by border shutdowns, shifting government regulations, or economic instability—directly impacts their earnings, making their situation increasingly precarious.

One of the most pressing concerns stemming from this lack of security is workplace exploitation. Many women working in border trade zones operate under informal arrangements, often without written contracts, leaving them open to unfair labour practices, sudden pay cuts, and hazardous working conditions.¹³⁸ Some are employed by traders or transport businesses, earning modest daily wages that

¹³³ Ibid.,

¹³⁴ Ibid.,

¹³⁵ Lallawmtluangi.,Op.Cit.

¹³⁶ Ibid.,

¹³⁷ Lalchhanhimi (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

¹³⁸ Ibid.,

fluctuate with market activity. Others run their micro-businesses but struggle with unpredictable supply chains and fluctuating demand. With no legal safeguards in place, they have little recourse when facing wage-related conflicts, workplace mistreatment, or forced displacement from their selling spaces.¹³⁹

Health risks add another layer of difficulty. Women engaged in cross-border trade frequently endure long hours of strenuous labour, lifting heavy goods, working in unsanitary environments, or spending extended periods standing at their stalls. Without medical coverage, many are unable to afford proper healthcare, forcing them to continue working despite illness or injury. Expectant mothers and those with young children face even greater hardships, as maternity benefits and childcare assistance are nonexistent in this sector.¹⁴⁰

Many have no option but to return to work soon after childbirth, jeopardizing both their well-being and that of their infants.¹⁴¹ Another major challenge is the absence of long-term financial support. Social security systems, including pension programs or retirement benefits, do not extend to women in Zokhawthar's informal trade sector. Without structured savings plans or state-backed financial aid, elderly women traders face uncertain futures. Unlike government employees or those in formal industries who receive post-retirement assistance, these women must continue working well into old age or depend on family support.¹⁴² This financial instability in later years further compounds their hardships, particularly for those without strong family ties.

Broader economic and social conditions further intensify these struggles. Zokhawthar's remote location means that access to essential infrastructure, banking services, and credit facilities is limited. Many women traders find it difficult to obtain financial aid or business loans due to a lack of collateral or official business status.¹⁴³ As a result, they often turn to informal lenders who impose steep interest rates, trapping them in cycles of debt. Additionally, limited financial knowledge and

¹³⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁰ Lalthlamuani., Op.Cit

¹⁴¹ Ibid.,

¹⁴² Ibid.,

¹⁴³ Lalchhanhimi., Op.Cit

lack of awareness regarding government assistance programs prevent many from benefiting from available support. Political and security-related factors also contribute to the fragile nature of their work.

Frequent border closures, driven by political disputes or security measures, lead to abrupt disruptions in trade, directly affecting their income.¹⁴⁴ Unlike those with formal employment who may have job security, women in the informal trade sector experience sudden financial setbacks whenever these disruptions occur, with no safety net to fall back on.

5.6.4. Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities

A significant challenge they face stems from inadequate infrastructure and essential facilities, which complicate their day-to-day work and limit their opportunities for progress. The lack of sufficient infrastructure at the Zokhawthar trade hub poses major difficulties for women engaged in commerce.¹⁴⁵ They often struggle to find suitable market areas to sell their goods efficiently. Existing marketplaces are either too small or poorly maintained, making it hard for them to carry out business effectively.¹⁴⁶ With no designated and properly managed trading spaces, congestion is a constant issue, pushing women to operate from temporary setups or open-air locations that expose them to unpredictable weather conditions.¹⁴⁷ This not only disrupts their trade but also affects their health, particularly during the rainy season, when flooding and inadequate drainage create highly unfavourable working conditions.

Another major obstacle is the absence of appropriate storage solutions. Many of these traders deal in perishable goods such as vegetables, seafood, and fruits. Without access to proper storage units, they often experience spoilage, leading to financial setbacks. Due to the lack of refrigeration facilities or even simple storage rooms, sellers are compelled to offload their stock quickly, frequently at lower

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁴⁵ International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2013). *Prospects for Border Trade in Mizoram*. Retrieved from https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/167948/ISAS_Insights_216_-_Prospects_for_Border_Trade_in_Mizoram_25072013155522.pdf

¹⁴⁶ Lalchhanhimi., Op.Cit

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.,

prices, which reduces their earnings.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, the insecurity of storage arrangements increases the risk of theft, adding to their financial struggles. Transportation difficulties further compound the challenges faced by women in the border trade sector. Connectivity to and from Zokhawthar is poor, with deteriorated road conditions moving goods both slow and expensive.¹⁴⁹

Many women traders must travel considerable distances to buy and sell goods, but navigating rugged terrain—especially during the monsoon, when roads become nearly unusable—is a daunting task.¹⁵⁰ Limited public transportation adds to the problem, as the few available options are overcrowded and unsafe, making it difficult for women to transport their goods. These constraints not only reduce their access to wider markets but also increase the physical strain of carrying heavy loads manually.¹⁵¹

Moreover, women spend extended hours at the trade centre, yet sanitation facilities are either insufficient or unhygienic, creating major discomfort. The absence of separate, secure restrooms poses both a health and safety risk, discouraging many women from fully participating in trade.¹⁵² This issue is especially challenging for women during menstruation, as they have no access to clean and private spaces, forcing some to stay away from work.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the non-availability of childcare facilities adds to the burdens of women traders who have young children.¹⁵⁴ Since many are also primary caregivers, they struggle to balance work and family responsibilities. Without childcare support, some bring their children along, which is neither safe nor ideal. The lack of such support systems forces women to make difficult choices between earning a livelihood and fulfilling caregiving duties, often leading to financial setbacks.

¹⁴⁸ Zaneihtiali (Residents of Zokhawthar village) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁵¹ L. Sangpui. (2024). *Enhancing Indo-Myanmar Trade with Special Reference to Zokhawthar*. Retrieved from <https://neissr.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Lilysangpui.pdf>

¹⁵² Zaneihtiali., Op.Cit

¹⁵³ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁴ L. Sangpui., Op.Cit

Security is another critical issue for women at the Zokhawthar trade hub. Informal trading networks and weak law enforcement create an environment where female traders face various risks, including exploitation and harassment.¹⁵⁵ Many have reported instances of discrimination and unfair treatment, particularly from male traders and transporters who dominate the industry. Cases of verbal abuse, intimidation, and even physical threats are not uncommon, making it unsafe for women to conduct business freely.¹⁵⁶ The absence of a structured complaint resolution system leaves them with limited options for seeking redress, increasing their vulnerability.

Apart from these difficulties, financial barriers also hinder women's ability to thrive in the trade sector. Limited access to credit and financial services prevents them from scaling their businesses or improving their working conditions. Many lack financial literacy and struggle with complex banking processes, forcing them to depend on informal lenders who charge excessive interest rates.¹⁵⁷ The lack of microfinance programs specifically designed for women in cross-border trade further restricts their ability to sustain and expand their businesses.¹⁵⁸

5.6.5. Bureaucratic Hurdles and Corruption

Women entrepreneurs and workers in Zokhawthar also face a multitude of challenges, with bureaucratic inefficiencies and corrupt practices forming significant roadblocks. These barriers create an intricate maze of difficulties that disproportionately impact women trying to establish themselves in the trade sector.¹⁵⁹ One of the primary obstacles is the complex and cumbersome bureaucratic process required to secure trade permits and licenses.¹⁶⁰ Women traders often encounter excessive administrative procedures, necessitating multiple approvals from different

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁶ Lalnunhlui (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁹ Lalnunluangi (Residents of Zokhawthar Village) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.,

government agencies, many of which are not easily accessible.¹⁶¹ The documentation requirements are extensive, and for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, navigating these legal complexities becomes particularly daunting. Lacking adequate resources and technical know-how, many women struggle to comply with regulations.¹⁶² These systemic hurdles not only prolong their entry into formal trade but also discourage participation, forcing some to turn to informal trade channels, where they face heightened risks and uncertainties.

Adding to these difficulties is the widespread prevalence of corrupt practices at border checkpoints. Women traders frequently report being pressured into making unofficial payments to accelerate document processing or avoid unwarranted hold-ups at customs.¹⁶³ Such exploitative demands disproportionately burden women with limited financial capital, increasing their operational costs and reducing profitability.¹⁶⁴ Male traders, in contrast, often have stronger networks or greater leverage, which enables them to navigate such situations with more ease. For women, however, these coercive demands not only pose financial setbacks but also create an environment of constant fear, where they risk harassment or arbitrary confiscation of their goods.¹⁶⁵

These obstacles are deeply gendered, extending beyond economic and bureaucratic struggles to entrenched societal biases. Women in the border trade industry frequently encounter dismissive attitudes from officials who are more inclined to prioritize male traders. Such systemic discrimination makes it even more challenging for women to establish themselves in an already competitive space. Furthermore, the absence of women in leadership roles within trade organizations and regulatory institutions results in their specific concerns being largely ignored in policy-making discussions.¹⁶⁶ Without meaningful interventions to address

¹⁶¹ Lalnunhlui., Op.Cit

¹⁶² Ibid.,

¹⁶³ Al Jazeera. (2024, April 11). *'Separated': Why is India Sealing its Myanmar Border, Dividing Families?* Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/4/11/were-a-single-village-india-seals-myanmar-border-dividing-families>

¹⁶⁴ Lalnuntluangi ., Op.Cit

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.,

bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, women traders in Zokhawthar will continue to grapple with an inequitable system that restricts their economic advancement.¹⁶⁷

Removing these barriers is not merely a question of fairness—it is essential for fostering inclusive economic growth in the region. Establishing a more supportive and transparent trade environment will ensure that women can participate without undue hindrances, ultimately contributing to a stronger and more equitable border economy that benefits the entire community.

5.6.6. Lack of Government Support and Representation

The lack of gender-responsive policies and limited governmental support also create an environment where women face significant hurdles in advancing within the sector.¹⁶⁸ Policies governing border trade are often designed without fully considering the distinct challenges faced by women traders and workers. While various initiatives exist to encourage trade, they generally fail to account for the socio-economic constraints that disproportionately affect women. The absence of dedicated programs aimed at supporting female entrepreneurs and workers results in persistent struggles related to access to financial resources, security concerns, and inadequate infrastructure.¹⁶⁹ Women engaged in border trade frequently encounter difficulties in securing funding due to ingrained biases in financial institutions, making it harder for them to expand their enterprises.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, bureaucratic and informal restrictions hinder their ability to obtain necessary trade permits and licenses, forcing many to operate in precarious conditions without legal safeguards.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Lalnunhlui.,Op.Cit

¹⁶⁸ Lalramnghahi (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November, 2024

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁰ Lalnuntluangi .,Op.Cit

¹⁷¹ Lalnunhlui.,Op.Cit

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in trade organizations and policy-making bodies intensifies these challenges. Border trade and commercial activities in Mizoram continue to be dominated by men, with women largely excluded from key decision-making spaces.¹⁷² Their limited presence in trade unions, market regulatory committees, and governmental discussions prevents their concerns from being adequately addressed. As a result, critical issues such as workplace safety, wage disparities, and access to essential trade facilities remain unresolved. The absence of female perspectives in governance structures means that policies are formulated without incorporating the lived experiences of women involved in trade.¹⁷³ Infrastructural gaps in Zokhawthar's border trade centres further exacerbate the difficulties women encounter.

Many locations lack necessities such as safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, and secure workspaces, making it difficult for women to operate in a safe and dignified setting.¹⁷⁴ The largely unregulated nature of border trade heightens their vulnerability to exploitation and hazardous working conditions. Weak enforcement of labour protections leaves women with little recourse in cases of workplace mistreatment or disputes.

Security risks present another significant barrier for women in cross-border trade. Given the geographic and economic dynamics of border areas, activities such as smuggling, trafficking, and other illicit operations pose direct threats. Women traders are particularly vulnerable as they frequently navigate informal trade routes and unregulated networks. The absence of gender-sensitive security measures and policing discourages women from fully participating in cross-border commerce.¹⁷⁵ Collectively, these factors contribute to the continued marginalization of women in Zokhawthar's border trade sector, limiting their opportunities for economic advancement.

¹⁷² Al Jazeera.,Op.Cit

¹⁷³ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁵ Lalnunpuui (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 10th November, 2024

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach, including policy reforms aimed at closing gender gaps, greater inclusion of women in decision-making bodies, and the introduction of targeted assistance programs.¹⁷⁶ Without proactive government intervention and increased awareness of the gender-specific barriers in trade, women in Zokhawthar will continue to struggle against systemic obstacles that constrain their economic growth and overall well-being.¹⁷⁷

5.7. Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres of Zokhawthar, Mizoram

In this evolving economic setting, women hold a crucial position, actively participating in diverse activities such as small-scale trading, transportation services, and informal market exchanges. The opportunities emerging from cross-border commerce have enabled many women in Zokhawthar to secure livelihoods that support both their households and the broader community. However, their involvement is influenced by multiple factors, including cultural expectations, financial conditions, and regulatory frameworks governing trade in border regions. While cross-border commerce offers financial autonomy to numerous women, it also introduces obstacles like unstable employment, gender-specific risks, and legal limitations linked to the unpredictable nature of trade across borders.¹⁷⁸

To grasp the significance of women's participation in Zokhawthar's border trade hubs, it is essential to explore their roles, experiences, and the difficulties they encounter. Analyzing these elements provides insight into larger themes concerning gender dynamics, trade policies, and frontier economies in Northeast India, emphasizing the link between livelihood strategies, state-imposed regulations, and economic mobility for women in these borderland areas.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷⁷ Government of Mizoram. (2012). *Border Trade: Indo-Bangladesh*. In *Economic Survey Mizoram 2012-13* (pp. 62-63). Retrieved from https://planning.mizoram.gov.in/uploads/economic_survey_2012-13/Agriculture%20and%20Allied/Border%20Trade.pdf

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.,

5.8. Prospects of Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres of Zokhawthar, Mizoram

Cross-border commerce has become a significant driver of economic progress in Northeast India, especially in states like Mizoram, where trade with Myanmar has been an integral part of local livelihoods for generations. Zokhawthar, a prominent trade hub along the border, serves as a vital link for commercial exchanges between the two nations. As trade becomes more structured and new policies are introduced to boost cross-border business, employment opportunities—particularly for women—have seen considerable growth.¹⁷⁹ Women in Mizoram have long been engaged in trade and marketplace activities, predominantly within informal networks such as small-scale retail and local distribution channels. However, the shifting dynamics of border commerce bring both fresh opportunities and new obstacles for female workers.

With improvements in trade-related infrastructure and an expanding variety of goods and services in circulation, women are finding prospects in entrepreneurship, logistics, and service-oriented fields. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including cultural expectations, financial constraints, and limited access to institutional support, all of which continue to influence their role in the sector. A deeper look into the involvement of women in Zokhawthar's trade centres necessitates an examination of economic regulations, market trends, and the broader socio-political context that affects their work and business potential.¹⁸⁰

5.8.1. Increasing Employment Opportunities

The growth of cross-border commerce in Zokhawthar, Mizoram, has brought about notable changes in the local economy, opening up fresh avenues for employment. As commercial exchanges between India and Myanmar progress, various enterprises and auxiliary services have sprung up, enabling greater participation of women in income-generating activities. This shift has not only

¹⁷⁹ Lalnunpuui.,Op.Cit

¹⁸⁰ Khonumthung News. (2024, August 27). *Indian Blockade on Chin State Border Trade Causing Problems*. Retrieved from <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/indian-blockade-chin-state-border-trade-causing-problems>

strengthened women's financial autonomy but has also played a key role in the overall advancement of the region.¹⁸¹

Women in Zokhawthar are actively involved in multiple sectors linked to border trade. Retail and wholesale businesses are particularly significant areas where they make substantial contributions. Numerous small-scale ventures focusing on textiles, beauty products, foodstuffs, and handicrafts offer women employment opportunities as vendors, shop owners, and suppliers. These businesses serve both local buyers and cross-border merchants, positioning them as essential elements of the economic framework.¹⁸² Women engaged in such trade often operate in informal marketplaces or small retail shops, either as self-employed business owners or as part of larger enterprises. The availability of locally produced goods and imports from Myanmar further encourages female entrepreneurs to take part in cross-border commerce.¹⁸³

Another key source of employment is the food service industry, which includes tea stalls, small eateries, and catering ventures. Women are deeply involved in running these establishments, which cater to traders, transport workers, and daily wage earners. Many of these food outlets, managed by women, specialize in traditional Mizo and Burmese dishes, attracting both locals and travellers moving through the border area.¹⁸⁴ The steady influx of visitors and traders has led to consistent demand for food services, ensuring a reliable income stream for women in the hospitality sector.

Handicrafts and artisanal industries have also experienced growth alongside expanding trade activities. Women skilled in weaving, bamboo crafts, and handembroidery find an eager market for their creations. Many of these handmade products are purchased by traders who transport them beyond the border or to different parts of Mizoram, offering women artisans a stable source of income.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹Ibid.,

¹⁸²R Vanhnuaithangi (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 13th November 2024

¹⁸³Ibid.,

¹⁸⁴Lalnunpuii., Op.Cit

¹⁸⁵Ibid.,

The rising appreciation for handcrafted items, particularly those showcasing Mizo and Burmese cultural influences, has further fueled demand in this sector.¹⁸⁶ Beyond retail and artisanal work, women also take part in logistics and support services. With an increasing volume of goods crossing the border, many find employment in packaging, sorting, and assisting with transport operations.¹⁸⁷ Some contribute by offering translation services, and bridging communication gaps between Indian and Burmese traders for smoother transactions. Others work in informal financial roles, aiding merchants in currency exchange and monetary dealings.

5.8.2. Promotion of Women Entrepreneurs

As trade activities expand and infrastructure develops, the landscape for women entrepreneurs in the region is evolving. In Zokhawthar and nearby areas, women have long played a vital role in the local economy through farming, weaving, and small-scale commerce. With formal trade routes becoming more established and financial resources more accessible, their economic engagement is transforming, opening doors to greater financial independence and empowerment.¹⁸⁸ One promising area for women's participation is in traditional crafts and weaving. Mizo artisans possess deep-rooted expertise in crafting intricate textile patterns and producing high-quality fabrics. The border trade hub offers them a valuable space to commercialize their skills, reaching both domestic and international buyers.

Additionally, skilled artisans from Myanmar contribute their craftsmanship, fostering opportunities for collaborative businesses.¹⁸⁹ Supporting locally woven textiles not only sustains cultural traditions but also meets the growing demand for handmade goods. With better trade infrastructure and rising consumer interest in handcrafted products, the potential for such enterprises is increasing.¹⁹⁰ Agriculture and agribusiness also provide significant opportunities. Mizoram's fertile soil supports the cultivation of ginger, turmeric, and other spices that are highly sought

¹⁸⁶ Ramhmingzuali.,Op.Cit

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁸ Mizo Studies Research Centre. (2020). *Socio-Economic Impact of Border Trade in Mizoram*. Mizoram University.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁹⁰ Ramhmingzuali.,Op.Cit

after in Indian and Southeast Asian markets. Women farmers stand to gain from structured trade policies that allow them to sell their products at favourable rates.

Furthermore, by focusing on value-added processes—such as drying, processing, and packaging—they can enhance profit margins while generating employment within their communities.¹⁹¹ Direct market access also reduces reliance on intermediaries, increasing their negotiating power and overall economic stability.

Access to funding remains a critical factor in fostering women-led enterprises. Microfinance organizations and cooperative groups have played an essential role in offering small loans and financial aid to aspiring businesswomen.¹⁹² These financial models support self-sufficiency by enabling women to invest in equipment, raw materials, and business growth. Additionally, government programs and NGOs involved in women's economic empowerment also provide training in financial literacy, business strategy, and digital marketing, helping women acquire essential entrepreneurial skills.

The border trade hub also presents possibilities in retail and small-scale commerce. Women can establish storefronts, market stalls, and kiosks catering to traders and visitors, selling products like clothing, household essentials, and regional delicacies.¹⁹³ With the increased movement of people and goods across the border, there is a rising demand for food stalls, small eateries, and service-oriented businesses, creating a strong market for women-led ventures.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, hospitality-based enterprises, including guesthouses and homestays, offer additional income opportunities, particularly as trade expansion brings more visitors to Zokhawthar.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.,

¹⁹² Mizo Studies Research Centre.,Op.Cit

¹⁹³ Lalrinmawii (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November 2024

¹⁹⁴ Mizo Studies Research Centre.,Op.Cit

5.8.3. Increased Financial Independence

In Mizoram, especially in Zokhawthar, women's participation in trade has been steadily increasing, driven by expanding economic opportunities and shifting societal norms that support their involvement in commerce. As the state strengthens its trade connections with Myanmar, border trade hubs have become key centres of economic activity, where women have established a strong foothold.¹⁹⁵ Their growing presence in trade is not only redefining traditional gender roles but also promoting financial self-sufficiency, social advancement, and economic progress in the area. One of the most significant effects of women's engagement in these border markets is their enhanced financial autonomy.¹⁹⁶ By participating in trade, they can generate their income, improving their economic position. In a region where conventional gender expectations have historically confined women to household duties, earning an independent income grants them greater control over their lives. Financially independent women can contribute to family expenses, ensuring better access to essentials such as food, healthcare, and education.¹⁹⁷

This financial empowerment also allows them to accumulate savings, invest in small enterprises, or expand their business operations. Over time, this economic security strengthens their confidence and decision-making authority, enabling them to play a more active role in both family and community affairs. The impact of financial independence extends beyond individuals, influencing family stability and broader community development. Women who contribute economically to their households often gain a stronger voice in decision-making, leading to more balanced family structures.¹⁹⁸ In many cases, the additional income generated through trade has improved living conditions, facilitated access to quality education for children, and enabled families to afford essential healthcare services. This transformation is particularly relevant in Mizoram, where evolving family dynamics increasingly recognize the importance of women's economic contributions.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁹⁷ Lalrinmawii., Op.Cit

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.,

Moreover, engaging in border trade enhances social mobility for women. Traditionally, many women in Mizoram, particularly in rural areas, have been involved in subsistence farming or small-scale businesses. The expansion of cross-border trade presents new opportunities for diversifying income sources, understanding market trends, and interacting with traders from diverse backgrounds. Exposure to such environments not only sharpens their business skills but also expands their professional networks, creating avenues for collaboration and growth.¹⁹⁹ Many women traders in Zokhawthar are now familiarizing themselves with trade regulations, customs policies, and negotiation strategies, which further refine their commercial expertise.²⁰⁰

The increasing involvement of women in trade also plays a vital role in the overall economic expansion of the region. As more women engage in business, the marketplace becomes more dynamic and inclusive; their participation introduces a greater variety of products, such as textiles, handicrafts, and speciality food items, enriching the trade ecosystem.²⁰¹ This diversification strengthens the economy, benefiting both traders and consumers. Additionally, successful women entrepreneurs serve as inspirations for younger generations, motivating more women to explore business ventures and participate actively in economic activities.

5.8.4. Government and Institutional Support

The role of women in cross-border trade has gained increasing recognition as a key driver of economic progress, particularly in regions where trade serves as a fundamental economic pillar. In response, both government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have initiated various strategies to enhance female participation in this sector. Through targeted interventions and supportive policies, these institutions aim to equip women with essential skills, financial backing, and regulatory support, enabling them to navigate the complexities of international trade.²⁰² A major focus of these efforts has been skill-building. Many

¹⁹⁹ Sangmawii (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 12th November, 2024

²⁰⁰ Ibid.,

²⁰¹ Ibid.,

²⁰² Ibid.,

women involved in border trade manage small-scale enterprises dealing in textiles, handicrafts, agricultural goods, and processed products.

However, their growth is often hindered by limited exposure to formal business training, financial knowledge, and market insights. To address this gap, governmental agencies and NGOs have developed training initiatives tailored to women entrepreneurs. These programs emphasize critical business competencies, including bookkeeping, inventory oversight, logistics coordination, negotiation strategies, and online commerce. Additionally, financial education is a key component, empowering women with knowledge about credit access, loan applications, and investment planning—critical tools for sustainable business expansion.²⁰³ Workshops on product diversification further help women explore new markets, minimizing reliance on a single trade avenue.

Beyond skill development, financial access has been a cornerstone of institutional support for women traders. Many women encounter difficulties in securing capital due to long-standing gender biases in banking and financial institutions. To counter this, government programs have introduced specialized grants and subsidies, reducing financial barriers and enabling women to launch and expand their enterprises with confidence.²⁰⁴ Microfinance organizations, often backed by government policies, have played a vital role in offering low-interest credit tailored to female entrepreneurs.²⁰⁵ Additionally, cooperative lending initiatives and self-help groups (SHGs) have become instrumental in pooling financial resources, allowing women to invest in business infrastructure, inventory, and transportation. This financial backing not only enhances women's involvement in trade but also strengthens their economic independence and social standing.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Lalrammuani (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November 2024

²⁰⁴ Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India. (2023). *Border Trade Policy and Infrastructure Development in Northeast India*. New Delhi: Government of India.

²⁰⁵ Lalrammuani., Op.Cit

²⁰⁶ Ibid.,

Efforts to facilitate trade have also been a priority for policymakers and institutions seeking to support women's integration into cross-border commerce. Complex customs procedures, bureaucratic red tape, and informal trade barriers have historically posed significant challenges for small-scale traders, many of whom are women. In response, governments have streamlined administrative processes, simplified documentation requirements, and established dedicated support desks for female traders at border checkpoints.²⁰⁷ The creation of special economic zones and designated trade markets along borders has further provided women with structured, legally sanctioned spaces for conducting business. These initiatives not only encourage formal trade but also help women traders avoid exploitation by intermediaries and border enforcement officials.²⁰⁸

Furthermore, policies have been introduced to expand market access for women beyond their immediate localities. Gender-responsive trade agreements have facilitated smoother movement of goods and services, opening up new opportunities for female entrepreneurs. Additionally, governments have partnered with international organizations to implement trade facilitation projects designed to specifically benefit women traders. By incorporating gender considerations into broader trade policies, these measures create a more level playing field, enabling women to compete effectively in the marketplace.²⁰⁹

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a pivotal role in supporting women traders, often serving as a bridge between them and government agencies. These organizations contribute significantly to advocacy, training, and financial inclusion; many NGOs provide legal assistance, ensuring that women understand their rights and comply with trade regulations.²¹⁰ They also facilitate networking, connecting female entrepreneurs with suppliers, buyers, and industry leaders. Through trade fairs, market linkage programs, and policy dialogues, NGOs

²⁰⁷ Ibid.,

²⁰⁸ C.Lalnunmawii(Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11thNovember, 2024.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.,

²¹⁰ Lalmangaihi(Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11thNovember, 2024

amplify the voices of women traders and advocate for more inclusive economic policies.²¹¹

The collective efforts of governments, financial institutions, and NGOs have made notable progress in increasing women's participation in cross-border trade.²¹² However, persistent challenges such as gender discrimination, security risks, and infrastructure limitations still need to be addressed. Continued investment in gender-sensitive policies, improved infrastructure, and digital resources can further strengthen women's role in this sector.²¹³ As more women establish themselves in cross-border commerce, their contributions will not only enhance household incomes but also bolster regional trade networks and overall economic resilience.

Ultimately, the commitment of governments and institutions to fostering female participation in border trade represents a crucial step toward economic empowerment and gender equality.²¹⁴ By expanding access to skills training, financial resources, and trade-friendly policies, these initiatives are dismantling traditional barriers and fostering a more inclusive commercial landscape.²¹⁵ As these efforts progress, they hold the potential to transform border trade into a significant driver of women's economic advancement and broader social development.

5.8.5. Social and Cultural Benefits

The participation of women in cross-border commerce brings about significant social and cultural advantages that go beyond personal financial benefits. As they engage in trade across borders, women help redefine societal expectations, drive local development, and reinforce cultural connections between adjacent regions.²¹⁶ Their active role in this economic sector signals a shift in conventional viewpoints, promoting broader inclusion and long-term growth within border communities. A key societal benefit of women's involvement in border commerce is

²¹¹ Ibid.,

²¹² Lalbiakhunagi (Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 13th November, 2024

²¹³ Ibid.,

²¹⁴ Zoramhmachhuani (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November 2024.

²¹⁵ Ibid.,

²¹⁶ Ibid.,

the empowerment it fosters. Engaging in economic activities provides women with newfound confidence and independence, challenging deep-seated gender traditions that have long confined them to household responsibilities.²¹⁷ As entrepreneurs, traders, and decision-makers, they assert greater control over financial matters, earning increased respect within their families and communities.²¹⁸ This empowerment extends further, motivating younger generations of girls to pursue non-traditional roles and explore entrepreneurial ventures.

The financial self-sufficiency gained from cross-border trading allows women to invest in education, healthcare, and improved living conditions for their families. By generating and managing income, they help break cycles of financial dependence and hardship, leading to a more balanced and stable socio-economic environment.²¹⁹ Households led by financially empowered women are better equipped to withstand economic challenges, ensuring more equitable distribution of resources within their communities. Beyond individual advancement, women's engagement in trade catalyzes community progress.²²⁰ Thriving women-led businesses boost local economies by generating jobs and encouraging the circulation of capital within the region. Women traders tend to reinvest their earnings in local enterprises, supporting artisans and small business owners, thereby reinforcing grassroots economic systems.²²¹ This localized economic activity decreases reliance on external aid and government assistance, fostering self-reliance among border populations.

Additionally, women engaged in cross-border trade contribute to strengthening social bonds. Their interactions with diverse trading partners, including individuals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, help cultivate mutual understanding and cooperation.²²² For example, commerce between India and Myanmar facilitates exchanges among people of various linguistic, religious, and

²¹⁷ Lalrokili(Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 11th November 2024.

²¹⁸ Ibid.,

²¹⁹ Zoramhmachhuani.,Op.Cit

²²⁰ Ibid.,

²²¹ Zolianzingi(Traders at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 12th November, 2024.

²²² Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India.,Op.Cit

cultural identities, fostering stronger bilateral ties. Women, with their natural ability to build trust and maintain relationships, play an instrumental role in bridging cultural divides, breaking down stereotypes, and promoting peaceful coexistence.²²³ The cultural exchanges facilitated by women traders further enrich border communities. The sale of traditional textiles, handicrafts, and local products helps preserve indigenous heritage and promotes cultural pride. Through trade, traditional crafts, culinary practices, and artisanal techniques gain wider recognition, ensuring their survival in an increasingly globalized world. Exposure to diverse customs and traditions also nurtures a broader appreciation for cultural diversity, fostering inclusivity and social harmony.

Another essential aspect of women's participation in border commerce is their role in fostering diplomatic goodwill. Informal trading networks, often spearheaded by women, serve as vital links between communities separated by national borders.²²⁴ These interactions help sustain people-to-people connections, which are crucial for maintaining amicable relations between neighbouring countries. Women traders, in this capacity, act as informal ambassadors of peace and cooperation, illustrating the role of economic interdependence in strengthening diplomatic relations.²²⁵ Moreover, the increasing presence of women in cross-border trade encourages policy shifts that acknowledge and support their contributions. As governments recognize the impact of women in commercial activities, they are more likely to introduce gender-responsive trade policies, offer financial incentives, and create support structures such as microfinance programs and skill-building initiatives.²²⁶ These measures enable women to expand their businesses, further magnifying the positive effects of their trade activities on society.

The social and cultural significance of women's involvement in border trade is profound. By challenging conventional gender roles, achieving economic independence, strengthening community networks, and fostering intercultural

²²³ Lalnunhlimi (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 13th November, 2024.

²²⁴ Ibid.,

²²⁵ Ibid.,

²²⁶ Khawliandimi (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 13th November, 2024.

exchanges, their participation drives meaningful change.²²⁷ As women continue to break barriers and establish themselves in trade, they not only uplift their circumstances but also contribute to the overall progress and cohesion of border communities.²²⁸ Supporting and recognizing their role can unlock the full potential of inclusive economic development and cultural synergy.

5.9. Comparison

The towns of Moreh (Manipur) and Zokhawthar (Mizoram) function as significant gateways linking the country to Southeast Asia through trade with Myanmar. Despite their shared roles as border trade zones, the day-to-day realities of women involved in economic activities differ markedly, shaped by unique socio-political landscapes, cultural values, infrastructural development, and varying degrees of exposure to regional unrest and economic reform. Moreh, in Manipur's Tengenoupal district, operates as a major commercial node where trade flows continuously. Goods, vendors, and informal workers form the pulse of this town. Women here are frequently involved in trading across the nearby Tamu border in Myanmar, participating through both regulated and unregulated channels. However, the informality of their work puts them at a disadvantage, most lack identification papers, legal recourse, or access to welfare schemes. The local context marked by militarization and insurgency exposes these women to constant surveillance, sporadic questioning, and at times, intimidation. The intersection of unstable politics and fragile economic standing makes their work environment particularly harsh.

By contrast, Zokhawthar in Mizoram's Champhai district presents a quieter commercial scene. Women in this area also trade with Myanmar's RihDil region, although the scale is much smaller. Economic returns are lower, but the relatively peaceful atmosphere anchored in Mizoram's reconciliatory history and sociopolitical stability provides a safer context for women. With limited military interference and robust community networks, often facilitated by church-led initiatives and cooperatives, women benefit from stronger social protections and community

²²⁷Ibid.,

²²⁸Cindy Rosangi (Residents and Workers at Zokhawthar border trade centre) was interviewed by the scholar on 14th November, 2024.

support. Still, there are shared obstacles. In both towns, the peripheral nature of their geography and the informal structure of trade expose women to labor that is poorly paid and physically taxing, with scarce opportunities for upward mobility. Access to skill-building, microfinance, and formal banking systems is minimal, limiting economic advancement. Deep-rooted patriarchal structures also curtail women's influence in decision-making spaces be it trade bodies or local governance councils.

Another key divergence emerges in the ethnic and social compositions of the two towns. Manipur is ethnically complex, home to the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki-Zomi groups, often divided by political and communal tensions. During conflicts, marginalized women suffer the most, particularly those of mixed heritage or perceived foreign descent. In Moreh, border fluidity means that women with Burmese ties are often treated with suspicion, excluded from official trade processes and denied access to public support systems. Zokhawthar's demography, on the other hand, is more homogenous, with the Mizo community forming the majority. This has fostered stronger social integration and a greater sense of local ownership. Although traditional gender norms persist, Mizoram has made notable progress in female education and civic participation. Women in this region more easily access collective economic platforms, including microloan schemes and cooperative ventures. That said, due to the limited size of the market, many women still rely on farming or seasonal labor to earn a livelihood.

Government efforts under the Act East Policy aim to boost both towns as centers of trade and transit, promising better infrastructure and deeper connections to Southeast Asian economies. On paper, these plans are full of potential for female employment in sectors like logistics, warehousing, and tourism. But results have varied. In Moreh, some infrastructural work has begun, but poor coordination and recurring ethnic tensions have slowed progress. In Zokhawthar, improvements are unfolding more gradually but benefit from community cooperation and a relatively stable environment. The presence and impact of NGOs and women-centric organizations differ between the two towns. In Moreh, women's groups function under difficult circumstances, restricted by security risks and limited support structures. Even so, they have contributed significantly to grassroots peace efforts

and economic training. In Zokhawthar, local women's collectives—often connected to religious institutions—play more integrated roles, engaging with authorities to push for health, education, and welfare reforms.

Trade relations with Myanmar also directly shape women's economic outcomes. Since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, political instability has deeply disrupted cross-border commerce. For women in Moreh, this has meant plummeting incomes from goods like clothing, electronics, and everyday merchandise. Zokhawthar, less dependent on goods sourced from Myanmar and more oriented around agricultural and local trade, has been less severely affected, though still impacted. Looking ahead, the outlook for women in these frontier towns will depend on how future policies are crafted. Recognition of women's participation in border trade, increased access to credit, and tailored vocational support are urgently needed. For Moreh, policies that account for conflict conditions and provide legal safeguards for informal workers could greatly enhance women's safety and income stability. In Zokhawthar, scaling up commercial activity while maintaining community harmony could help expand opportunities.

In summary, Moreh offers broader economic possibilities but exposes women to higher risks and institutional challenges. Zokhawthar, while offering fewer commercial prospects, provides a more stable and supportive environment for women engaged in local trade. These contrasting situations underscore the importance of creating flexible, community-rooted strategies that center gender-specific concerns in the broader vision for border trade development in Northeast India.

5.10. Conclusion

Women engaged in trade activities at border hubs navigate a complex landscape of both opportunities and difficulties. Their contributions play a crucial role in sustaining local economies, enabling cross-border commerce, and reinforcing economic ties between regions. At the same time, they grapple with several challenges, such as unequal pay, unstable employment conditions, limited social

protections, and heightened risks of exploitation. Additionally, cultural expectations and insufficient policy frameworks add to their hardships.

Nevertheless, there are emerging opportunities for women in border commerce. Strengthening regional trade partnerships, enhancing infrastructure, and implementing favourable government initiatives can open more inclusive economic pathways. Equipping women with relevant skills, expanding their access to financial resources, and reinforcing legal safeguards will not only improve their economic standing but also drive wider economic progress. Tackling these issues requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and community stakeholders to ensure that women in border trade zones gain fair and sustainable access to economic participation.

Chapter-VI

CONCLUSION

The final concluding chapter of the research work summarised the entire work. It presents a summary of all previous chapters. This chapter includes findings and observation, suggestions and conclusion. This conclusion chapter opens with presenting a summary of the entire work. The British colonial authorities conducted substantial changes to trading activities that occurred between India and Myanmar. The territorial acquisition of Myanmar by British India occurred after the successful completion of the Anglo-Burmese Wars during 1824–1885. The colonial government designed policies that focused on resource exploitation together with infrastructure development for imperial economic integration of Myanmar. The Indo-Burma Trunk Road together with the Burma Railway enabled the imperial markets to obtain teak wood and rice through resource transportation. These new developments dismantled traditional barter practices that existed before colonial interference causing damage to established communities throughout both territories.

The colonial states built Moreh (India) and Tamu (Myanmar) into customs enforcement centers although these hubs mainly served imperial interests. During World War II Japanese invasions coupled with military infrastructure changes broke the existing commercial routes. India and Myanmar struggled in 1947 and 1948 after their independence to develop new trade procedures because of altered political limits.

The political instabilities during the early independence period caused severe damage to border commercial activities in both nations. Myanmar isolated its economy through socialist policies implemented in response to the 1962 military coup and thus sealed many of its border routes. During this period India restricted foreign trade exchanges with Myanmar because its self-sufficiency strategy took precedence. Despite general trade interactions between the countries there remained no official systems to manage these exchanges.

The late 1990s initiated a new era of border trade between India and Myanmar through the implementation of India's "Look East Policy" for economic liberalization. The authorities worked to establish formal trade agreements between India and Myanmar beginning with the 1994 Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement. Border Trade Centres were created at the Moreh (Manipur) and Zokhawthar (Mizoram) locations to offer simpler trade facilities.

Border trade experienced a revival starting from the 1990s because of changing global relations together with regional economic integration plans. Through its "Act East Policy" India focused on developing better connections between Southeast Asia and Myanmar to enhance regional partnerships. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project was developed to establish better transportation connections between northeastern India and Myanmar.

The towns of Moreh (Manipur), Zokhawthar (Mizoram), Avangkhu-Pangsha (Nagaland) and Lungwa (Nagaland) became essential trade centers between India and Myanmar. Trading centers along the border linked farmers to textile producers and timber extractors and mineral miners and consumer goods distributors creating harmonious cultural links with border residents. Border trade between India and Myanmar faces barriers from military coups in Myanmar as well as inadequate infrastructure developments and currency exchange problems together with smuggling activities which limit its complete economic potential.

Border trade through history between India and Myanmar established its vital economic importance for northeastern India while advancing Southeast Asian integration. The important economic partnership shows promise for improvement through BTCs and regional connectivity projects despite the persistent challenges from political instability together with infrastructure deficits.

6.1 Summary

The research undertakes an examination of border trade centers as they affect women's empowerment in the North-east Indian territories of Manipur and Mizoram. The areas position themselves near Myanmar and Bangladesh borders to function as essential centers for international business activity. The paper examines in-depth the

ways trade centers support women in economic growth together with social development and political empowerment against their encountered difficulties.

The tract of northeastern Indian states which includes Manipur and Mizoram functions as essential cross-border trading areas because they maintain proximity to Southeast Asia. Women have dominated the economic fabric of these regions as shown in Manipur's Ima Keithel which holds the title for world's largest women-only market, yet they encounter obstacles from insufficient public infrastructure and traditional cultural boundaries. When women gain trading power it creates greater family revenue and supports total economic advancement of the society.

Manipur acts as an entry point for India's "Act East Policy" because of its strategic position between India and Myanmar. The Moreh-Tamu corridor serves as a vital trade route which operates both formal and informal trade activities to enhance regional economic development and foster pan-regional integration.

For decades Manipuri women supported the state's economic foundation by running Ima Keithel institutions. The growth of their cross-border trading activities created additional economic opportunities for them to function as traders and vendors together with business operators. The path toward becoming a trader proves difficult for women because they confront social limitations along with constrained resource availability and insufficient infrastructure. The women face challenges but use their trade opportunities to support themselves financially and achieve community leadership positions.

Through border trade hubs in Mizoram women acquire venues to develop business ventures while doing cross-border business. Women belonging to tribal areas take an active part in trading crops in combination with both house-made products and hand-made cloths. Women who participate in trade activities have earned higher social standing while transforming conventional gender norms. Women play active leadership roles as heads of households and head their communities. Training specific to financial understanding and marketing alongside negotiation skills has given women the abilities to thrive in commercial

environments. The programs gain backing from both governmental policies and NGOs.

Border trade participation of women receives support through governmental policies developed by both state authorities and central authorities. The "Act East Policy" guides essential progress through infrastructure development which allows women entrepreneurs to seize new market opportunities. The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) offers women trading professionals both education and small-scale financial resources. The border trade centers located in Manipur and Mizoram serve as important tools which empower women. These hubs empower women through financial chances and organized training sessions and market access enabling them to fight gender-based conventions and drive local development outcomes. For border trade to achieve its maximum potential the necessary challenges of limited infrastructure and societal resistance need to be resolved.

The Study demonstrates the essential role of India-Myanmar border trade which extends from past traditions to current market developments. Border trade functions as a fundamental economic relationship that establishes business associations between northeastern states in India as well as border populations in Myanmar. Border trade enables the exchange of agricultural products, textiles along with electronics and machinery thereby creating cultural and trade connections between India and Myanmar. The trade hub of Moreh in Manipur functions as a major commercial center that builds infrastructure and creates jobs and improves interregional economic partnership. Trade formalization has reinforced diplomatic ties which aligns with Indian diplomacy and establishes Myanmar as part of regional market supply chains.

Women have an essential part in border trade operations especially when participating within informal business sectors. These women lead the operation of small businesses and oversee retail stores and also maintain local trading activities. Women who actively participate in border trade commonly deal with restricted financing possibilities alongside inadequate education or training provisions while fighting against social prejudice. Border community stability increases through their

engagement which helps achieve family financial security in these border regions. All societies must acknowledge women's position in economic development to establish gender equality.

Border trade centers of Zokhawthar, Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur have drawn numerous women workers who participate in the development of North-East India through regional economic trade activities. India's trade partnership with Myanmar depends on these two locations because they function as essential gateways linking India to Myanmar for both economic and cultural and social mandates. Women who participate in these trade centers take part through formal as well as informal merchant activities that sustain local economic development. Women who play essential roles in these regions maintain multiple socio-economic challenges together with persistent structural obstacles which restrict their complete power and achievement potential.

Since colonial times the Indo-Myanmar border has functioned as a vital zone where trade combined with cultural interaction between the two regions took place. The vast borderlands of Mizoram and Manipur near Myanmar serve as vital areas for Indian strategic objectives under Look East and Act East policies and they indirectly support foreign commerce while enhancing diplomatic relations across Southeast Asia. These policies focus on developing Southeast Asian economic alliances through border facilities such as Moreh and Zokhawthar. The cross-border exchanges involve female participation as active traders who also function as shopkeepers while carrying products through physical transport. Women participated at a higher rate in border trade following the 1994 India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement since it stabilized transaction processes while providing new business opportunities.

6.2 Study Objective and Research Questions

The first study objective, “to examine the profile of border trade between India and Myanmar,” is approached using a descriptive methodological framework. This objective is analyzed through historical, comparative, and descriptive methods, with content analysis employed to detail the profile of border trade between India and

Myanmar. A descriptive design was developed to outline the characteristics of the study area and present the background of border trade.

The second objective, “to investigate women’s work in the border trade centers at Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur,” relies on data and information gathered from women workers. A quantitative method was designed for this purpose, with primary data collected via a survey questionnaire and personal interviews with selected respondents. A comparative analysis method was used for this objective.

The third objective, “to explore women’s empowerment through the Border Trade Centers,” employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The case study method is utilized to analyze this objective. The relationship between the border trade centers and women’s empowerment is seen as interdependent, based on a cause-and-effect framework. This objective highlights how the facilities and services provided by the Border Trade Centers are directly linked to women's work.

The final objective, “to analyze the challenges faced by women workers at the border trade centers,” is addressed through the use of survey questionnaires and personal interviews. Open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire and interviews to support this objective.

Additionally, the observation method and field site visits were employed to gather more insights. A comparative data analysis method was used to illuminate the challenges at the Border Trade Centers.

The first research question, “What is the historical background of border trade between India and Myanmar?” is addressed through a theoretical analysis of the history of border trade between the two countries. This trade has experienced various fluctuations over time and was primarily based on a barter system, involving traditional exchange activities managed by women across the India-Myanmar border.

The second research question, “What is the status of women workers in the border trade centers at Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur?” is explored through an analysis of primary data collected via survey questionnaires and personal

interviews with selected women workers at both trade centers (BTCs). The status of women workers at the Moreh BTC differs significantly from that at the Zokhawthar BTC. The socio-economic status of women workers at Moreh is comparatively higher than that of their counterparts at Zokhawthar. This disparity is attributed to Moreh's integrated check post (ICP) status, in contrast to Zokhawthar's land customs station (LCS) status.

The third research question, "What is the significance of border trade centers for women's empowerment?" is answered by analyzing data and information from official documents, records, registers, and annual reports concerning border trade centers. Additionally, information and opinions gathered through personal interviews and survey questionnaires contribute to this analysis. Border trade represents the only opportunity available to local women, who largely depend on locally available income sources. The BTCs play a crucial role in empowering women workers and facilitate cultural exchange across borders.

The last research question, "What are the problems faced by women workers at border trade centers?" is examined through data collected from survey questionnaires and personal interviews with women workers and other related stakeholders. Several challenges encountered by women workers were identified during physical observations of both trade facilities. Women shared their experiences in personal interviews and responses to the survey questionnaires about the difficulties they face in their daily lives at the border trade center. A significant issue is the lack of awareness about banking, trade regulations, and professional skills, which contributes to many of the problems experienced by these women. Lack of adequate infrastructural facilities mainly at Zokhawthar border trade centre is a big cause of problems. Additionally, women at Zokhawthar face more challenges than those at Moreh.

6.3 Findings and Obervastion

The findings and observation are based on the analysis of theoretical framework of the study. These are based on the data and opinons of stakeholders. the data analysis of answers of survey questionnaires and personal interviews. The content

analysis of government reports, records and documents related to border trade centres are used in this study. The findings are based on observation of the working of the field sites through physical visits.

Status and Working of Border Trade Centres

Due to its size and population, the two Border Trade Centers became a significant divergent. Moreh is renowned as a center of commercial trade that was essential to the flow of money. It features an integrated checkpoint that facilitates cross-border flow of persons and products. Certain government services and facilities, such as immigration clearing, cold storage, pump house, customs clearance, money exchange counter, weight bridge, plant and animal quarantine, import and export warehouse, etc., are available in Moreh. It has a significant impact on local communities' empowerment, which advances Manipur's development. However, Zokhawthar is homogeneous, with Mizo people making up the majority. On the Indian side is a Land Custom Station. In addition, it has a weighbridge, a warehouse, the State Bank of India, a plant quarantine, a police checkpoint, an agriculture office, veterinary and animal husbandry, and internet connection via a mobile phone. In addition to the absence of amenities in the region, inadequate infrastructure leads to subpar administration.

Socio-Economic Status of Women Workers

One of the most underutilized economic drivers in the nation is the female population. The only option for India to make headway in reducing the gender gap is through employment. In India, factors including age, social standing, education, and geographic location have an impact on the state of women's empowerment. Initiatives should be implemented through skill-building programs that prioritize inclusivity and gender equality. BTC has great economic opportunities by providing jobs to women in the center. Because of the economic advantage in the area, most women are set to enter the labor force. A skilled workforce is required to increase women in the workplace for generating income and for more productive jobs. The low rate of formal employment in the border area affects security and access to employment differently in providing social security to women workers.

Women Operate the Trade Activities

The border trade centers commonly see women operating small stores where they sell both domestic goods and handmade items as well as import products while connecting between local producers and main commercial operators. The intricate social network skills and extensive market understanding of these women ensure their irreplaceable role within trading centers. More professional women now take positions in structured trade enterprises and logistics services together with administrative positions in both sectors. The movement of women from informal trading roles to formal ones represents both societal economic transformation and widespread understanding of female economic capabilities.

Challenges Face by Women Workers

Despite these positive developments, the study reveals that women workers in Moreh and Zokhawthar face significant challenges that impede their progress. Women encounter the major problem of restricted formal market connections combined with limited financial opportunities. Women traders struggle with business growth and credit services because they do not possess valid licenses or proper business registration. The combination of insufficient access to transportation and substandard market access and unstable communication infrastructure leads to poor business efficiency for women entrepreneurs. Small-scale women traders face disproportionate challenges due to uncertain trade policies and high taxation rates since they cannot afford to absorb unpredictable changes in their business environment. Moreover, women traders sometimes face aggravated risks because there are ineffective complaint response tools as well as insufficient legal protection.

Social and Economic Ramification

However, the study found that the process of border trade participation by women produces substantial social and economic ramifications. Women who engage in border commerce through international trade improve their household wealth and fight poverty while promoting community well-being and regional peaceful conditions. When women receive economic empowerment it results in better health results for families together with enhanced education and nutrition levels which

creates successive positive impacts across the entire community. Participation of women in trade activities creates enhanced social ties and better cultural connections between neighboring regions and these border zones need peaceful cooperation.

Financial Autonomy

Also, the financial autonomy of women gives them stronger authority to fight discrimination while securing their rights and active participation in local decision-making bodies. The social changes brought by women traders become especially important when considering North-East India where conventional gender stereotypes traditionally subordinated women. Through their strategic barrier-breaking methods women traders create conditions which will lead to a society that is both inclusive and fair.

Adaptability and Adversities

The research reveals that women traders in Zokhawthar and Moreh display powerful adaptability and endurance when dealing with adversities. Women utilize their creativity to develop helpful solutions which help them fight obstacles while continuing their economic survival. Many women develop network cooperatives which allow resource sharing and mutual support as well as information exchange. Through their networks women traders improve their market muscle yet utilize these nonformal structures to unite on matters of common advocacy. Women traders have generated positive outcomes through their influence to win better market facilities which include enhanced security and improved trade transparency.

Educational and Professional Skills

Moreover, the study also found that women farmers require proper education together with skills training for them to become empowered traders. Training programs that teach business management and financial literacy and digital technology to women will enhance their participation and benefits from cross-border trade. The support needed must come from both government and non-governmental organizations which will also promote awareness of women's rights and entitlements. The economic development of women demands that trade policies and

programs adopt systemic gender-based elements which build structures supporting women's economic engagement. Besides, women need proper solutions developed to eliminate institutional barriers which prevent them from joining formal trading relations with financial institutions.

Women will shift from informal to formal sectors when simple registration methods are combined with fewer bureaucratic procedures and financial products tailored for their needs. The successful development of women-friendly market areas demanded alongside robust infrastructure systems for transportation and communication and strong safety measures for female traders. Woman traders need secure frameworks along with reliable means to resolve complaints because they face exploitation threats and abuse.

Community-Based Support to Women Workers

Community-based support together with family backing proves indispensable for women who want to participate in border trade operations. Men need encouragement to perform household duties and changes to traditional gender expectations will build better support for female traders in their communities. The promotion of gender equality together with respect and inclusion requires community organizations and local community leaders to actively participate. The participation of women workers at border trade centers throughout North-East India demonstrates her ability to stay resilient and use resources creatively while showing great determination.

Economic and Social Transformation of the Border Region

The economic and social transformation of the region heavily depends on their work but women traders experience major difficulties that need immediate resolution. Public officials together with development professionals and community leaders must work jointly to address existing difficulties so women in border trade can access complete potential leading to an inclusive and economically prosperous future. This research demonstrates women's crucial position in cross-border commercial activities and presents suggestions for empowerment that guide policy actions targeting these specific groups. The sustainable development and equitable

evolution of Southeast Asia requires an empowered female presence in border trade centers between India and Southeast Asia including Moreh and Zokhawthar.

Obstacles in Empowerment of Women Workers

Before recent times women in border trade only performed informal sales of agricultural products and handmade merchandise because formal trading was controlled by men in such networks. The empowerment of women has increased through time though recent obstacles such as restricted educational chances and leadership positions continue to hamper their progress. Border market areas such as Moreh (Manipur) and Zokhawthar (Mizoram) see women assuming control of all informal marketplace deals that include vegetable distribution and textile and handcrafted product trade. The informal trade sector provides flexible opportunities but Restricts business growth through capital constraints and requires fixing exploitation problems in uncontrolled commercial operations.

Enhance to Chances and Opportunities

Women now have enhanced chances to do business through regulated commerce sectors after trade became formalized. Women entrepreneurs have set up shops and perform both wholesale distribution and business ownership activities. Through education and business training programs combined with access to digital technology women have become capable of participating in lucrative trade segments. Women continue to actively participate in service sectors including transportation, logistics, hospitality, retail management and banking as well as customs clearing at trade locations. Through their business ventures these women prove essential to local economic growth as they also work to break down established gender expectations. Social and economic independence along with leadership opportunities emerge from border trade because it allows women to gain independence. Women now make their own decisions in the household and use their income for educational expenditures as well as healthcare services. When women take part they create relationships which reinforce connections between members of the community.

Changes in Local Economic and Communitities

The presence of women traders within border trade creates tremendous changes for both local economic systems and communities which reside along the India-Myanmar frontier. In spite of experiencing obstacles from gender-based discrimination and limited resources women boost economic progress together with social integration between communities. Women's ability to overcome obstacles reveals their essential importance for developing future cross-border business dynamics. The study examines both opportunities and difficulties that women employees encounter while working in border trade centers by studying Moreh Manipur and Zokhawthar Mizoram India. Borders depend on women because they boost household revenue and support local business activities and expand regional commercial activities. Various barriers emerge from economic conditions together with cultural practices and institutional structures that challenge women workers during their border trade activities.

Banking and Financial Limitations

Women rarely find stable employment opportunities because they work in non-formal sectors which pay minimum wages. Market demand and trade policies as well as exchange rates influence the income received by female border traders. Women find it difficult to obtain loans since they lack both appropriate security and understand financial operations. Women who need loans must turn to informal lenders because formal institutions deny them financing and these lenders offer loans with especially high interest rates that result in perpetual debt. The better resources and extensive networks which wealthy traders possess shape markets into setups that small-scale domestic women traders find challenging to compete against. Society maintains strict barriers against women which prevent their movement between locations and limits both their capability to make decisions and blocks their access to profitable opportunities.

Balance between Housework and Trade Work

Professional growth limitations occur because women face dual responsibilities between their housework and their trade work. Women who work in informal employment roles receive no insurance packages that cover health care or maternity leave benefits. The absence of proper market areas as well as storage systems and sanitation provision and transportation access poses major obstacles for female market sellers. Insurgent warfare combined with political confinements disrupts commercial operations thus causing extra hardship for women who conduct daily business. Border checkpoints with their complicated bureaucracy and discriminatory practices create greater marginalization of women in the trading process.

New Opportunities for Women Workers

New opportunities for women professionals in retail registered through regional trade agreements while infrastructure development invites participation in hospitality and logistics industries. Government bodies and NGOs provide training programs that teach women business administration practices and financial literacy in addition to trade rule comprehension. The formation of Self-Help Groups with cooperatives gives women the chance to combine their resources which creates united bargaining strength. Through these networks women gain better bargaining power for their trade and access needed financial resources. Trade participation provides women with better financial autonomy that enables them to spend household money and expand their businesses. Social advancement occurs when women take part in society because it challenges male-dominated norms of tradition.

The development of roadways and storage facilities along with banking services provides women better opportunities to conduct cross-border business activities with enhanced efficiency. Women's active participation creates cultural sharing bridges that exist between border communities and simultaneously fights against gender biases. Entrepreneurial accomplishments by these women serve as motivational factors that drive younger generations towards business ownership.

Scope for Central Sponsored Schemes

Women laborers who work at border trade centers encounter multiple obstacles regarding pay rates along with inadequate facilities and discrimination and social protection weaknesses yet they are key figures leading economic changes in their regions. The full empowerment of female workers requires enhancement of regional policies combined with strategic skill development initiatives together with better infrastructure and wider financial access. The solutions for these problems will benefit workers' quality of life and help promote regional economic development alongside gender equality advancement.

The economic development of both countries features as one benefit from the trade agreements between India and Myanmar. Financial programs such as Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) supporting micro-entrepreneurs. The border areas of Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur) along the India-Myanmar frontier represent dynamic zones of economic activity, cultural exchange, and geopolitical significance. The women workers of these regions act as vital components to make livings succeed by assisting in trade activities while confronting the difficulties resulting from geographic and political elements.

Shifting from Informal to Formal Trade Activities

Prior to European colonization borderlands linking India and Myanmar acted as trading centers where Mizo, Chin, Naga and Kuki communities exchanged farming products together with fabrics, forest resources and handmade goods. Economic activities during this era depended heavily on women because they served both as active traders and masters of handicraft and textile production.

British colonial administration during the Colonial period created established trading pathways although it counteracted established indigenous methods of operation. Women's economic responsibilities shifted because the transition from barter exchange into monetary transactions restricted their hands-on involvement with business transactions. Following independence Myanmar faced political turmoil causing northeast Indian border areas to experience insurrections which blocked

cross-border trading for numerous decades. The informal market continued operating through small-scale trading performed by women and female laborwork.

Lack of Upgradation and New Build-up Facilities

Since 1994 when the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement began and India adopted its "Look East" (now "Act East") policy trade activities resumed through key points at Moreh and Zokhawthar. Women gained new job possibilities as a result of these developments although informal trade barriers persisted alongside a lack of proper infrastructure. Zokhawthar functions as a vital trade center because it borders Rihkhawdar in Myanmar's Champhai district, Mizoram. Women make an active contribution to the small-scale marketing activities of agricultural commodities along with textile products and consumer products. Women engage in border market vending while working as porters and creating handicrafts and working in various other roles.

The Zokhawthar-Rih Trade Zone received formal status in 2004 which failed to establish solutions for credit availability and gender-focused assistance for women traders. Moreh, Manipur serves as an essential trade conduit between India and Southeast Asian regions position in Manipur. Women operating in this border area conduct commercial activities by selling textiles along with food items and various other products. Women who work in trading encounter several hindrances including outdated business patterns and unacknowledged professional capability along with lacking access to storage facilities and financial institutions.

The income earnings of households are expanded through the trade-based activities performed by women. They operate both small enterprises and carry out work as employees who receive pay only for each day they work. Women promote cultural exchange through their trade of traditional items which represent common heritage elements between Indian and Myanmar ethnic groups. Through economic contributions women extend their activities to promote social cohesion by organizing joint festivals and rituals and conducting markets.

Sustainable and Inclusive Policies

Women believe they will have enhanced participation opportunity in cross-border trade in the coming years. Numerous women suggest that accepting inclusive policies alongside financial support and stronger security measures will lead to their success. Women believe that increased cross-border commercial activities will help break social gender restrictions. Women who work at the India-Myanmar trade frontier keep the economy active while actively undermining the established social divisions between men and women. Their ability to overcome scarce resources together with social pressures has allowed women workers to make substantial contributions to both their families and their communities. Access to resources along with skill development programs and inclusive policies enable women's total potential realization for both regional development and gender equality advancement.

Non-core issues such as security and protection, cross-border illegal activities, and the revocation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) are present at border trade centers. These illegal activities and security concerns also impact women workers in these areas. Security authorities conduct inquiries and interrogations with women workers regarding illegal activities at the border trade centers. It has been observed that such inquiries and interrogations disrupt the lives of these women workers.

Women workers at border trade centers including Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur drive cross-border business operations and simultaneously generate household wealth and develop local economies as well as area trading networks. The women working in border trade face multiple obstacles due to cultural norms alongside economic uncertainties and insufficient infrastructure as well as gender discrimination. International trade policy changes along with regional partnership development open new prospects to empower border traders.

The consequences of border security are highlighted in a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), given that Myanmar is the site of a continuous drug flow to India. The Free Movement Regime (FMR), which runs

parallel to Indo-Myanmar, is a crucial element between two adjacent nations. It began in 1970 and saw a comeback in 2016, and it is part of New Delhi's Act East Policy. Giving people who lived within 16 kilometers the freedom to travel without requiring proper documentation was the primary goal. This border's FMR is influenced by strong familial and ethnic ties. The increase in Myanmar's drug production has led to increased scrutiny. Because they share a common progenitor, the people who live in the border area did not support border fencing. Myanmar and Mizoram have a lengthy 510-kilometer border. On the other hand, Manipur is about 10 km. This strengthens ties amongst the tribe's cultures. Nonetheless, the Indian government started a discussion with the Myanmar government to discuss ending unrestricted border movement, as well as to think about and strengthen the border with fencing.

The Free Movement Regime (FMR) which go along Indo-Myanmar serve as an important aspects between two neighbouring countries. Which initiated in 1970 and experience a resurgence in 2016, find place within Act East Policy of New Delhi. The main purpose was giving permission to individual residing within 16 kms to move freely without the requirement of valid documents. The FMR along this border is shaped deep ethnical and familial connections. There is a heightened scrutiny because due to surge in drug production in Myanmar. There is a report from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime(UNODC) make remark the implications of security at the border as Myanmar is the region for consistant flow of narcotics to India. The people residing in the border area didnt support Border Fencing due to ethnical ties which share a common ancestor. Mizoram share a long border of 510 km with Myanmar. While Manipur cover approximately 10 km. This foster cultural linkages between the tribe. However,the Indian government initiated a dialogue with the authorities with Myanmar for consideration to termination of unristricted border movement and for contemplation and fortifying it with fencing.

Violence, extortion, and a variety of demands from various Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGS) have increased in Manipur as a result of uncontrolled migration from Myanmar and an undefended border. This provided surrounding nations with a safe harbor. A critical security concern will be resolved by the smart fencing system,

which will prevent illicit actors and rebel groups from entering without authorization and from infiltrating in various ways. The termination of the Free Movement Regime impacts border residents who are simply divided by boundaries and have similar ethnic links. Maintaining cultural ties between those residing on both sides of the border is crucial. The peaceful coexistence and cross-cultural interchange that are essential components of the border would suffer as a result. Furthermore, there is no other route to cross the border except through the international border post, which is guarded by Assam Rifles and customs. However, the boundary can be crossed at thousands of sites.

6.4 Recommendation and the Way Forward

The recommendation and way forward are based on the analysis of data collected through primary sources as survey questionnaires, personal interviews and opinions of local stakeholders. The observation of field sites (border trade centers) and analysis of contents drew from the secondary sources as reports and publications are also used. The empowering initiative for female workers in Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur) consists of institutional improvements along with infrastructure progress and skills upgrades combined with financial accessibility programs as well as efforts to enhance social and cultural opportunities for women. An extended examination provides additional details on each area followed by specific recommendations.

a). Women-Led Cooperatives

The establishment of cooperatives under female leadership creates an essential mechanism to achieve economic developments through group effort. The cooperatives should build their marketable product range through the India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement to include textiles and handicrafts with agricultural items. Women join formal cooperative groups to eliminate their reliance on exploitative informal trading networks and obtain credit support and training services along with essential resources.

b). Gender Quotas in Decision-Making Bodies

Border Trade Centres (BTCs) enforce gender quota systems for their management committees which brings female viewpoints into policy formation processes. Gender-based representation in decision-making structures helps solve pay inequality problems and harassment problems at work and maternal care problems simultaneously with supportive trade policy implementation.

c). Formalization of Informal Trade

Because of excessive bureaucracy many women conduct their trade operations through informal channels. A streamlining of trade document procedures through legal simplification would motivate female traders to enter formal commerce operations. Such measures would safeguard female traders by preventing exploitation while maintaining standards set forth in international trade.

d). Dedicated Market Spaces

Marketplaces dedicated to female vendors improve marketing opportunities as well as women's economic involvement in the business world. These spaces need to include security protection along with child care areas and sanitation areas and system to monitor climate for perishable product storage.

e). Healthcare and Education Facilities

Mobile health facilities installed at border marketplaces should help protect female workers from harmful occupational risks. Vocational training in financial literacy and digital marketing and logistics skills can increase women's ability to take part in cross-border business because these abilities directly support commerce.

f). Transportation Subsidies

Female traders receive reduced operational costs because the introduction of subsidized transportation networks makes their movements between locations easier. The implementation of improved connectivity systems would give women traders access to bigger markets than their current restricted border regions.

g). Cold Storage Warehouses

The location of climate-controlled storage space near border checkpoints helps women farmers in agricultural trade activities avoid spoilage losses. The new infrastructure would implement sustainable farming principles to generate more revenue for local communities.

h). Vocational Training Initiatives

Women require detailed training about entrepreneurship and digital skills along with sustainable agricultural techniques to advance beyond minimum-wage informal industries through international trade standards. Women can develop better cross-border negotiation capabilities by completing certification programs that will strengthen their capacity to handle challenging trade conditions.

i). Craft Innovation Hubs

New centers for innovation will combine modern technologies with old traditional skills to rebuild declining local industries without losing their cultural heritage. The points of connection would enable designers to collaborate with artisans for developing marketable products which would participate in both regional trade fairs and international markets.

j). Digital Literacy Campaigns

Women must learn digital literacy skills to properly use e-commerce platforms. The training curriculum needs to teach people how to utilize digital payment platforms with online marketing methods coupled with social media platforms to grow their business footprint.

k). Streamlined Microloan Procedures

Border trade centers should simplify microloan procedures to make financial capital available for women who want to launch or grow their businesses. When Start-Up India initiates women-centric venture funds they will enhance support for entrepreneurship activities.

l). Integration with Export Promotion Councils

Self-Help Groups must work together with export promotion councils to get access to financing options and worldwide export markets. An integrated connection would enable these entities to achieve global competition success as well as establish economic independence.

m). Crowdfunding Platforms

The funding mechanism of crowdfunding benefits women entrepreneurs who operate in border locations. The platforms act as funding alternatives by connecting to community-based engagement initiatives.

n). Awareness Campaigns

People must become aware of gender equality together with legal rights and economic opportunities because these concepts are essential to break down social barriers that restrain female commercial involvement. The presentation of strong successful female traders as inspiration will help motivate other women to follow trading careers.

o). Childcare Services at Trade Centers

Women would be able to participate in economic activities after hubs at trade facilities implement care services for children who accompany them to work.

p). Recognition Programs

Both awards and public recognition of best female traders actively validate their economic contributions which in turn builds social acceptance of women leaders in all professions.

q). Community Engagement Programs

Community-based programs that promote gender sensitization education work towards removing cultural obstacles which stop women from entering the workforce.

r). Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

The implementation needs supportive collaboration between MDoNER (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region), NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission), UN Women, International Labour Organization (ILO) and state departments of women's development and MWDC (Mizoram Women's Development Corporation) and e-commerce platforms to succeed.

s). Cross-Border Skill Exchanges

Under the "Act East" policy framework India can enhance regional cooperation by creating opportunities for skill exchanges with Myanmar.

t). Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

PPPs provide a valuable infrastructure development tool for specialized marketplaces along with cold storage facilities and accomplish sustainability goals through collaborative management arrangements.

u). E-Commerce Platforms

Digital marketplaces provide women traders with both low-cost operations and immediate connections to international customers without needing intermediaries. Systems enabling digital payments require implementation in these platforms to achieve smooth transactions.

v). Trade Paperwork Assistance

The provision of legal documentation assistance in cross-border trade enables women to step out of informal business into formal operations while bypassing governmental barriers.

w). Blockchain Technology Adoption

Blockchain provides a solution for transparent transaction records which enhances accountability and decreases corruption risks in international business.

6.5 Conclusion

To conclude, an examination of female participation in cross-border trading zones in the North-Eastern region of India, particularly focusing on Mizoram and Manipur, uncovers a multifaceted relationship between gender roles, economic practices, spatial dynamics, and state policies. Women involved in these trading environments often find themselves negotiating between entrenched cultural expectations and the evolving demands of a liberalising regional economy. In doing so, they have managed to assert their presence within informal and quasi-formal trade circuits, crafting livelihoods and asserting autonomy amidst structural limitations.

Mizoram and Manipur's frontier regions, due to their proximity to Myanmar and deep-rooted ethno-historical connections, have historically operated as active conduits for cross-cultural exchange and commercial interaction. Within these contexts, women have assumed indispensable roles in sustaining local trade systems, particularly within small-scale and unofficial markets. Their involvement spans a diverse array of merchandise, from farm goods and woven fabrics to everyday consumer items, despite facing significant institutional neglect and lacking formal acknowledgement. Their entrepreneurial adaptability and competence in navigating linguistic and cultural barriers highlight their critical role in these marginal economies.

Nevertheless, the analysis reveals several persistent socio-economic hindrances confronting these women. Challenges such as deficient transport and market infrastructure, restricted access to micro-finance, marginalization in trade associations, and vulnerability to exploitation remain prevalent. The dominance of unregulated market operations further amplifies their susceptibility to sudden policy changes, increased border surveillance, and local political instability, all of which can destabilize their income sources. Moreover, patriarchal norms and gendered expectations continue to constrain their mobility and limit their influence within trade governance mechanisms. In Manipur, the town of Moreh stands out as both a space of promise and unpredictability for women traders. While some have

established themselves through women-run cooperatives or informal alliances, they still face recurrent disruptions arising from shifting geopolitical landscapes and internal unrest. A comparable situation exists in Zokhawthar, Mizoram, where Mizo women actively engage in transborder trade yet remain outside the formalized structures of state-regulated commerce.

Despite such obstacles, the tenacity and adaptive strategies of these female traders are remarkable. Their sustained efforts to operate in a fluid environment characterized by uncertain policies, informal economies, and embedded social restrictions reflects their resourcefulness and perseverance. Though fragile, the informal trade sector offers a degree of financial independence and increased public engagement not readily accessible to many rural women in the North-East. However, to genuinely recognize and strengthen their economic role, it is crucial to formulate trade policies that incorporate gender-specific considerations. This entails not only integrating informal practices into legal frameworks but also ensuring better access to credit, skills development initiatives, market infrastructure, and legal safeguards. Any such strategy must be grounded in a nuanced understanding of the region's socio-cultural and economic diversity.

These interventions address institutional infrastructure problems and financial discrimination against women as well as gender-based discrimination alongside legal inequalities while taking advantage of regional trade agreements to empower women workers socially and economically. Exclusivity remains the focus of proposed strategies that combine institutional reforms with skill development programs and financial accessibility measures as well as socio-cultural empowerment initiatives and security protocols and trade process digitization and regional and international partnership development. The detailed implementation strategies can convert Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur) into vibrant economic centers which elevate female workers' socio-economic status and sustain development in northeastern border regions of India toward the "Act East" policy framework goals.

In summing up, enhancing the role of women in Mizoram and Manipur's border trade corridors is both a question of equity and a pragmatic step towards

inclusive regional growth. By dismantling the systemic barriers hindering their participation, governments and development actors can harness their potential as agents of cross-border engagement, local economic resilience, and regional collaboration. These women's narratives should be placed at the forefront not as marginal anecdotes, but as central to understanding North-East India's evolving economic relations with its neighboring regions and its broader position within South and South-East Asian trade dynamics.

APPENDIX-1

QUESTIONNAIRE

WOMEN WORKERS IN BORDER TRADE CENTRES IN NORTH-EAST INDIA: A STUDY OF MIZORAM AND MANIPUR

Dear Miss/Madam,

I request you kindly fill up my questionnaire for my Ph.D. thesis. All responses collected are confidential and will not be identified individually. I will use this data only for my research analysis. Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,
MimmyRosangpuii

Respondent Profile:

- 1.Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Religion: _____
4. Marital Status: _____
5. Did you own any business: Yes () No (). If yes, Did your business stop export/import due to border issues _____
6. Monthly business income in total: _____
7. Did you do import/export to India or Myanmar personally: _____
8. Level of studies : _____
9. No dependencies in your family: _____
10. Types of house: Owned () Rented () Shared ()
11. Your types of Family: _____ Joined () Small family ()
12. Who is doing household chores: Me () My In-laws () Other Family member ()

FAMILY:

1. How many members are there in your family: _____
2. How many children are there in your family: _____
3. How many female workers are there in your family: _____
4. How many male workers are there in your family: _____

SOCIAL STATUS:

1. Religion: _____
2. Do you have responsibility in the church: Yes () No ()
3. Are you involved in Non- Government Organizations: Yes () No ()
4. Are you a leader of Local Organizations: Yes () No ()
5. Are you a member of any social group or association in your locality: _____
10. Are there any Self-Help groups in your locality? If yes, are you a member of SHG: _____
11. Are you a member of any Porter Union or association in your locality: _____
12. At present, are you satisfied with your job: Yes () No () If no write the reason _____
13. What are the reasons for your works: For my satisfaction () For my Family () Myfamily members force me () Any other _____
14. Are you connected with social Networking site/Group/Application: _____
15. Do you use Internet Banking, etc. _____

ECONOMIC STATUS

1. Working Status: Permanent () Temporary () Personal ()
2. Kinds of Work: Street vendor () Agricultural work () Porter () Household work/Chores () Private Organizations () Own Business ()
1. Monthly Income in Rupee: _____
2. Average Family Income: _____
3. Does your income improve the standard of living of your family: _____
4. How do you use your salary: _____
5. Do you own vehicles: _____
6. Do you have a BPL or AAY card: _____
7. Does the government provide facilities required in your job like (Drinking water, Waiting shed, Banking facilities, etc.) _____

WOMEN AND BORDER TRADE

1. What are your responsibilities and role in border trade?

2 How long have you been participating in border trade activities?

3. Why did you decide to work in border trade?

4. Which items do you mostly trade across?

5. How do you deal with cultural or gender difficulties at work?

6. Have you ever faced prejudice or unfair treatment at work? If yes, could you share some examples?

7. What tools or support networks do you use to get past obstacles at work?

8. What effects does border trade have on your family and personal life?

9. What prospects do you see for advancing female empowerment and gender equality in the border trade?

10. What impact do you think women will have on border trade in the future?

11. Which programmes or policies, in your opinion, would best assist women who work in border trade?

12. What is your vision for the future of cross-border trade, particularly in terms of gender dynamics?

13. What are the most difficult challenges you face as a woman working in border trade?

14. Would you mind sharing any further information regarding your viewpoints and experiences as a female employee in the border trade?

15. Any suggestions related to women workers at the border trade?

BORDER TRADE CENTRE WORKER

1. Position/Post of activity:

2. Nature of work:

3. Details of activity/ Time:

4. Facilities provided, if any:

5. Problems /challenges faced at theBorder Trade Centre

6. Suggestions for improvement for the border area.-

PERCEPTIONS ON POLITICS

1. Do you think that BorderTrade Centre is important for women's empowerment? If Yes/ No, why?

2. Do you want to participate in politics? If Yes/No, why?

3.

Are you interested in politics?

If Yes/No, why?

4. Are you satisfied with the government facilities at the Border Trade Centre? If Yes/No, Why?

5. To what extent do you understand the idea of border trade and its importance in your area?

6. Have you personally encountered any challenges or barriers as a woman engaging with or participating in border trade activities?

7. Do you think there are any particular programmes or policies that could help women participate in border trade more effectively or address gender-related challenges in this particular context?

8. Do social and cultural norms affect women's involvement in border trade, and if so, how do they affect this region's political environment?

PERCEPTIONS ON FREE MOVEMENT REGIME/ BORDER FENCING

1. Is FMR benefit for your Locality?

2. How far does FMR will effect your area if the Home Ministry scrap the movement?

3. Did you support FMR

4. Is FMR threatened the internal security in your area

5. Did you support Border Fencing in your area

6. Do you think border fencing will curb illigegal trade, drug trade, smuggling and insurgencies in your area.

APPENDIX-2

(AS ON 31.3.87)

PERTAINING TO INDO-BURMA BORDER AREA RESIDENTS

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

New Delhi, the 28th June, 1968

NOTIFICATION

G.S.R. 1265. - In pursuance of clause (i) of sub-rule (2) of rule 4 of the Passport (Entry into India) Rules, 1950, and of all other powers hereto enabling and in supersession of the notification of the Government of India, in the Ministry of Home Affairs No. 4/15/50-F.I., dated 26th September, 1950, the Central Government being of the opinion that it is necessary and expedient in public interest so to do, thereby exempts from the provisions of rule 3 of the said rules, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of the Union of Burma and who is *ordinarily resident in any area within 40 kilometers on either side of the India-Burma frontier*, entering into India across the said frontier after the 31st July, 1968, subject to the following conditions namely:-

(a) If he is a citizen of India: -

- (i) who has departed to Burma on the basis of a permit issued in accordance with the notification of the Government of India, in the Ministry of External Affairs No. SI/108/1/66, dated 28th June, 1968 he shall be in possession of such permit which is valid and effective at the time to re-entry, and
 - (ii) in any other case in possession of a permit (which is in the form given in the Schedule hereto annexed and valid and effective at the time of re-entry) issued by the Government of India, State Government or Union Territory Administration or by such authority as the Government of India, the State Government or Union Territory Administration may specify in this behalf.
- (b) If he is a citizen of the Union of Burma, he shall possession of: -
- (i) a permit or other like document issued by any authority empowered under the law for the time being in force in Burma, or by such other authority in Burma as the Government of Burma may specify for the purpose, or
 - (ii) a permit (which is in the form given in the Schedule hereto annexed and valid and effective at the time of re-entry) issued by the Government of India, State Government or Union Territory Administration or by such authority in India as the Government of India,

the State Government of the Union Territory administration may specify for the purpose, and he shall not on the basis of that permit move into area in India which is beyond 40 kilometers from the aforesaid frontier.

THE SCHEDULE PERMIT

1. Name (in full)
2. Father's name
3. Age/date of birth
4. Place of birth
5. Sex
6. Nationality
7. Permanent Address
8. Tribe and Occupation
9. Marks of Identification

10. Place intended to be visited

11. Route

- (a) for inward journey
- (b) for return journey

12. Signature or thumb impression of holder

This permit is valid upto _____ the day
of _____.

(Issuing Authority)
Signature
(Name in Block letters
Designation

Date:
Seal
Place:

(No. 4/1/68-F.I.)

(J. C. AGGARWAL)
Jt. Secy. to the Government of India

APPENDIX-3

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
ON THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT TRADE COMMITTEE
BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT
OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR**

The Government of India and the Union of Myanmar (herein referred to as the "Parties")

Wishing to promote and facilitate direct trade relations between the two countries;

Recalling The Trade Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of the Union of Myanmar signed on 27 May 1970 and the Border Trade Agreement signed on 21 January 1994;

Intending to establish a Joint Trade Committee (JTC) between the two countries;

Have reached the following understanding:

**ARTICLE I
OBJECTIVE**

The Parties shall establish a Joint Trade Committee for facilitating the expansion of mutual trade between the two countries.

**ARTICLE II
COMPOSITION**

The Joint Trade Committee shall be composed of delegation led by the concerned Ministers and the respective Government shall determine the composition of each delegation.

ARTICLE III TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Joint Trade Committee shall undertake measures to facilitate the expansion of trade which inter alia include the following:

- a) Hold consultations and exchange information on trade, and other related matters;
- b) Review the development of trade and other related matters as well as identify areas of mutual interest in trade for further co-operation;
- c) Recommend measures to the respective governments aimed at the expansion and diversification of trade between the two countries; and
- d) Set up working groups where necessary to carry out activities falling under its competence.

ARTICLE IV PROCEDURES

The Joint Trade Committee shall hold its session once in a year alternatively in India and Myanmar on dates to be mutually agreed upon. The host country shall provide the Secretariat for the meeting and extend courtesy to the determined members of the counterpart delegation.

ARTICLE V ENTRY INTO FORCE, DURATION AND TERMINATION

This Memorandum of Understanding shall come into force on the date of its signature and shall remain in force for a period of five (5) years. Thereafter, it may automatically be extended for another

five (5) years, unless either party gives to the other a written notice of its intention to terminate the Memorandum at least three (3) months before the date of its expiry.

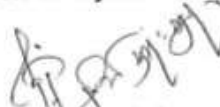
Done at Yangon on the 14 day of **July** 2003 in two originals each in Hindi, Myanmar and English languages, all texts being equally authentic. In case of any divergence in interpretation, the text in English shall prevail.

For the Government of India



(Arun Jaitley)
Minister for Commerce
and Industry

For the Government of
the Union of Myanmar



(Brig-Gen Pyi Sone)
Minister for Commerce

APPENDIX-4

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.1597

TO BE ANSWERED ON THE 5TH FEBRUARY, 2014/MAGHA 16, 1935 (SAKA)

DECISION TO REPLACE ASSAM RIFLES WITH BSF AT INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER

1597. SHRIMATI WANSUK SYIEM:

Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether considering Myanmar as a friendly neighbour, India has decided to replace The Assam Rifles, under the control of the Indian Army presently manning 70-80 km stretch of the border with Myanmar, with Border Security Force (BSF);

(b) whether India and Myanmar share an unfenced 1643 km border and permit free movement up to 16 kms across border, making it extremely porous;

(c) whether due to tough terrain, the BSF has proposed to air-maintain the border with a fleet of M-17 choppers; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS
(SHRI R.P.N. SINGH)

(a): The proposal to replace Assam Rifles with Border Security Force for guarding of the Indo Myanmar Border has not been finalized.

(b): Out of the total length of 1643 Kms of Indo-Myanmar Border, presently only 3 Kms is fenced. A Free Movement Regime on both sides of the border for upto 16 Kms is in place, which is, however, restricted to three points, namely Pangsou, Moreh and Zwkhatthar in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram respectively. An additional point in Nagaland is proposed to be established in due course.

(c) & (d) : BSF has submitted a proposal to air maintain the Border Out Posts with a fleet of MI-17 V5 helicopters and ALH Dhruv/Cheetah helicopters.

APPENDIX-5



RESERVE BANK OF INDIA
Mumbai - 400 001

RBI/2015-16/230

November 05, 2015

A. P. (DIR Series) Circular No. 26

To

All Authorised Dealers in Foreign Exchange

Madam / Sir,

Switching from Barter Trade to Normal Trade at the Indo-Myanmar Border

Attention of the Authorised Dealers is invited to A.D. (G.P. Series) Circular No.8 dated May 17, 1997 read with [A.P.\(DIR Series\) Circular No. 17 dated October 16, 2000](#) in terms of which it has been stipulated that the border trade between Myanmar and India may be settled through barter system. Further, in terms of Regulation 3 and 5 of the [Notification No. FEMA 14/2000-RB dated May 3, 2000](#) [viz. Foreign Exchange Management (Manner of Receipt and Payment) Regulations, 2000] as amended from time to time, the trade transactions with Myanmar may be settled in any permitted currency in addition to the Asian Clearing Union mechanism.

2. Barter trade was initially permitted to facilitate exchange of locally produced commodities along the Indo-Myanmar border. As such, these transactions were not captured in the banking system or reflected in the trade statistics. However, over a period of time the trade basket has diversified and adequate banking presence is in place to support normal trade with Myanmar.

3. It has, therefore, been decided, in consultation with Government of India, to do away with the barter system of trade at the Indo-Myanmar border and switch over completely to normal trade with effect from December 1, 2015. Hence instructions contained in [A.P. \(DIR Series\) Circular No. 17 dated October 16, 2000](#), stand withdrawn. Accordingly, all trade transactions with

Myanmar, including those at the Indo-Myanmar border with effect from December 1, 2015 would be settled in any permitted currency in addition to the Asian Clearing Union mechanism.

4. Authorised Dealers may bring the contents of this circular to the notice of their constituents concerned.

5. Reserve Bank has also amended the Principal Regulations through the Foreign Exchange Management (Export of Goods & Services) (Second Amendment) Regulations, 2015 notified through [Notification No. FEMA 347/2015-RB dated July 24, 2015](#), vide G.S.R. No 579 (E) dated July 24, 2015.

4. The directions contained in this circular have been issued under Section 10(4) and Section 11(1) of the FEMA, 1999 (42 of 1999) and are without prejudice to permissions / approvals, if any, required under any other law.

Yours faithfully,

(A. K. Pandey)
Chief General Manager

APPENDIX-6

No. 12/63/2014-BADP(Pt-I)
Government of India
Ministry of Home Affairs
Department of Border Management

Room No.21, Heritage Building,
MDC National Stadium, India Gate Circle
New Delhi-110 001
Dated the 11th March, 2020

To,

The Chief Secretary,
Government of Arunachal Pradesh/ Assam/ Bihar/ Gujarat/ Himachal Pradesh/
/Manipur/ Meghalaya/ Mizoram/ Nagaland/ Punjab/ Rajasthan/ Sikkim/ Tripura/ Uttar
Pradesh/ Uttarakhand/ West Bengal/ UT of Jammu & Kashmir and UT of Ladakh.

**Subject: New Guidelines of Border Area Development Programme (BADP), 2020 –
regarding.**

Sir,

The undersigned is directed to refer to the subject mentioned above and to forward
herewith a copy of new guidelines of BADP (2020), approved by the Hon'ble Union Home
Minister.

2. These guidelines will come into effect from 1st April, 2020 and will supersede previous
guidelines regarding implementation of BADP.
3. For kind information and necessary action please.

Yours faithfully,


(Prashant Rajagopal)
Deputy Secretary(BM-I)
Tel: 011-23075317

Copy to:

1. Secretary, Department of Expenditure, MoF, New Delhi.
2. Secretary, D/o Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare, New Delhi.
3. Secretary, Ministry of DoNER, New Delhi.
4. Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, New Delhi.
5. Secretary(SE&L), Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi.
6. Secretary (WR, RD & GR), Ministry of Jal Shakti, New Delhi.
7. Secretary, MNRE, New Delhi.
8. Secretary, Ministry of Power, New Delhi.
9. Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, New Delhi.
10. Secretary, Ministry of MSME, New Delhi.
11. Secretary, M/o Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, New Delhi.
12. Secretary, M/o Women & Child Development, New Delhi.
13. Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, New Delhi.
14. Principal Adviser, NITI Aayog, New Delhi.
15. AS & FA (Home), MHA, North Block, New Delhi.
16. DsG, BSF, ITBP, SSB & Assam Rifles
17. Additional Secretary (K), Department of J&K, MHA, North Block, New Delhi
18. Joint Secretary (NE), MHA, North Block, New Delhi.

Copy for information to:

1. Nodal Officers (BADP), Government of Arunachal Pradesh/ Assam/ Bihar/ Gujarat/ Himachal Pradesh/ / Manipur/ Meghalaya/ Mizoram/ Nagaland/ Punjab/ Rajasthan/ Sikkim/ Tripura/ Uttar Pradesh/ Uttarakhand/ West Bengal/ UT of Jammu & Kashmir and UT of Ladakh.
2. PPS to HM/PPS to MoS(N)/PPS to Home Secretary/PPS to Secretary (BM)/PPS to JS (BM-II).
3. Master Folder.

Copy also to:

1. SO (IT) with the request the New Guidelines of Border Area Development Programme (BADP), 2020 may please be uploaded on the MHA's website.
2. Seema Jain, Director(Tech), NIC, MHA, North Block, New Delhi.


Deputy Secretary(BM-II)
Tel: 011-23075317

F.No.12/63/2014-BADP(Pt.I)
Government of India
Ministry of Home Affairs
Department of Border Management

Border Area Development Programme (BADP): Guidelines (2020)

1. Objective:

The main objective of the BADP is to meet the special developmental needs and well-being of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas situated near the International Boundary (IB) and to provide the border areas with essential infrastructure by convergence of BADS/other Central/State/UT/Local Schemes and through a participatory approach especially in six thematic areas - Basic Infrastructure, Health Infrastructure, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development. In border areas, the provision of essential infrastructure facilities and opportunities for sustainable living would help integrate these areas with the hinterland, create a positive perception of care by the country and encourage people to stay on in the border areas, leading to safe and secure borders.

2. Basic Principles:

The following basic principles will guide the implementation of the BADP:

- a) Projects for developing infrastructure in strategically important villages/towns (as identified by Border Guarding Forces) will be given priority.
- b) Border Guarding Forces (BGFs) will be co-opted as part of decision making process at all levels (Planning/ Execution / Monitoring).
- c) Keeping in view the limited availability of funds under BADS, the State/UT Level Screening Committee (SLSC/UTLSC) will ensure convergence with schemes of line Ministries and State/UT Governments and other available resources to ensure holistic development of the strategically important villages/ towns in the border areas.
- d) MHA will work in close collaboration with, inter-alia, M/o Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, M/o DoNER, M/o Health & Family Welfare, M/o Human Resource Development, M/o Jal Shakti, M/o New and Renewable Energy, M/o Power, M/o Rural Development, M/o Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, M/o MSME, M/o Women & Child Development, M/o Youth Affairs & Sports etc. to promote infrastructure development, improved connectivity, better social services and to provide sustainable livelihood opportunities in the border areas.
- e) Works/projects will be evaluated regularly through Social Audit mechanism, besides Prabhari Officers in addition to ongoing mechanism of State/UT/ Central Governments.
- f) Saturation / coverage through ongoing developmental schemes of various Ministries of Government of India, if necessary, by relaxation of guidelines and yardsticks with the approval of the competent authority.
- g) Medium-Term perspective – Four/Five Year Perspective Action Plan would be prepared for development of identified habitations by pooling resources as mentioned in sub-clause (c) above. For the subsequent years, the Annual Plan would be drawn up within the overall perspective plan and inclusive of objectives carried forward, modifications necessitated due to lessons learnt and other developments. The Annual Plans would be a subset of the same. For the first year, alongwith perspective plan, annual plan would

also be submitted. The States would strive to achieve saturation of beneficiaries and creation of infrastructure under various Government Schemes by 2023.

- h) Competition among Districts: The Districts would be challenged to compete among themselves on the basis of incremental changes and their performance would be recognized and rewarded.
- i) Comprehensive Development: For comprehensive development of border districts, BADP will have two components - first will be saturation of beneficiaries and ensuring creation of infrastructure in border districts through convergence of various Government Schemes, and second part will be Border Area Development Scheme (BADS) for convergence and filling up gaps to achieve desired levels of development.

3. Coverage:

3.1 The BADP is a Core Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS). Presently, the Programme covers 396 Blocks of 111 border Districts in 16 States and 2 Union Territories abutting the International Boundary viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir (UT), Ladakh (UT), Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. Previously it has largely worked as a 'stand-alone' vehicle for project financing; it will now be converted to a programme which seeks comprehensive development.

3.2 The programme will cover all the census villages/ towns, semi-urban and urban areas located within 0-10 Km distance (crow – fly/ aerial distance) from the first habitation from International Boundary (IB). The imaginary line joining all the first habitations from the IB will be the Zero line for BADP and the 10 km distance towards the interior will be calculated from this zero line. The State/UT Government will compile and provide a latest map of this border belt (0-10 Km) - district wise, depicting all the census villages, semi-urban/ urban areas with latest population statistics. The State/UT Government will furnish village/ town code (2011 Census) allotted by Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Government of India, for mapping of the villages/ towns on the BADP Online Management System (BADP OMS).

3.3 Within this 0-10 km area, census villages, semi-urban and urban areas identified by BGFs as 'strategic villages/towns' shall be given highest priority.

3.4 Once 0-10 km area is saturated, the programme may cover 10-20/30/40/50 km area.

4. Operational Guidelines

4.1 **Allocation of Funds to the States/UTs:** The funding pattern of BADS (like other Core Centrally Sponsored Schemes), for the eight North Eastern States (viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim) & 2 Himalayan States (viz. Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) will be in the ratio 90:10 (Centre Share: State Share) and in respect of remaining six border States (viz. Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) will be in the ratio 60:40 (Centre Share: State Share). For UT of Jammu and Kashmir the funding pattern will be in the ratio 90:10 (Centre Share: UT Share) and for UT of Ladakh (UT without Legislature) Centre Share will be 100%.

4.2. During a financial year, the distribution of funds will be as follows:

- (a) 10% of the total allocated funds will be kept reserved under BADS (called BADS Reserve Fund) and will be utilized for incentives for better performing State/UTs.

- (b) 10% of the total allocated funds will be additionally allocated to the States/ UTs abutting Indo-China Border (Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Sikkim and Uttarakhand) for taking up works/projects in the border districts abutting Indo-China Border.
- (c) Remaining 80% funds will be divided in a 40:60 ratio and 40% of the funds will be allocated to eight North-Eastern States and; 60% of the funds will be allocated to the remaining eight border States and two UTs. The fund allocation will be based on the following criteria:
 - (i) Length of International Boundary (33% weightage);
 - (ii) Area of the border belt covering census villages, semi-urban and urban areas situated within 0-10 Km (within a border block) (33% weightage).
 - (iii) Population of the census villages, semi-urban and urban areas situated within 0-10 Km of IB (33% weightage);
(Allocation to these States will be increased/ decreased on a pro-rata basis depending upon the overall fund allocation)

4.3 State/UT Administration, shall prepare plan as given below:

- (a) The BADS funds will be utilized for undertaking developmental works/projects in census villages/towns close to the 'Zero' line on the border on first priority.
- (b) BGFs shall draw a list of strategically prioritized villages/towns in their respective areas and forward the same to the State/UT Authorities, and Ministry of Home Affairs. The strategic border villages/towns, as drawn by BGFs would be saturated first with basic infrastructure.

4.4 The funding pattern will be as per the extant Government of India norms applicable for Core Centrally Sponsored Schemes (Core CSS).

4.5 The State/UT Governments will not have any claim over the funds which could not be released due to non-compliance of provision of BADP guidelines.

4.6 BADS funds shall ordinarily be used for meeting the critical gaps in basic infrastructure which are not getting covered under any regular scheme of any developmental Ministry. Recurring expenditure will not be provided under BADS.

4.7 The Empowered Committee on BADP will have the power to relax any norm of any scheme of any developmental Ministry with the approval of the competent authority, so that the required infrastructure development/ benefit can be passed on to the border population covered under BADP.

4.8 A baseline survey and spatial resource mapping must be carried out in border villages/ towns in order to identify the gaps in basic physical and social infrastructure. The State/UT Government will fill up these gaps through the developmental schemes of the Government, including BADS.

4.9 The State/UT Governments will nominate a Nodal Department/Cell within the existing administrative arrangement for implementation of the BADP. The Head of the Department dealing with BADP shall be the Nodal Officer of BADP. The department will also nominate an Assistant Nodal Officer of Director/ Deputy Secretary rank (or equivalent rank) to the State/UT Government.

4.10 States/UTs shall ensure convergence of Central/State/UT/special schemes for individual / family/ community benefit including infrastructure related schemes, in border areas. If some work cannot be completed within the date of completion committed by the State/UT Government, due to poor planning/ unjustified reasons, an amount equal to the amount of the approved work(s) may be deducted from the future releases of the State/ UT Government.

4.11 All assets created under BADS will be the property of the State/UT Government. Any asset under BADS can be created on government owned land only. Further, in respect of North Eastern States, the community/ individual land can be taken over by the State Government through purchase/Gift Deed for constructing assets under BADS. However, no fund for purchase of land shall be provided under BADS.

4.12 Physical assets must be maintained and kept under good repairs by the State/ UT Governments. Maximum 10 percent of the funds allocated to the State/UT in a financial year can be utilized for the purpose of maintenance of assets created under BADS. The proposals for construction of assets under BADS should have an inbuilt component of maintenance liability by the executing agency for a period of minimum three years after the date of completion of the work/ project.

4.13 Under BADS, funds should not be provided to NGOs/private institutions.

4.14 The compliance of extant GFR norms shall be ensured by State/UT Governments.

5. Selection of Works/projects:

5.1 The State/UT/District will draw up plan for the comprehensive development of villages/towns/habitations included in the programme in a belt of 0-10 km from the first habitation from International Boundary (IB). They will converge resources from both the Central and State/UT Government schemes as required, if necessary, by tweaking of guidelines of the scheme with the approval of the competent authority.

5.2 The proposals would include a detailed Annual Action Plan (AAP) for the year alongwith the sources of funding for the AAP.

5.3 A list of work/project, which can be taken up under Border Area Development Scheme (BADS) is at **Annexure-I**. Works/projects under BADS should focus on the benefit of the community.

5.4 Within the ambit of BADP guidelines, the States while preparing the AAP, will give high priority to strategic projects recommended by the Border Guarding Forces which are identified due to high strategic and security value and to ensure better integration.

5.5 The State/UT Governments may constitute a District Level Committee (DLC) headed by District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner for implementation of BADP.

5.6 Based on the tentative allocation as conveyed by MHA, State/UT Governments shall prepare and submit Annual Action Plan of BADS as per Four Year Perspective Action Plan, duly approved by the State/UT Level Screening Committee (SLSC/UTLSC) headed by the Chief Secretary of the State/UT to the Department of Border Management, Ministry of Home Affairs latest by 15th January, every year, for the next financial year through BADP Online Management System. The Nodal Officer dealing with BADP or an officer senior to him will also furnish a certificate that the local MP, MLAs have been consulted while formulating of the AAP of BADS and that there is no duplication of

works/projects taken up under BADS with any other Central/State/UT Government Schemes. The State/UTs shall also obtain approval of Competent Technical Authority in State on the proposed works/projects and furnish an 'Abstract of Cost' along with Annual Action Plan.

5.7 For projects proposed under BADS, 100% land should be available with the State/UT Government and no part of funds allocated under BADS is to be used for land acquisition under any circumstances. Also, while recommending various projects under the BADS, various statutory clearances such as, forest, environment and other local clearances, etc. as applicable should be processed well in advance.

5.8 The estimates of works/projects proposed under BADS should be checked and approved by the Competent Technical Authority in the State/UT and an 'Abstract of Cost' of each work/project, duly signed by appropriate technical authority should be furnished by the State/UT Government along with the AAP.

5.9 Works/projects in the Annual Action Plan for the BADS will be approved only when the projects/works are in line with the strategic needs. The works/projects will be approved by this Ministry subject to the following conditions:

- (i) Each Work should be amounting to Rs. 10 lakh or more (focus will be on taking up bigger projects of significance);
- (ii) Physical & Financial phasing of works of at-least 4 years has been done, wherever applicable;
- (iii) The allocation in successive annual action plan shall give first priority to these ongoing works;
- (iv) Committed liabilities of previous financial years will be taken up first by the State/UT Governments before taking up any new work.

5.10 Model Villages: Any proposals for creation of Model Villages shall be submitted as part of Annual Action Plan of BADS.

5.11 States/UTs may augment fund flow for BADP works by inclusion of corporate social Responsibility (CSR) components/ funds, District Mineral Fund (DMF) and any other funds available, as per the guidelines regulating such funds.

6. Empowered Committee:

6.1 The policy matters such as the guidelines of BADP, the geographical areas within which the BADP is implemented; allocation of funds, modalities of execution of Works/projects etc. will be laid down by an Empowered Committee of BADP constituted under the Chairmanship of the Secretary, Department of Border Management, Ministry of Home Affairs. The composition of the Empowered Committee of the BADP is as under:

Composition:

(i)	Secretary (BM), Department of Border Management -	Chairman
(ii)	Secretary, Department of Expenditure, MoF -	Member
(iii)	Principal Adviser, NITI Aayog -	Member
(iv)	Additional/Special Secretary & F.A. (Home), MHA -	Member
(v)	Secretary, D/o Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare -	Member
(vi)	Secretary, Ministry of DoNER -	Member
(vii)	Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare -	Member

(viii)	Secretary(SE&L), Ministry of Human Resource Development -	Member
(ix)	Secretary (WR, RD & GR), Ministry of Jal Shakti -	Member
(x)	Secretary, MNRE -	Member
(xi)	Secretary, Ministry of Power -	Member
(xii)	Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development -	Member
(xiii)	Secretary, Ministry of MSME -	Member
(xiv)	Secretary, M/o Skill Development & Entrepreneurship -	Member
(xv)	Secretary, M/o Women & Child Development -	Member
(xvi)	Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports -	Member
(xvii)	Chief Secretaries of BADP States/UTs -	Members
(xviii)	DsG, BSF, ITBP, SSB & Assam Rifles -	Members
(xix)	Joint Secretary (K), MHA -	Member
(xx)	Joint Secretary (NE), MHA -	Member
(xxi)	Special Invitees from other Ministries (as required) -	Member
(xxii)	Joint Secretary (BM-II), MHA -	Member Secretary

6.2 The Empowered Committee (EC) within the frame work of these guidelines will be responsible for policy matters relating to the scope of the BADP, prescription of geographical limits in the States/UTs concerned within which the BADP will be implemented, modalities of implementation, arriving at a formula for allocation of funds to States/UTs etc. the Committee shall meet as per requirement.

6.3 The Empowered Committee on BADP will have the power to relax any norm of any scheme of any developmental Ministry with the approval of the competent authority to achieve the objectives of BADP.

6.4 The Empowered Committee/ Chairman EC on BADP may recommend placing Inter-Ministerial issues before the Empowered Committee on Border Infrastructure (ECBI) headed by the Cabinet Secretary.

6.5 The Empowered Committee may decide to reward best performing districts by giving them additional allocation for projects using the performance based reserve funds/ savings(if any) under BADS.

6.6 The Empowered Committee will review the implementation of all the individual/family/community benefit schemes of Government of India in the border areas.

6.7 The Chairman, Empowered Committee on BADP will be authorized to relax any provision of BADP guidelines with the approval of the competent authority.

7. State/UT Level Screening Committee (SLSC/UTLSC):

7.1 There shall be a State/UT Level Screening Committee (SLSC/UTLSC) on Border Area Development Programme (BADP) under the Chairmanship of the Chief Secretary of the State/UT with necessary representation as decided by the State/UT Government, however, representation from BGFs concerned will be mandatory. This Committee would be responsible for approval of the five year vision and annual plans in line with these Guidelines as well as monitoring of the progress of the BADP. The Committee is also expected to take note of policy and other bottlenecks including availability of manpower (doctors/ teachers etc.) in the BADP coverage area.

7.2 An amount not exceeding 2.5% of the allocation of the State/UT under the BADS in a particular financial year will be kept reserve and will be placed at the disposal of the Chief

Secretary/Chairman, State/UT Level Screening Committee (SLSC/UTLSC) for taking up works under BADP/ administrative expenditure. Administrative expenditure shall not exceed 1% of the funds allocated to the State/UT in the particular financial year subject to a ceiling of Rs. 50 lakhs in a financial year.

7.3 No change in already approved works/projects will be done by the State/UT without the approval of the Empowered Committee/ Chairman, Empowered Committee viz, Secretary (Border Management), MHA.

8. Funds Flow:

8.1 Funds will be released to States/UTs based on confirmation of expenditure (Utilization Certificates) and receipt of approved list of works/projects. The States/UTs will be required to submit 100% UCs for the funds released upto 31st March of the year before the previous financial year, i.e. during the financial year 2020-21, States/UTs will be required to submit 100% UCs of the funds released upto 31st March, 2019. An amount equal to pending UCs will be deducted from the funds being released. Amount so deducted shall be released to the State/UT on due provision of relevant UCs by 30th September of the financial year. The State/UT Governments will not have any claim on the remaining amount after 30th September of the financial year and amount thus saved due to non-furnishing of relevant UCs by State/UT Governments, will be treated as 'savings' under BADS and will be released to other State/UT Governments who fulfill all conditions for release of funds.

8.2 The State/UT Governments are required to have a separate budget head and bank account for the BADP. Funds should be released by the State/UT Governments to the implementing agencies immediately upon receipt of the same from Government of India and as per the directions of Government of India, Ministry of Finance; parking of funds at any level is strictly prohibited and compliance of extant GFR norms shall be ensured by State/UT Governments.

9. Monitoring and Review:

9.1 Annual Social Audit of the works completed in the border areas will be carried out by the Gram Sabhas or similar local bodies of border districts/representatives of BGF concerned. The implementing agency will also be invited to present status of the works taken up by them.

9.2 Prabhari Officers will be nominated for different districts for independent feedback on the development works undertaken in the border areas. The Prabhari Officers for the above purpose will submit a report every quarter.

9.3 The State/UT Level Screening Committee shall be responsible for monitoring of implementation of works under BADP as well as ensuring quality of works, utilizing their administrative officials/line departments of and other agencies under their disposal.

9.4 Quarterly progress reports (QPRs) should be submitted work/project-wise to the Department of Border Management latest by 15th day after the closure of the quarter through BADP Online Management System. The year-wise consolidated utilization certificates should be sent in the prescribed proforma (GFR-12-C) of the General Financial Rules, 2017 within one month of the closure of the financial year, as given at Annexure-II. States/UTs are required to submit QPR as per the following:

- (i) Upto 31st March- by 15th April
- (ii) Upto 30th June-by 15th July
- (iii) Upto 30th September- by 15th October
- (iv) Upto 31st December- by 15th January

9.5 The State/UT Governments shall develop an inventory of assets created under the BADS in border census villages/habitations, for analytical purposes etc. All projects are to be geo-mapped and uploaded on BADP Online Management System. All projects taken up under BADP during last ten years should be geo-mapped and uploaded on the specific thematic layers on the Bhuvan Platform.

9.6 A display board will be kept at each BADS project site indicating that the work (giving details of project including physical and financial scope) is being done/has been done under the BADS, Government of India.

9.7 The State/UT Governments will ensure that the funds sanctioned under BADS are utilized only for the purpose for which they have been sanctioned. State/UT Governments will also ensure the reasonability of rates/costs of the items/works/projects proposed to be undertaken under BADS. If any discrepancy is noticed at a later stage, an amount equivalent to the amount approved for the items/works/projects will be deducted and adjusted against the State/UT Government's pending/future releases.

9.8 Role of BGFs

- (i) BGF officers deployed in the area will provide independent feed-back about the progress of the BADS works being undertaken in their District/ Block.
- (ii) BGFs deployed in the area may be tasked to conduct social audit of BADS works.

10. Audit of Funds released under BADP

10.1 Regular audit of the works taken up under BADS shall be done through C&AG by the State/UT Government concerned and the State/UT Government shall furnish the observations of C&AG on expenditure under the head BADS after completion of C&AG Audit to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The State/UT Governments will get the funds, released under BADS, audited annually by the Accountant General and an Audit Certificate alongwith the observations raised by the Auditors and compliance report of the State/UT Government will be furnished to the Ministry of Home Affairs by 31st December each year. A pro-forma for submission of executive summary of Annual Audit of BADS works/projects required to be submitted by the States/UTs is at **Annexure-III**.

10.2 Sample checking of the BADS Accounts: Ministry of Home Affairs may carry out sample checking of the BADS accounts, being maintained by the State/UTs, to address any problems relating to release of BADS funds, including reconciliation of accounts and to review the impact of utilization of BADS funds, as and when found necessary.

10.3 Interest accrued on deposits on BADS funds at any level shall be treated as additional resources under the BADS and would be utilized on the works/projects drawn by the State/UT Government for the areas and on works covered under the guidelines of the BADP in priority census villages, as per extant GFR guidelines. In this regard, the State/UT Government is required to furnish a certificate to Ministry of Home Affairs stating that all interests or other earnings against Grants-in-Aid to the State/UT Government or advances (other than re-imbursement) released to any institution under Border Area Development Scheme(BADS) has been deposited in the BADS Account maintained at the State/UT level immediately after annual finalization of the accounts and the amount has been deposited in the exclusive BADS account maintained at State/UT Level.

10.4 These guidelines will come into effect from 01st April, 2020.

Annexure-I

Illustrative List of Works/Projects permissible under the Border Area Development Scheme

(A) Roads and Bridges

- (i) Construction and up-gradation of roads.
- (ii) Construction of bridges and culverts.
- (iii) Construction of Foot Suspension Bridges.
- (iv) Construction of retaining walls to protect the roads in hilly areas.

(B) Health infrastructure:

- (i) Construction of houses for Government doctors, paramedics and other Government officials engaged in health sector in border census villages/ habitations.
- (ii) Building infrastructure (SHC/PHC/CHC) including their up-gradation.
- (iii) Setting up of Government mobile dispensaries/ambulances.
- (iv) Purchase of medical equipments in Government Hospitals.

(C) Education infrastructure:

- (i) Construction of houses for Government teachers and other government officials engaged in education sector.
- (ii) Construction of Primary/ Middle/ Secondary/ Higher secondary school buildings and their up-gradation/addition such as construction of additional classrooms, computer rooms and laboratories.
- (iii) Construction of hostels/ dormitories in Secondary/ Higher Secondary school.

(D) Agriculture infrastructure

- (i) Construction of minor irrigation works.
- (ii) Water conservation programmes.

(E) Sports Infrastructure:

- (i) Construction/ development of play fields.
- (ii) Construction of mini stadium.
- (iii) Construction of indoor courts for table tennis/ badminton/ basketball / handball.

(F) DWS projects:

Drinking Water Supply projects in Government schools /census villages/ census towns.

(G) Social Sector Infrastructure

- (i) Construction of anganwadi centre.
- (ii) Construction of community centre.

(H) Development of Model villages – the State / UT Government may undertake multiple infrastructure development works/projects in a village on a hub and spoke model.

(I) Construction of infrastructure for Small Scale Industries.

(J) Maintenance of assets created under BADS.

(K) Administrative Expenditure.

The estimates of each work/project proposed under BADS should be checked and approved by the Competent Technical Authority in the State/UT and an 'Abstract of Cost' of each work/project, duly signed by appropriate technical authority should be furnished by the State/UT Government along with the AAP.

Annexure-II**Format for submission of Utilization Certificates (UCs) for State/UT Governments**

GFR 12 – C (See Rule 239 of GFR, 2017)

FORM OF UTILIZATION CERTIFICATE (FOR STATE GOVERNMENTS)

(Where expenditure incurred by Govt. bodies only)

Sl. No.	Letter No. and date	Amount	Certified that out of Rs.....Of grants sanctioned during the year.....in favour of.....under the Ministry /Department Letter No. given in the margin and Rs.....on account of unspent balance of the previous year, a sum of Rs.....has been utilized for the propose of for which it was sanctioned and that the balance of Rs.....remaining unutilized at the end of the year has been surrendered to Government (vide No. dated.....)/ will be adjusted towards the grants payable during the next year.....
	(Give number of letter of Government of India sanctioning the fund with date)	(Give amount and year for which sanctioned)	
	Total		

2. Certified that I have satisfied myself that the conditions on which the grants-in-aid was sanctioned have been duly fulfilled/ are being fulfilled and that I have exercised the following checks to see that the money was actually utilized for the propose for which it was sanctioned.

Kinds of checks exercised

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Signature.....

Designation.....

Date.....

Annexure-III

Template for submission of executive summary of Annual Audit of BADS works / projects.

Name of the State/UT: _____

Audit conducted by: _____

Name(s) of Audit Officer(s): _____

Period of Audit (Financial Year/s): _____

Date(s) of Audit	Date of submission of the Audit Report	Observations of the Audit party	Suggestions for improvement by the Audit party	Compliance report/ response of the State/UT Government	Remarks (if any)
1	2	3	4	5	6

Signature of Secretary/Head of department
Dealing with BADP in the State/UT

Note: Executive summary of Annual Audit of BADS works/projects is required to be submitted by the States/UTs once every year (for the previous year) by 31st December.

APPENDIX-7

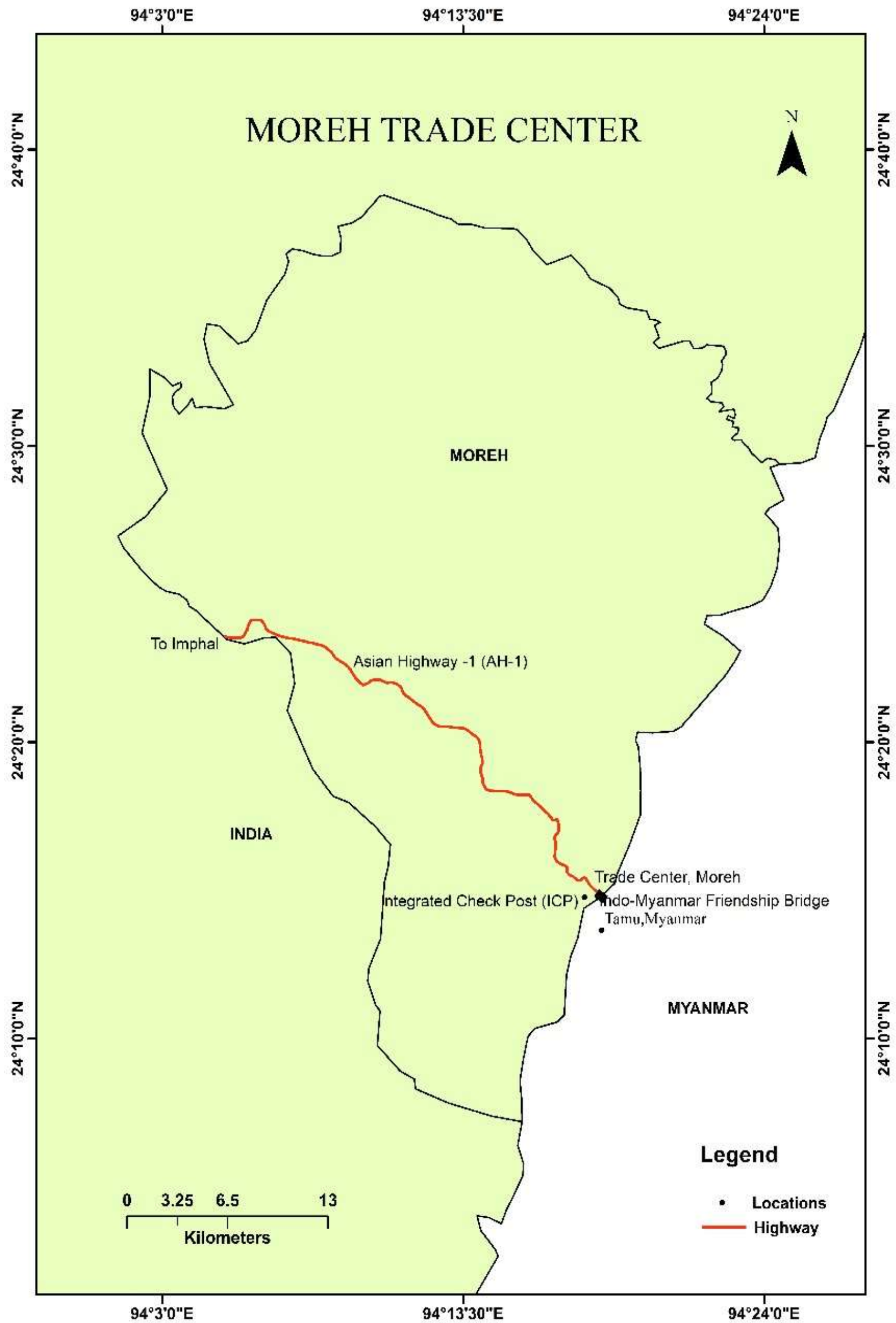


Fig.2. Moreh Border-Trade Centre

APPENDIX-8

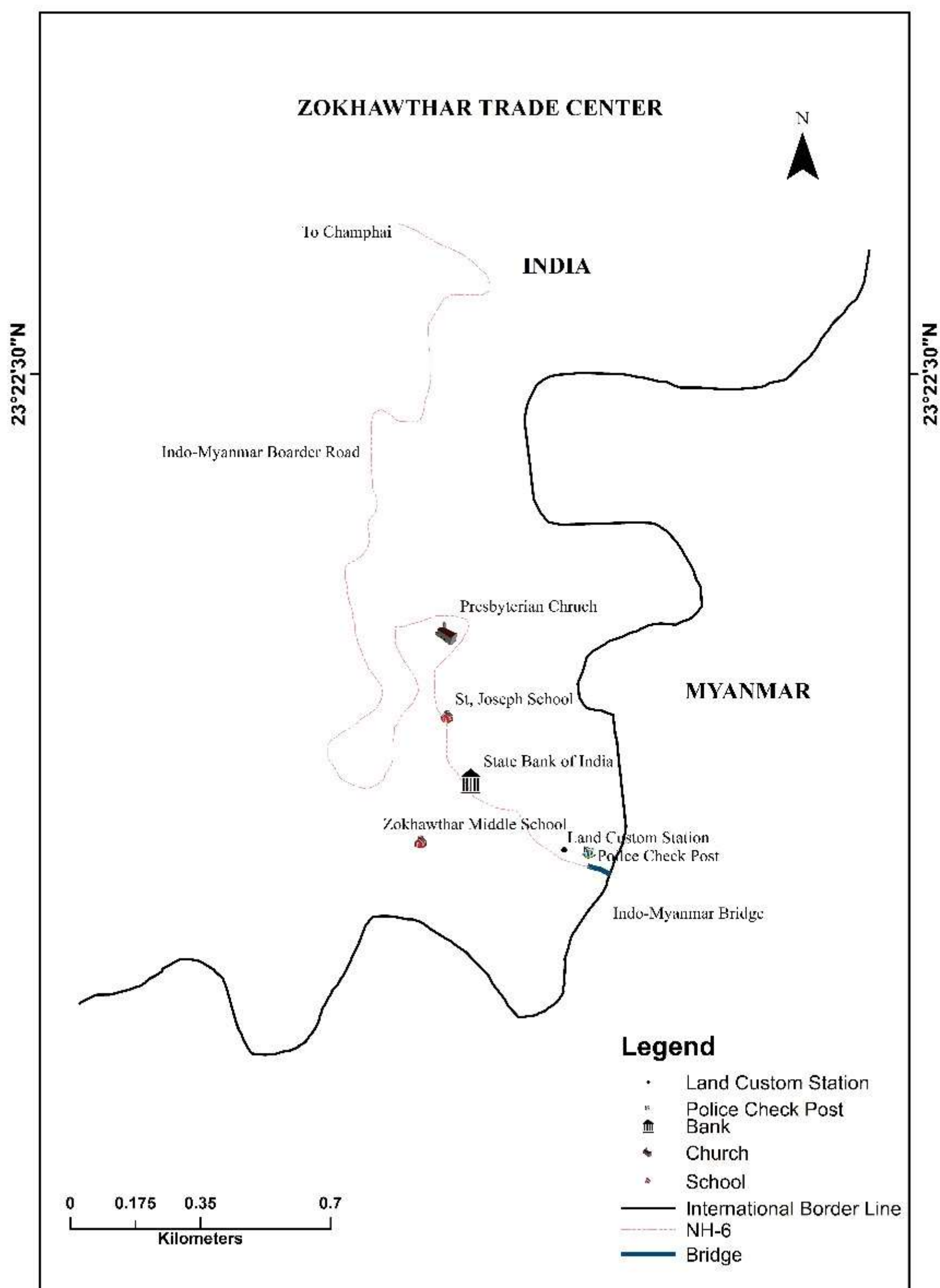


Fig.3. Zokhawthar Border Trade Centre

APPENDIX-9
Photos taken during Field Work



Indo-Myanmar Border (Zokhawthar) 1.6.2022



Land Custom Station (Zokhawthar) 22.7.2023



T Rodinhang, Women Workers at Zokhawthar. 11th Nov.2024



R. Vanhnuaithangi. Zokhawthar Women Traders. 13th November 2024.



Ramfangzauva. Fin.Secy.Champhai District Borderland Trade Transport Union (CTU). 5th December.2024.



Laldinpuia, Police Duty at Zokhawthar Border Trade Centre. 18.11.2023



FIG. Vanneihthanga (Mutia President) Zokhawthar. 18.11.2023

\\



Women Workers at Zokhawthar 10.05.2024



Money Exchanger at ZKT. 10th May. 2024.



Chalthanthiangi. Chairman, Sumdawng Association, Melbuk. 1st March 2025



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BIODATA OF THE CANDIDATE

PERSONAL PROFILE

Name : Mimmy Rosangpuii

Father's name : TBC Herliana

Mother's name: C Ngurthangi

Date of birth : 7th March 1984

Gender : Female

Status : Married

Nationality : Indian

Caste/Tribe : Scheduled Tribe (ST)

Religion : Christian

Permanent Address: Vengthlang, Champhai.Mizoram. Pin-796321

Phone/Mobile : 9862131330

e-mail : mimisangpuii73@gmail.com

UGC-NET (2008).

MA (2008) in Political Science, MZU.

BA (2006) in Political Science, MZU.

HSSLC (2002) under MBSE.

HSLC (2000) under MBSE.

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PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE

Name of the Candidate	: MIMMY ROSANGPUII
Degree	: Doctor of Philosophy
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MZU Registration No.	: 487/2003-2004
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Extension (if any)	: NIL

Head of Department
Department of Political Science

ABSTRACT

**WOMEN WORKERS IN BORDER TRADE CENTRES IN
NORTHEAST INDIA: A STUDY OF MIZORAM AND MANIPUR**

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

MIMMY ROSANGPUII

MZU REGISTRATION NO.: 487/2003-2004

Ph.D. REGISTRATION NO.:MZU/Ph.D./1492 of 03.11.2020



**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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**Women Workers in Border Trade Centres in NorthEast India: A Study of
Mizoram and Manipur**

**BY
MIMMY ROSANGPUII**

**Supervisor
Dr. Suwa Lal Jangu**

**Submitted
In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Political Science in Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

WOMEN WORKERS IN BORDER TRADE CENTRES IN NORTHEAST INDIA: A STUDY OF MIZORAM AND MANIPUR

ABSTRACT

The British colonial authorities conducted substantial changes to trading activities that occurred between India and Myanmar. The territorial acquisition of Myanmar by British India occurred after the successful completion of the Anglo-Burmese Wars during 1824–1885. The colonial government designed policies that focused on resource exploitation together with infrastructure development for imperial economic integration of Myanmar. The Indo-Burma Trunk Road together with the Burma Railway enabled the imperial markets to obtain teak wood and rice through resource transportation. These new developments dismantled traditional barter practices that existed before colonial interference causing damage to established communities throughout both territories. The colonial states built Moreh (India) and Tamu (Myanmar) into customs enforcement centers although these hubs mainly served imperial interests. During World War II Japanese invasions coupled with military infrastructure changes broke the existing commercial routes. India and Myanmar struggled in 1947 and 1948 after their independence to develop new trade procedures because of altered political limits.

The political instabilities during the early independence period caused severe damage to border commercial activities in both nations. Myanmar isolated its economy through socialist policies implemented in response to the 1962 military coup and thus sealed many of its border routes. During this period India restricted foreign trade exchanges with Myanmar because its self-sufficiency strategy took precedence. Despite general trade interactions between the countries there remained no official systems to manage these exchanges.

The late 1990s initiated a new era of border trade between India and Myanmar through the implementation of India's "Look East Policy" for economic liberalization. The authorities worked to establish formal trade agreements between India and Myanmar beginning with the 1994 Indo-Myanmar Border Trade

Agreement. Border Trade Centres were created at the Moreh (Manipur) and Zokhawthar (Mizoram) locations to offer simpler trade facilities.

Border trade experienced a revival starting from the 1990s because of changing global relations together with regional economic integration plans. Through its "Act East Policy" India focused on developing better connections between Southeast Asia and Myanmar to enhance regional partnerships. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project was developed to establish better transportation connections between northeastern India and Myanmar.

The towns of Moreh (Manipur), Zokhawthar (Mizoram), Avangkhu-Pangsha (Nagaland) and Lungwa (Nagaland) became essential trade centers between India and Myanmar. Trading centers along the border linked farmers to textile producers and timber extractors and mineral miners and customer goods distributors creating harmonious cultural links with border residents. Border trade between India and Myanmar faces barriers from military coups in Myanmar as well as inadequate infrastructure developments and currency exchange problems together with smuggling activities which limit its complete economic potential.

Border trade through history between India and Myanmar established its vital economic importance for northeastern India while advancing Southeast Asian integration. The important economic partnership shows promise for improvement through BTCs and regional connectivity projects despite the persistent challenges from political instability together with infrastructure deficits.

The research undertakes an examination of border trade centers as they affect women's empowerment in the North-east Indian territories of Manipur and Mizoram. The areas position themselves near Myanmar and Bangladesh borders to function as essential centers for international business activity. The paper examines in-depth the ways trade centers support women in economic growth together with social development and political empowerment against their encountered difficulties.

The tract of northeastern Indian states which includes Manipur and Mizoram functions as essential cross-border trading areas because they maintain proximity to Southeast Asia. Women have dominated the economic fabric of these regions as

shown in Manipur's Ima Keithel which holds the title for world's largest women-only market, yet they encounter obstacles from insufficient public infrastructure and traditional cultural boundaries. When women gain trading power it creates greater family revenue and supports total economic advancement of the society.

Manipur acts as an entry point for India's "Act East Policy" because of its strategic position between India and Myanmar. The Moreh-Tamu corridor serves as a vital trade route which operates both formal and informal trade activities to enhance regional economic development and foster pan-regional integration.

For decades Manipuri women supported the state's economic foundation by running Ima Keithel institutions. The growth of their cross-border trading activities created additional economic opportunities for them to function as traders and vendors together with business operators. The path toward becoming a trader proves difficult for women because they confront social limitations along with constrained resource availability and insufficient infrastructure. The women face challenges but use their trade opportunities to support themselves financially and achieve community leadership positions. Through border trade hubs in Mizoram women acquire venues to develop business ventures while doing cross-border business. Women belonging to tribal areas take an active part in trading crops in combination with both house-made products and hand-made cloths. Women who participate in trade activities have earned higher social standing while transforming conventional gender norms. Women play active leadership roles as heads of households and head their communities. Training specific to financial understanding and marketing alongside negotiation skills has given women the abilities to thrive in commercial environments. The programs gain backing from both governmental policies and NGOs.

Border trade participation of women receives support through governmental policies developed by both state authorities and central authorities. The "Act East Policy" guides essential progress through infrastructure development which allows women entrepreneurs to seize new market opportunities. The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) offers women trading professionals both education and

small-scale financial resources. The border trade centers located in Manipur and Mizoram serve as important tools which empower women. These hubs empower women through financial chances and organized training sessions and market access enabling them to fight gender-based conventions and drive local development outcomes. For border trade to achieve its maximum potential the necessary challenges of limited infrastructure and societal resistance need to be resolved. The Study demonstrates the essential role of India-Myanmar border trade which extends from past traditions to current market developments.

Border trade functions as a fundamental economic relationship that establishes business associations between northeastern states in India as well as border populations in Myanmar. Border trade enables the exchange of agricultural products, textiles along with electronics and machinery thereby creating cultural and trade connections between India and Myanmar. The trade hub of Moreh in Manipur functions as a major commercial center that builds infrastructure and creates jobs and improves interregional economic partnership. Trade formalization has reinforced diplomatic ties which aligns with Indian diplomacy and establishes Myanmar as part of regional market supply chains.

Women have an essential part in border trade operations especially when participating within informal business sectors. These women lead the operation of small businesses and oversee retail stores and also maintain local trading activities. Women who actively participate in border trade commonly deal with restricted financing possibilities alongside inadequate education or training provisions while fighting against social prejudice. Border community stability increases through their engagement which helps achieve family financial security in these border regions. All societies must acknowledge women's position in economic development to establish gender equality.

Border trade centers of Zokhawthar, Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur have drawn numerous women workers who participate in the development of North-East India through regional economic trade activities. India's trade partnership with Myanmar depends on these two locations because they function as essential gateways linking

India to Myanmar for both economic and cultural and social mandates. Women who participate in these trade centers take part through formal as well as informal merchant activities that sustain local economic development. Women who play essential roles in these regions maintain multiple socio-economic challenges together with persistent structural obstacles which restrict their complete power and achievement potential.

Since colonial times the Indo-Myanmar border has functioned as a vital zone where trade combined with cultural interaction between the two regions took place. The vast borderlands of Mizoram and Manipur near Myanmar serve as vital areas for Indian strategic objectives under Look East and Act East policies and they indirectly support foreign commerce while enhancing diplomatic relations across Southeast Asia. These policies focus on developing Southeast Asian economic alliances through border facilities such as Moreh and Zokhawthar. The cross-border exchanges involve female participation as active traders who also function as shopkeepers while carrying products through physical transport. Women participated at a higher rate in border trade following the 1994 India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement since it stabilized transaction processes while providing new business opportunities.

The informal market sector commonly sees women operating small stores where they sell both domestic goods and handmade items as well as import products while connecting between local producers and main commercial operators. The intricate social network skills and extensive market understanding of these women ensure their irreplaceable role within trading centers. More professional women now take positions in structured trade enterprises and logistics services together with administrative positions in both sectors. The movement of women from informal trading roles to formal ones represents both societal economic transformation and widespread understanding of female economic capabilities.

Review of Literature

The scholar reviewed 15 articles and eight books. The participation of women in the social, economic and political sphere can be found in different areas of research and books. The existing review shows the evident that women participation in cross-

border areas have played a significant role in the growth and development of the society. Cross-Border trade and women empowerment made a significant study from the reviewed book and publication. But the participation of women in cross-border especially in *Moreh* and *Zokhawthar*, has been neglected and it require a bookish publication or writing about the participation at the border area. Therefore, in this study, we investigated the importance of women participation and the requirement information regarding the positive impact and some limitation and shortage in the area will be identified.

1.6. Statement of the Problem

Socio- Economic changes are found in the North-East region which can be found from the fact that that women have involved in different roles in the society such as victims, survivors, combatants, peace activist, negotiators, household head, and laborer in traditionally male dominated field. The literacy rate in this area is higher than the national average except in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

Manipur become the last independent state to incorporate into British India and under this they become the princely state in 1981 under the British rule. After the Second World War, the constitutional Act of Manipur 1947 was established and form a democratic form of governments. It became a part of republic of India in October 1949, and union territory in 1949 and became a full fledge state in 1972.

Moreh town is located in India-Myanmar border at Tengenoupal district of the state of India. It plays a crucial role in connection with India-Myanmar relation and became an instant developed trade point with Myanmar and on the other side of the border Tamu. It is one of the most important trading centers between India and Myanmar and play a key role in bringing economic development of the state. The Central and State government take several new measures to promote and increase trade link with Southeast Asia. This will provide a competitive advantage to Manipur.

Champhai is also the main entry route from Myanmar to India located near the International Border between India and Myanmar. Champhai is only 30 km from Zokhawthar. Zokhawthar is under the jurisdiction of Champhai Police station. Many

Foreigner from Myanmar entered Mizoram via Zokhawthar- Rih sector. Being located at the International boarder, many Foreigner from Myanmar are known to have been involved in Drug trafficking. The central and State Government provided Security services to the officer of land custom station besides maintaining law and order. D. Company of Assam Rifles and Zokhawthar Police out post are situated at Zokhawthar.

Zokhawthar is a border between India and Myanmar. It is the main source of trade link between the two. In these area women are engage in different kinds of activities as men. Women have played a significant role in the society as well as economic development. Though granted by the constitution of India women are also participating in the community development purpose, few people are elected as their representatives at the local level. The people living in this area are mostly immigrants. Poverty impels people to reside in this area but there is no programme for agriculture women workers. Thus, they mostly engage in different kinds of work to earn their daily bread. In Zokhawthar Border Trade Centre, most of women workers playing equal part with men. Women are involved in the economic activities for generation of money because of their economic backwardness. This brings economic development in the community.

ZokhawtharRih-Sector has economic significance due to its strategic location which can improve regional cooperation with South-East Asian countries. After the Border Trade Agreement was signed between India and Myanmar in 1994, the barter system which visualize the exchange of goods without transaction of money was replaced to normal trade in 2015. Some data shows that there is lack of demand for the Indian products. Reed brooms and Betel Nuts are particulars imported through Land Custom Station at Zokhawthar. Besides there is some other product to meet the demand for other items like pharmaceuticals and fertilizers are met through informal trade. After the opening of Land Custom Station at Zokhawthar the livelihood of the people has changed and slash and burn i.e., jhumming cultivation was consigned with employment generated through this trade point which is dominated by informal trade. This informal trade needs to be addressed by the authorities for formalizing trade at this point.

1.7. Scope of the Study

The scope of this research is to study the women workers in cross-border between India and Myanmar which focus on Moreh town and Zokhawthar. The involvement of women workers is very high in this area, because of the trade system. Women workers those are engaged in border trade centres became the economic dependence for family. The information and research relating to women workers in cross border especially in India is limited. This study of women workers in border trade centres of Moreh and Zokhawthar will give emphasis on their participation. Trade and economic development activities on border are not only survival means for women worker but also meaningful source of cross-border relations. The information collected will help in the upcoming policies and approach in the future.

1.8. Significance of the Study

The status of women in socio-economic mainstream is consistently lagging behind. Women experienced high poverty rates than men, facing adverse health condition and remain under represent in political office with wide variation by the state. The economic security of women is linked to their family income, not only from government jobs but also from other source, while some women enjoy comfortable family income. Some women are still struggling to make ends meet. Various steps are on its way for further improvement. Women have potential, skill and knowledge which can prove helpful to establish and manage.

The most significant things were to create awareness, motivation and support from their family or other organization. With proper assistance, women can strengthen their capacities besides adding to the family income and national productivity. It is the need of the hour to create awareness to women regarding their rights, when and how to exercise these rights. Without knowledge one cannot be bold as she could be, after knowing what their rights entails, then only they will be daring and brave to take what they ought to have. The various institutions of the society; be it public, private or NGOs should always remember that, half of the population is female. This will help them to realize that the welfare of women in all aspects of life is as important as male welfare.

The present study will contribute in finding out the important role that women workers play in the border trade-based economic arena. While undertaking the study, many women workers will have some awareness in this regard as well, since they are going to be respondents of this research. The study will analyse the comparative role and status of women workers in border trade-centres in both Mizoram and Manipur. The proposed study analyses women's workers in border trade centres in Mizoram and Manipur.

1.9. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the profile of border trade and border trade between India and Myanmar
2. To examine women's work in the border trade centres at Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur.
3. To study the women's empowerment through the Border Trade Centres.
4. To analyse the problems that women workers face at the Border Trade Centres.

1.10. Research Questions

1. What is the historical background of border trade between India and Myanmar?
2. What is the status of women workers in the border trade centres at Zokhawtharin Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur?
3. How does the significance of border trade centres for women's empowerment?
4. What are problems at border trade centres faced by women workers?

1.11. Methodology

It is a qualitative study in nature. It adopts the descriptive approach to analyse the participation of women workers in Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur. The study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected through

purposive interviews, survey questionnaires, and observation methods. The study is physically conducted in Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur).

The sample size of the study is 210. The respondents are selected through purposive sampling for the field-survey. 105 survey questionnaires were distributed each border trade center. The researcher applies the open-ended questionnaire. 10 personal interviews with women workers in each border trade center are conducted in convenience to the research. Telephonic interviews mode applied to women workers in Moreh due to the Manipur crisis. Primary data also collected from government notifications, gazette publications, websites of government offices. Descriptive statistics is employed to provide an outline of the general characteristics of the study. Secondary data include books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, research studies, and electronic sources.

1.12. Chapterization

Chapter I: Introduction

The introductory chapter deals with the core part of the thesis work. It includes a statement of the problem, literature review and methodology. It discuss the conceptual framework of the study. The chapter presents the outline of the thesis work, including the study objectives, research questions, research gap and chapter plan.

Chapter II: Historical background of border trade and border trade centres between India and Myanmar

This chapter traces the historical background of border trade and border trade centers in India and Mizoram. It also presents the status of the border trade centres by examining the geographical proximity and intertwined cultural and economic landscapes that define the boundary shared by India and Myanmar. It emphasizes the long-standing historical connections that have played a crucial role in shaping the nature of trade. An overview of early interactions is provided, highlighting ancient trading paths, cross-border religious and cultural influences, and customary exchanges sustained by communities living in the frontier regions. It presents an

overview on the evolution of prominent trade hubs while also discussing the physical and bureaucratic challenges that accompany developments in the border area.

Chapter III: The border trade centers for Women's empowerment in Manipur and Mizoram

This chapter discusses the role and importance of the border trade centers for women's empowerment. It analyses the border trading centers and other trade facilities in general the Northeast regions and particularly in Manipur and Mizoram. The chapter discusses the emerging border trade activities where women are not only participating but actively redefining their roles as business owners, informal traders, and community influencers. These border areas, long plagued by isolation, political strife, and neglected infrastructure, have ironically become fertile ground for a unique form of female empowerment.

Chapter IV: Women's work in border trade and Border Trade Centers between India and Myanmar

This chapter includes the participation and status in border trade in Zokhawthar and Moreh border trade centres. It discusses the perspectives of Women in Border Trade. The role of women in border trade, i.e. formal and informal trade, is also mentioned in detail. The needs and steps for the empowerment of women in border trade is also discussed. It presents a qualitative study on the role of women and Border Trade and Border Trade centres in Mizoram and Manipur. This chapter underlines the gender perspectives of Border Trade and Border Trade Centres.

Chapter V: Challenges and Prospects of Women Workers in the Border Trade Centres

This chapter discusses the challenges and prospects of women workers in the border trade centre of Mizoram and Manipur. These locations serve purposes that go beyond economic transactions—they are deeply rooted in the area's geography, cultural heritage, political dynamics, and long-standing transnational relationships. Understanding these trade hubs requires viewing them as reflections of broader

societal and economic patterns, not merely as marketplaces. These trade zones hold vital importance for the economy of northeastern India, particularly concerning Myanmar.

Chapter VI: Conclusion and suggestions

The final concluding chapter of the research work summarised the entire work. It presents a summary of all previous chapters. This chapter includes findings and observation, suggestions and conclusion. This conclusion chapter opens with presenting a summary of the entire work. The British colonial authorities conducted substantial changes to trading activities that occurred between India and Myanmar. The colonial government designed policies that focused on resource exploitation together with infrastructure development for imperial economic integration of Myanmar. The Indo-Burma Trunk Road together with the Burma Railway enabled the imperial markets to obtain teak wood and rice through resource transportation. These new developments dismantled traditional barter practices that existed before colonial interference causing damage to established communities throughout both territories.

Findings

The study reveals that women workers in Moreh and Zokhawthar face significant challenges that impede their progress. Women encounter the major problem of restricted formal market connections combined with limited financial opportunities. Women traders struggle with business growth and credit services because they do not possess valid licenses or proper business registration. The combination of insufficient access to transportation and substandard market access and unstable communication infrastructure leads to poor business efficiency for women entrepreneurs. Small-scale women traders face disproportionate challenges due to uncertain trade policies and high taxation rates since they cannot afford to absorb unpredictable changes in their business environment. Moreover, women traders sometimes face aggravated risks because there are ineffective complaint response tools as well as insufficient legal protection.

However, the study found that the process of border trade participation by women produces substantial social and economic ramifications. Women who engage in border commerce through international trade improve their household wealth and fight poverty while promoting community well-being and regional peaceful conditions. When women receive economic empowerment it results in better health results for families together with enhanced education and nutrition levels which creates successive positive impacts across the entire community. Participation of women in trade activities creates enhanced social ties and better cultural connections between neighboring regions and these border zones need peaceful cooperation. Also, the financial autonomy of women gives them stronger authority to fight discrimination while securing their rights and active participation in local decision-making bodies. The social changes brought by women traders become especially important when considering North-East India where conventional gender stereotypes traditionally subordinated women. Through their strategic barrier-breaking methods women traders create conditions which will lead to a society that is both inclusive and fair.

The research reveals that women traders in Zokhawthar and Moreh display powerful adaptability and endurance when dealing with adversities. Women utilize their creativity to develop helpful solutions which help them fight obstacles while continuing their economic survival. Many women develop network cooperatives which allow resource sharing and mutual support as well as information exchange. Through their networks women traders improve their market muscle yet utilize these non-formal structures to unite on matters of common advocacy. Women traders have generated positive outcomes through their influence to win better market facilities which include enhanced security and improved trade transparency.

Moreover, the study also found that women farmers require proper education together with skills training for them to become empowered traders. Training programs that teach business management and financial literacy and digital technology to women will enhance their participation and benefits from cross-border trade. The support needed must come from both government and non-governmental organizations which will also promote awareness of women's rights and

entitlements. The economic development of women demands that trade policies and programs adopt systemic gender-based elements which build structures supporting women's economic engagement. Besides, women need proper solutions developed to eliminate institutional barriers which prevent them from joining formal trading relations with financial institutions. Women will shift from informal to formal sectors when simple registration methods are combined with fewer bureaucratic procedures and financial products tailored for their needs. The successful development of women-friendly market areas demanded alongside robust infrastructure systems for transportation and communication and strong safety measures for female traders. Woman traders need secure frameworks along with reliable means to resolve complaints because they face exploitation threats and abuse.

Community-based support together with family backing proves indispensable for women who want to participate in border trade operations. Men need encouragement to perform household duties and changes to traditional gender expectations will build better support for female traders in their communities. The promotion of gender equality together with respect and inclusion requires community organizations and local community leaders to actively participate. The participation of women workers at border trade centers throughout North-East India demonstrates her ability to stay resilient and use resources creatively while showing great determination. The economic and social transformation of the region heavily depends on their work but women traders experience major difficulties that need immediate resolution. Public officials together with development professionals and community leaders must work jointly to address existing difficulties so women in border trade can access complete potential leading to an inclusive and economically prosperous future. This research demonstrates women's crucial position in cross-border commercial activities and presents suggestions for empowerment that guide policy actions targeting these specific groups. The sustainable development and equitable evolution of Southeast Asia requires an empowered female presence in border trade centers between India and Southeast Asia including Moreh and Zokhawthar.

Before recent times women in border trade only performed informal sales of agricultural products and handmade merchandise because formal trading was controlled by men in such networks. The empowerment of women has increased through time though recent obstacles such as restricted educational chances and leadership positions continue to hamper their progress. Border market areas such as Moreh (Manipur) and Zokhawthar (Mizoram) see women assuming control of all informal marketplace deals that include vegetable distribution and textile and handcrafted product trade. The informal trade sector provides flexible opportunities but Restricts business growth through capital constraints and requires fixing exploitation problems in uncontrolled commercial operations.

Women now have enhanced chances to do business through regulated commerce sectors after trade became formalized. Women entrepreneurs have set up shops and perform both wholesale distribution and business ownership activities. Through education and business training programs combined with access to digital technology women have become capable of participating in lucrative trade segments. Women continue to actively participate in service sectors including transportation, logistics, hospitality, retail management and banking as well as customs clearing at trade locations. Through their business ventures these women prove essential to local economic growth as they also work to break down established gender expectations. Social and economic independence along with leadership opportunities emerge from border trade because it allows women to gain independence. Women now make their own decisions in the household and use their income for educational expenditures as well as healthcare services. When women take part they create relationships which reinforce connections between members of the community.

The presence of women traders within border trade creates tremendous changes for both local economic systems and communities which reside along the India-Myanmar frontier. In spite of experiencing obstacles from gender-based discrimination and limited resources women boost economic progress together with social integration between communities. Women's ability to overcome obstacles reveals their essential importance for developing future cross-border business

dynamics. The study examines both opportunities and difficulties that women employees encounter while working in border trade centers by studying Moreh Manipur and Zokhawthar Mizoram India. Borders depend on women because they boost household revenue and support local business activities and expand regional commercial activities. Various barriers emerge from economic conditions together with cultural practices and institutional structures that challenge women workers during their border trade activities.

Women rarely find stable employment opportunities because they work in non-formal sectors which pay minimum wages. Market demand and trade policies as well as exchange rates influence the income received by female border traders. Women find it difficult to obtain loans since they lack both appropriate security and understand financial operations. Women who need loans must turn to informal lenders because formal institutions deny them financing and these lenders offer loans with especially high interest rates that result in perpetual debt. The better resources and extensive networks which wealthy traders possess shape markets into setups that small-scale domestic women traders find challenging to compete against. Society maintains strict barriers against women which prevent their movement between locations and limits both their capability to make decisions and blocks their access to profitable opportunities. Professional growth limitations occur because women face dual responsibilities between their housework and their trade work. Women who work in informal employment roles receive no insurance packages that cover health care or maternity leave benefits. The absence of proper market areas as well as storage systems and sanitation provision and transportation access poses major obstacles for female market sellers. Insurgent warfare combined with political confinements disrupts commercial operations thus causing extra hardship for women who conduct daily business. Border checkpoints with their complicated bureaucracy and discriminatory practices create greater marginalization of women in the trading process.

New opportunities for women professionals in retail registered through regional trade agreements while infrastructure development invites participation in hospitality and logistics industries. Government bodies and NGOs provide training

programs that teach women business administration practices and financial literacy in addition to trade rule comprehension. The formation of Self-Help Groups with cooperatives gives women the chance to combine their resources which creates united bargaining strength. Through these networks women gain better bargaining power for their trade and access needed financial resources. Trade participation provides women with better financial autonomy that enables them to spend household money and expand their businesses. Social advancement occurs when women take part in society because it challenges male-dominated norms of tradition. The development of roadways and storage facilities along with banking services provides women better opportunities to conduct cross-border business activities with enhanced efficiency. Women's active participation creates cultural sharing bridges that exist between border communities and simultaneously fights against gender biases. Entrepreneurial accomplishments by these women serve as motivational factors that drive younger generations towards business ownership.

Women laborers who work at border trade centers encounter multiple obstacles regarding pay rates along with inadequate facilities and discrimination and social protection weaknesses yet they are key figures leading economic changes in their regions. The full empowerment of female workers requires enhancement of regional policies combined with strategic skill development initiatives together with better infrastructure and wider financial access. The solutions for these problems will benefit workers' quality of life and help promote regional economic development alongside gender equality advancement. The economic development of both countries features as one benefit from the trade agreements between India and Myanmar. Financial programs such as Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) supporting micro-entrepreneurs. The border areas of Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur) along the India-Myanmar frontier represent dynamic zones of economic activity, cultural exchange, and geopolitical significance. The women workers of these regions act as vital components to make livings succeed by assisting in trade activities while confronting the difficulties resulting from geographic and political elements.

Prior to European colonization borderlands linking India and Myanmar acted as trading centers where Mizo, Chin, Naga and Kuki communities exchanged farming products together with fabrics, forest resources and handmade goods. Economic activities during this era depended heavily on women because they served both as active traders and masters of handicraft and textile production.

British colonial administration during the Colonial period created established trading pathways although it counteracted established indigenous methods of operation. Women's economic responsibilities shifted because the transition from barter exchange into monetary transactions restricted their hands-on involvement with business transactions. Following independence Myanmar faced political turmoil causing northeast Indian border areas to experience insurrections which blocked cross-border trading for numerous decades. The informal market continued operating through small-scale trading performed by women and female laborwork.

Since 1994 when the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement began and India adopted its "Look East" (now "Act East") policy trade activities resumed through key points at Moreh and Zokhawthar. Women gained new job possibilities as a result of these developments although informal trade barriers persisted alongside a lack of proper infrastructure. Zokhawthar functions as a vital trade center because it borders Rihkhawdar in Myanmar's Champhai district, Mizoram. Women make an active contribution to the small-scale marketing activities of agricultural commodities along with textile products and consumer products. Women engage in border market vending while working as porters and creating handicrafts and working in various other roles.

The Zokhawthar-Rih Trade Zone received formal status in 2004 which failed to establish solutions for credit availability and gender-focused assistance for women traders. Moreh, Manipur serves as an essential trade conduit between India and Southeast Asian regions position in Manipur. Women operating in this border area conduct commercial activities by selling textiles along with food items and various other products.

Women who work in trading encounter several hindrances including outdated business patterns and unacknowledged professional capability along with lacking access to storage facilities and financial institutions.

The income earnings of households are expanded through the trade-based activities performed by women. They operate both small enterprises and carry out work as employees who receive pay only for each day they work.

Women promote cultural exchange through their trade of traditional items which represent common heritage elements between Indian and Myanmar ethnic groups. Through economic contributions women extend their activities to promote social cohesion by organizing joint festivals and rituals and conducting markets.

Women believe they will have enhanced participation opportunity in cross-border trade in the coming years. Numerous women suggest that accepting inclusive policies alongside financial support and stronger security measures will lead to their success. Women believe that increased cross-border commercial activities will help break social gender restrictions. Women who work at the India-Myanmar trade frontier keep the economy active while actively undermining the established social divisions between men and women. Their ability to overcome scarce resources together with social pressures has allowed women workers to make substantial contributions to both their families and their communities. Access to resources along with skill development programs and inclusive policies enable women's total potential realization for both regional development and gender equality advancement. Women workers at border trade centers including Zokhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur drive cross-border business operations and simultaneously generate household wealth and develop local economies as well as area trading networks. The women working in border trade face multiple obstacles due to cultural norms alongside economic uncertainties and insufficient infrastructure as well as gender discrimination. International trade policy changes along with regional partnership development open new prospects to empower border traders.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are based on the analysis of collected data through primary sources as personal interviews, responses of respondents to survey questionnaires and field observations during the research. These suggestion can be considered for the decision-making towards the empowering women workers at both border trade centers. The empowering initiatives for female workers in Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur) consists of institutional improvements along with infrastructure progress and skills upgrades combined with financial accessibility programs as well as efforts to enhance social and cultural opportunities for women. An extended examination provides additional details on each area followed by specific recommendations.

Women-Led Cooperatives: The establishment of cooperatives under female leadership creates an essential mechanism to achieve economic developments through group effort. The cooperatives should build their marketable product range through the India-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement to include textiles and handicrafts with agricultural items. Women join formal cooperative groups to eliminate their reliance on exploitative informal trading networks and obtain credit support and training services along with essential resources.

Gender Quotas in Decision-Making Bodies: Border Trade Centres (BTCs) enforce gender quota systems for their management committees which brings female viewpoints into policy formation processes. Gender-based representation in decision-making structures helps solve pay inequality problems and harassment problems at work and maternal care problems simultaneously with supportive trade policy implementation.

Formalization of Informal Trade: Because of excessive bureaucracy many women conduct their trade operations through informal channels. A streamlining of trade document procedures through legal simplification would motivate female traders to enter formal commerce operations. Such measures would safeguard female traders by preventing exploitation while maintaining standards set forth in international trade.

Dedicated Market Spaces: Marketplaces dedicated to female vendors improve marketing opportunities as well as women's economic involvement in the business world. These spaces need to include security protection along with child care areas and sanitation areas and system to monitor climate for perishable product storage.

Healthcare and Education Facilities: Mobile health facilities installed at border marketplaces should help protect female workers from harmful occupational risks. Vocational training in financial literacy and digital marketing and logistics skills can increase women's ability to take part in cross-border business because these abilities directly support commerce.

Transportation Subsidies: Female traders receive reduced operational costs because the introduction of subsidized transportation networks makes their movements between locations easier. The implementation of improved connectivity systems would give women traders access to bigger markets than their current restricted border regions.

Cold Storage Warehouses: The location of climate-controlled storage space near border checkpoints helps women farmers in agricultural trade activities avoid spoilage losses. The new infrastructure would implement sustainable farming principles to generate more revenue for local communities.

Vocational Training Initiatives: Women require detailed training about entrepreneurship and digital skills along with sustainable agricultural techniques to advance beyond minimum-wage informal industries through international trade standards. Women can develop better cross-border negotiation capabilities by completing certification programs that will strengthen their capacity to handle challenging trade conditions.

Craft Innovation Hubs: New centers for innovation will combine modern technologies with old traditional skills to rebuild declining local industries without losing their cultural heritage. The points of connection would enable designers to collaborate with artisans for developing marketable products which would participate in both regional trade fairs and international markets.

Digital Literacy Campaigns: Women must learn digital literacy skills to properly use e-commerce platforms. The training curriculum needs to teach people how to utilize digital payment platforms with online marketing methods coupled with social media platforms to grow their business footprint.

Streamlined Microloan Procedures: Border trade centers should simplify microloan procedures to make financial capital available for women who want to launch or grow their businesses. When Start-Up India initiates women-centric venture funds they will enhance support for entrepreneurship activities.

Integration with Export Promotion Councils: Self-Help Groups must work together with export promotion councils to get access to financing options and worldwide export markets. An integrated connection would enable these entities to achieve global competition success as well as establish economic independence.

Crowdfunding Platforms: The funding mechanism of crowdfunding benefits women entrepreneurs who operate in border locations. The platforms act as funding alternatives by connecting to community-based engagement initiatives.

Awareness Campaigns: People must become aware of gender equality together with legal rights and economic opportunities because these concepts are essential to break down social barriers that restrain female commercial involvement. The presentation of strong successful female traders as inspiration will help motivate other women to follow trading careers.

Childcare Services at Trade Centers: Women would be able to participate in economic activities after hubs at trade facilities implement care services for children who accompany them to work.

Recognition Programs: Both awards and public recognition of best female traders actively validate their economic contributions which in turn builds social acceptance of women leaders in all professions.

Community Engagement Programs: Community-based programs that promote gender sensitization education work towards removing cultural obstacles which stop women from entering the workforce.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: The implementation needs supportive collaboration between MDoNER (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region), NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission), UN Women, International Labour Organization (ILO) and state departments of women's development and MWDC (Mizoram Women's Development Corporation) and e-commerce platforms to succeed.

Cross-Border Skill Exchanges: Under the "Act East" policy framework India can enhance regional cooperation by creating opportunities for skill exchanges with Myanmar.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): PPPs provide a valuable infrastructure development tool for specialized marketplaces along with cold storage facilities and accomplish sustainability goals through collaborative management arrangements.

E-Commerce Platforms: Digital marketplaces provide women traders with both low-cost operations and immediate connections to international customers without needing intermediaries. Systems enabling digital payments require implementation in these platforms to achieve smooth transactions.

Trade Paperwork Assistance: The provision of legal documentation assistance in cross-border trade enables women to step out of informal business into formal operations while bypassing governmental barriers.

Blockchain Technology Adoption: Blockchain provides a solution for transparent transaction records which enhances accountability and decreases corruption risks in international business.

Conclusion

To conclude, an examination of female participation in cross-border trading zones in the North-Eastern region of India, particularly focusing on Mizoram and Manipur, uncovers a multifaceted relationship between gender roles, economic practices, spatial dynamics, and state policies. Women involved in these trading environments often find themselves negotiating between entrenched cultural expectations and the evolving demands of a liberalising regional economy. In doing so, they have

managed to assert their presence within informal and quasi-formal trade circuits, crafting livelihoods and asserting autonomy amidst structural limitations.

Mizoram and Manipur's frontier regions, due to their proximity to Myanmar and deep-rooted ethno-historical connections, have historically operated as active conduits for cross-cultural exchange and commercial interaction. Within these contexts, women have assumed indispensable roles in sustaining local trade systems, particularly within small-scale and unofficial markets. Their involvement spans a diverse array of merchandise, from farm goods and woven fabrics to everyday consumer items, despite facing significant institutional neglect and lacking formal acknowledgement. Their entrepreneurial adaptability and competence in navigating linguistic and cultural barriers highlight their critical role in these marginal economies.

Nevertheless, the analysis reveals several persistent socio-economic hindrances confronting these women. Challenges such as deficient transport and market infrastructure, restricted access to micro-finance, marginalization in trade associations, and vulnerability to exploitation remain prevalent. The dominance of unregulated market operations further amplifies their susceptibility to sudden policy changes, increased border surveillance, and local political instability, all of which can destabilize their income sources. Moreover, patriarchal norms and gendered expectations continue to constrain their mobility and limit their influence within trade governance mechanisms. In Manipur, the town of Moreh stands out as both a space of promise and unpredictability for women traders. While some have established themselves through women-run cooperatives or informal alliances, they still face recurrent disruptions arising from shifting geopolitical landscapes and internal unrest. A comparable situation exists in Zokhawthar, Mizoram, where Mizo women actively engage in transborder trade yet remain outside the formalized structures of state-regulated commerce.

Despite such obstacles, the tenacity and adaptive strategies of these female traders are remarkable. Their sustained efforts to operate in a fluid environment characterized by uncertain policies, informal economies, and embedded social restrictions reflects

their resourcefulness and perseverance. Though fragile, the informal trade sector offers a degree of financial independence and increased public engagement not readily accessible to many rural women in the North-East. However, to genuinely recognize and strengthen their economic role, it is crucial to formulate trade policies that incorporate gender-specific considerations. This entails not only integrating informal practices into legal frameworks but also ensuring better access to credit, skills development initiatives, market infrastructure, and legal safeguards. Any such strategy must be grounded in a nuanced understanding of the region's socio-cultural and economic diversity.

These interventions address institutional infrastructure problems and financial discrimination against women as well as gender-based discrimination alongside legal inequalities while taking advantage of regional trade agreements to empower women workers socially and economically. Exclusivity remains the focus of proposed strategies that combine institutional reforms with skill development programs and financial accessibility measures as well as socio-cultural empowerment initiatives and security protocols and trade process digitization and regional and international partnership development. The detailed implementation strategies can convert Zokhawthar (Mizoram) and Moreh (Manipur) into vibrant economic centers which elevate female workers' socio-economic status and sustain development in northeastern border regions of India toward the "Act East" policy framework goals.

In conclusion, enhancing the role of women in Mizoram and Manipur's border trade corridors is both a question of equity and a pragmatic step towards inclusive regional growth. By dismantling the systemic barriers hindering their participation, governments and development actors can harness their potential as agents of cross-border engagement, local economic resilience, and regional collaboration. These women's narratives should be placed at the forefront not as marginal anecdotes, but as central to understanding North-East India's evolving economic relations with its neighboring regions and its broader position within South and South-East Asian trade dynamics.

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