

The Journey between Two Lands: A Study of the Indo-Bangladesh Women Migration with Special Reference to Jalpaiguri District

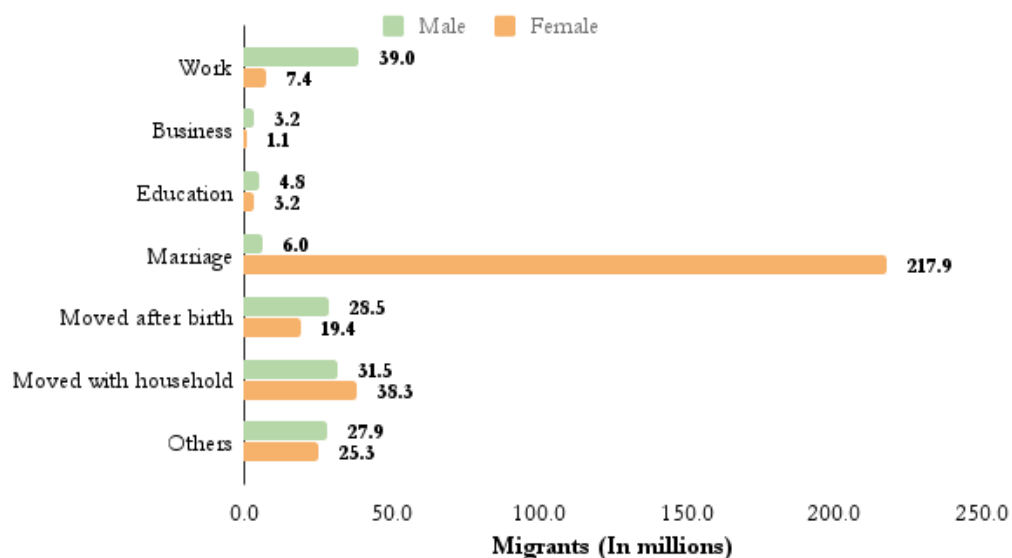
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Abstract: *The work, women in border area, the author wishes to highlight the ethnographic compilation on the complex interrelationship between gender and political borders in South Asia, particularly in the major areas of Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal which shares its border with the country of Bangladesh. The author attempts to examine the stories of women whose lives are intertwined with borders, who are its markers and who resist everyday violence in all its myriad forms. The borders become zones, where the power and control of one state ends and the other begins. The result is the startling revelation that women not only live on the borders, but in many ways, they form them and are a crucial part of them. The borders become symbolic of spaces where socio-economic and political contests of inclusion and exclusion are played out every day. The work wishes to elaborate the ways in which women negotiate their differences within a state, which in the guise of being democratic, denies space to differences based on ethnicity, religion, class, or gender. Borders become hostile zones of widespread aggression, where masculinity is privileged. It shows how most of the traditional efforts made to make geopolitical regions more secure, are nothing but attempts to privilege a masculine definition of security that only results in feminine insecurities. The India–Bangladesh border is negotiated and reproduced in the everyday spaces of people living in the borderland that is often overlooked by the usual representation of geopolitical nationalism and hard realities of the barbed wire.*

Keywords: *Indo-Bangladesh, Women, Borders, Jalpaiguri, Gender studies.*

Introduction: What do borders do, mean, and look like in different parts of the world? How are they decided? Who or what might they protect? How might they do harm? How and why might they change? My research work tries to particularly focus on the condition of the women in and around the border region of Jalpaiguri district. But before diving deeper into that, there is a need to learn more about the physical construct that separates two countries- the borderland.

Reasons For Migration 2011



Source: Hindustan Times

Year	Total In-migrants from Bangladesh	% Share to District's Total In-Migrants
1951	132358	84.44
1961	218431	83.44
1981	279186	93.13
1991	249424	94.55
2001	230574	94.56

Source: Census of India, 1961; 2001

The Bangladesh–India border, known locally as the Radcliffe line (IB), is an international border running between the republics of Bangladesh and India that demarcates the eight divisions of Bangladesh and the Indian states. Bangladesh and India share a 4,096-kilometre-long (2,545 mi) international border, the fifth-longest land border in the world, including 262 km (163 mi) in Assam, 856 km (532 mi) in Tripura, 318 km (198 mi) in Mizoram, 443 km (275 mi) in Meghalaya, and 2,217 km (1,378 mi) in West Bengal.[1] The Bangladeshi divisions of Mymensingh, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Sylhet, and Chittagong are situated along the border. A number of pillars mark the border between the two states. Small demarcated portions of the border are fenced on both sides.

The border is used as a route for smuggling livestock, food items, medicines, and drugs from India to Bangladesh. Moreover, illegal immigrants from Bangladesh

cross the border to India. Because of a large number of illegal immigrants crossing from Bangladesh into India, a controversial shoot-on-sight policy has been enforced by the Indian border patrols. This is a region of rampant women abuse, especially around the Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar district and my work is an attempt to bring into focus the living and surviving conditions of the women of the region.

But in fact most of our traditional efforts to make geopolitical regions more secure are nothing but attempts to privilege a masculine definition of security that result in only feminine insecurities. Yet in addressing questions of security the insecurities of women always remain in the back of beyond. The political class talks about ISI, insurgency, terrorism, and never talks about how trafficking or its linkages with statelessness and HIV/AIDS. Little does it realize that the threat posed by AIDS is much more than the one posed by “terrorism”. And, herein lies the fallacy in most policy decisions. When AIDS becomes an epidemic migrant prostitutes are punished without any recognition that they are as much a victim of the system. It is the system that needs to be restructured with gender just vision.

Women belonging to both settled, immigrant communities, and those living in the enclaves of Jalpaiguri border face many of these marginalisations. Such marginalisations affect women in the border region of Bangladesh. Yet no study till date has been conducted keeping this particular problematic in mind and so such a research work will not just fill a gap in the existing literature on governance but it will also have definite policy implications as well.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What are the roots of the women in the Indo-Bangladesh border region?
2. What roles or significance does the border women have in the contemporary politics of India and Bangladesh?
3. How the two-way interaction between both the nations have shaped the relation between the two countries?
4. How cross border women issues have shaped a new identity in the pre-existing women movement?
5. What are the conditions of the people living in these borders particularly of the women?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the genesis of the women condition in the Indo-Bangladesh border particularly around Jalpaiguri district.
2. To study the roots and the reasons for women migration
3. To study the relevance of the women condition in the present scenario of the region.

4. To study the role of the government and other organizations in the upliftment of the women of the specified border region
5. To study their living conditions, social structure and income sources as well as income level in and around the border region

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Ahmed, Sakia, Rita, Mohapatra, Nirjan, “EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN NORTH-EAST INDIA”, Kalpaz Publications, 2020 highlights Present Up-and-coming Issues And Challenges Of Land-locked Region Of North-east India. The Book Includes All The Up To Date Issues Of North-east India With Special Reference To National Register Of Citizenship, Insurgency Movement, Ethnic Conflict, Strategic Significance Of North-east, Environmental Movement, Political Issues, Untouchability Issues, And The Rights Of Indigenous People Of This North-east Region. The Book Will Directly Benefit For All The Students And Research Scholars From The Academic Perspective. The Book Can Be Considered As A Text Book And A Reference Book For The Subjects Like Political Science, Public Administration And Contemporary Politics In North-East India. The Book Will Be Helpful To Understand The Various Issues Of North-east India In Context Of Present Existing Scenario Of This Region.

Banerjee, Paula, “Borders, Histories , Existences: Gender and Beyond”, Sage Publication, India Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2010 is an insightful historical work on borders and bordered existences, with special emphasis on the gender dimensions of these existences. The author argues that the experiences of women living on borders and in borderlands are definitive of those of the vulnerable communities who bear the brunt of the complex border and security issues. The conditions of migrant women, women peace campaigners, and victims of human trafficking and mobile diseases are presented as markers of bordered existences. Their history is one of negotiations with structures of control, leading to insecurity, subversion, endurance and a different kind of existence. Thus, this book adopts a critical feminist history angle. *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond* contends that borders are, by definition, lines of inclusion and exclusion established by the state. It analyses how states construct borders and try to make them static and rigid and how bordered existences, such as women, migrant workers, victims of human trafficking, etc., destabilise the rigid constructs. It explores the political conditions that have made borders problematic in post-colonial South Asia and how these borders have become regions of extreme control or violence. The book contains new research data and original theories and would provide crucial information to those studying colonial and post-colonial history, politics and international relations, South Asia studies and sociology.

Banerjee, Paula, Roy Chaudhury, “Women in Indian Borderland”, SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd New Delhi, 2011 is an ethnographic compilation on

the complex interrelationship between gender and political borders in South Asia, particularly in the three major areas of West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and Northeast India. The book is an outcome of a research program on Globalization, Democracy, Citizenship, Gender, and Peace Studies. The chapters in the book examine the stories of women whose lives are intertwined with borders, who are its markers and who resist everyday violence in all its myriad forms. The borders become zones, where the power and control of one state ends and the other begins. The result is the startling revelation that women not only live on the borders, but in many ways, they form them and are a crucial part of them. The borders become symbolic of spaces where socio-economic and political contests of inclusion and exclusion are played out every day. The essays describe the way in which women negotiate their differences within a state, which in the guise of being democratic, denies space to differences based on ethnicity, religion, class, or gender. The contributors indicate that borders become hostile zones of widespread aggression, where masculinity is privileged. They analyze how most of the traditional efforts made to make geopolitical regions more secure, are nothing but attempts to privilege a masculine definition of security that only results in feminine insecurities.

Baruah, Sanjib “Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking The Impasse in Northeast India”, Oxford University Press, 2011 says how decades of armed conflicts in North-east India have militarized the region, restricted civil right, and impeded economic growth. Conveying a sense of the region’s rich and vibrant public discourse, this collection explores how democratic politics and the world of armed rebellions intersect in complex ways. A number of the contributors argue that only concerted efforts to establish the rule of law, a system of accountability, and faith in institutions of government can break the cycle of violence. This volume will be interest to all those interested in armed conflicts, the state of Indian democracy, civil liberties, and north-east India.

Chakroborty, Gorky, Banenerjee, Suparna, “Negotiating Borders and Borderlands: The Indian Experience”, Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad, 2023 talks about how borders have always been seen as physical lines of separation, which mark the ‘other’ and group geographical spaces into territories and nation-States. However, can borders and borderlands also simultaneously exist as gateways for trade and commerce while being rigid institutions that disallow the movement of people from one part to another? Are some borders seen while others are only felt? Negotiating Borders and Borderlands shows how these ‘in-between’ spaces of borders have their own stories to tell. The chapters move beyond the Statist view of borders and provide a picture of borderlands from the perspective of those who inhabit such spaces. The authors show how the impact of Partition still echoes in the borderlands of postcolonial India, located along the land boundaries of Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, and Pakistan. They discuss: issues of

displacement, citizenship, territoriality, and identity that followed the often arbitrary boundary demarcations during the colonial period; how disputed political borders and cross-border military action affect the everyday lives of people; the sociocultural practices of minority communities in neighbouring countries; and the crucial role played by symbolic, invisible borders that present through the creation of the 'self' versus the 'other'.

Clisby, Suzanne, "Gender, Sexuality and Identities of the Borderlands: Queering the Margins", ROUTLEDEGE, New York, 2020 draws attention on border thinking, postcolonial and transnational feminisms, and queer theory, Gender, Sexuality and Identities of the Borderlands brings an intersectional feminist and queer lens to understandings of borderlands, liminality, and lives lived at the margins of socio-cultural and sexual normativities. Bringing together new and contemporary interdisciplinary research from across diverse global contexts, this collection explores the lived experiences of what Gloria Anzaldúa might have called 'threshold people', people who live among and in-between different worlds. While it is often challenging, difficult, and even dangerous, inhabiting marginal spaces, living at the borders of socio-cultural, religious, sexual, ethnic, or gendered norms can create possibilities for developing unique ways of seeing and understanding the worlds within which we live. This collection casts a spotlight on the margins, those 'queer spaces' in literary, cinematic, and cultural borderlands; postcolonial and transnational feminist perspectives on movement and migration; and critical analyses of liminal lives within and between socio-cultural borders. Each chapter within this unique book brings a critical insight into diverse global human experiences in the 21st Century.

RESEARCH GAP: The power of borders emerges not only from their institutional and legal nature but also from their symbolic and identity-forming significance. This innovative Research Agenda uncovers the links between different levels of border-making processes, or bordering, from the political to the cognitive, and connects everyday processes and experiences of border-making to the wider social world. Grounded in their original research, contributors offer a variety of discussions on future directions for border studies, including two areas which may prove particularly fruitful; firstly, the question of the broader political salience of borders and secondly, the ways in which the border studies paradigm increasingly connects ontological and ethical questions to processes of border-making. Taken together, the question of how everyday bordering practices and discourses can be productively linked to different aspects of social relations have not been discussed yet. This timely work attempts to be an invigorating work for those studying borders across a wide range of disciplines including human geography, political science, sociology, anthropology, history, international law as well as the humanities, notably art, media studies and philosophy. The researcher has found that there is a major research gap. No specific work have been done on the women

of border area of Jalpaiguri district. Various books, papers and websites are not relevant to this work. The objective of the researcher is to fill up the existing gap and provide an informative and thoroughly researched work for the consideration of the specified authority.

ANALYSIS OF STUDY: In an increasingly globalized world, border control is continuously changing. Nation-states grapple with ‘migration management’ and maintain secure borders against ‘illegal’ flows. Between India and Bangladesh, borders are elusive; internal and external security is blurred, and policies create legal categories of people whether it is a ‘trusted’ tourist or an ‘unauthorized’ migrant. For the ‘unauthorized’ Bangladeshi woman migrant trying to achieve safe passage to the Indian, the ‘border’ is no longer only a physical line to be crossed but a category placed on an individual body, which exists throughout her migration journey producing vulnerability as soon as the Indo-Bangladesh boundary is crossed. Based on policy analysis and fieldwork, this article argues that rather than protecting ‘unauthorized’ migrants, which the Indian government narrative claims to do, border policies imposed by the state legally categorize female bodies in clandestine terms and construct violent relationships. This embodied illegality creates forced invisibility, further marginalizing women with respect to finding work, and experiences of sexual violence and abuses by migration actors. The analysis focuses on three areas: the changing definition of ‘borders’; the effects of categorization and multiple vulnerabilities on Central American women; and the dangers caused by forced invisibility.

The lack of trust experienced by women migrants with regards to the coyote relationship may translate into abuses involving abandonment, kidnapping, and extortion. First, due to their ‘intersectional oppressions’, women may be perceived by their coyotes as physically weaker compared to men and thus more disposable when compared to the rest of the migrant group. Some women may be at a physical disadvantage, for example, when having to outrun state authorities. Coyotes make it very clear at the beginning of the arrangement that if anyone is unable to keep up with the rest of the group, they risk being left behind. Women travelling with children may be especially insecure since they are more likely unable to keep up with the rest of the group (Women’s Refugee Commission 2013). Second, many women migrants face kidnapping combined with extortion. Coyotes may try to take advantage of these women by extorting more money from their families than originally agreed upon during the business arrangement. In this scenario, women are kidnapped and taken to ‘safe houses’ where they are kept until a ransom of money is paid for their release.

Years	Bangladesh		Sri Lanka		Nepal	
	Female	Percentage of Female in Total Migrants	Female	Percentage of Female in Total Migrants	Female	Percentage of Female in Total Migrants
2010	27 706	7.09	130 657	48.84	10 056	3.42
2011	30 579	5.38	126 654	48.16	10 416	2.93
2012	37 304	6.14	138 312	48.97	22 958	5.96
2013	56 400	13.78	118 033	40.25	27 767	6.16
2014	76 007	17.86	110 489	36.78	29 121	5.60
2015	103 718	18.66	110 344	36.76	21 421	4.29

*The gender disaggregation of emigration from India and Pakistan is not provided by their respective official sources (Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Overseas Indian Affairs, and Pakistan Bureau of Overseas Employment).

Sources: Bangladesh: BMET; Sri Lanka: SLBFE; Nepal: *Labour Migration for Employment: A Status Report for Nepal-2014/15*. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Nepal.

Source: Research Gate

The India–Bangladesh enclaves, also known as the Chitmahals (Bengali: ছিটমহল *chitmôhól* and sometimes called Pasha enclaves, were the enclaves along the Bangladesh–India border, in Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya. The main body of Bangladesh contained 102 Indian enclaves, which in turn contained 21 Bangladeshi counter-enclaves, one of which contained Dahala Khagrabari, an Indian counter-counter-enclave, the world's only third-order enclave when it existed. The Indian mainland contained 71 Bangladeshi enclaves, which in turn contained 3 Indian counter-enclaves. A joint census in 2010 found 51,549 people who were residing in these enclaves: 37,334 in Indian enclaves within Bangladesh and 14,215 in Bangladeshi enclaves within India.

The Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh signed the Land Boundary Agreement in 1974 to exchange enclaves and simplify their international border. A revised version of the agreement was adopted by the two countries on 7 May 2015, when the Parliament of India passed the 100th Amendment to the Constitution of India. Under this agreement, which was ratified on 6 June 2015, India received 51 Bangladeshi enclaves (covering 7,110 acres (2,880 ha)) in the Indian mainland, while Bangladesh received 111 Indian enclaves (covering 17,160 acres (6,940 ha)) in the Bangladeshi mainland. The enclave residents were allowed to either continue residing at their present location or move to the country of their choice. The exchange of enclaves was to be implemented in phases between 31 July 2015 and 30 June 2016. The enclaves were exchanged at midnight on 31 July 2015 and the transfer of enclave residents was completed on 30 November 2015. After the Land Boundary Agreement, India lost around 40 square kilometres (15 sq mi) to Bangladesh. Since the exchange of territory took place, the only remaining enclave is Dahagram–Angarpota, an enclave of Bangladesh.

The largest Bangladeshi composite enclave (combining the first- and third-largest Bangladeshi chhits by area), administered as part of Patgram Upazila in Lalmonirhat Zila, lies within the Indian province of West Bengal. It is separated from the contiguous area of Bangladesh at its closest point by 178 metres (584 ft). The enclave has an area of 25.95 km² (10.02 sq mi) with a resident population of 20,000 people. The enclave lacks basic facilities. The lone health complex remains virtually useless because of lack of power supply, as India refused to allow Bangladesh to run power lines to the enclave. After the exchange of enclaves in July 2015, Bangladesh retained it as an exclave.

The Tin Bigha Corridor, a strip of Indian territory 85 metres (279 ft) wide running from the Dahagram–Angarpota composite enclave to the Bangladeshi mainland at their nearest approach, was leased by India in perpetuity to Bangladesh for access to the enclave. It is available for use by the residents of Dahagram–Angarpota.

Women of this region are predominantly prospectors, small businessmen, and women who carry out ancillary activities associated with gold extraction in the mining environment, such as freight forwarders, vendors, and sex workers. It appears that these women experience overlapping vulnerabilities; they have little or no education, precarious housing and, often, are hired to work in mining by intimate partners and/or with financial debt.

Commuting and disorderly migration, which is intensely carried out, associated with the challenges that the forest imposes for access to health teams, clandestinity, and the fact that these are people invisible to the State, favor the rapid spread of diseases. Potential health problems include influenza A, malaria, beriberi, digestive disorders, leishmaniasis, dermatitis, worm infestations, syphilis, Chikungunya, Dengue, Covid19, HIV/AIDS, and other infections, as well as snake bites.

Concerning women's health, current knowledge is extremely limited. Women in the mining area constitute a vulnerable group, considering the intersection of gender inequalities, stigma, clandestinity, origin, associated with the geographic isolation of the region. These aspects increase the risk of these women to health problems, such as sexually transmitted infections (STI/HIV), reduced access to rapid testing, difficulties in the sustained use of condoms, difficulties in performing and receiving the screening test for cervical cancer, exposure to sexual violence, exposing weaknesses related to gender and reproductive health in this perspective.

It was in this context that the concerns and motivations arose for carrying out this study, which proposes to analyze the vulnerabilities to illnesses in women around the border region of Jalpaiguri district.

CONCLUSION: The prime ministers of India and Bangladesh signed a Land Boundary Agreement in 1974 to exchange all enclaves and simplify the international border. In 1974 Bangladesh approved the proposed Land Boundary Agreement, but India did not ratify it. In 2011 the two countries again agreed to

exchange enclaves and adverse possessions. A revised version of the agreement was finally adopted by the two countries when the Parliament of India passed the 119th Amendment to the Indian Constitution on 7 May 2015.

Jalpaiguri is a part of West Bengal which is situated in North Bengal. The district situated in the northern part of West Bengal has international borders with Bangladesh in the north and south and district borders with Darjeeling hills in the west and northwest and Alipurduar district and Cooch Behar district on the east. Distance between Jalpaiguri and Bangladesh Border Road is 90.74 km. The border areas in Jalpaiguri are Fulbari, Berubari, Rjgamj, Chaulhati, Sobharhaat, Gadra, Tetulia and Manikganj. Phulbari also known as Fulbari is the longest border of the district of India-Bangladesh border and a proposed municipality in Rajganj community development block in Jalpaiguri district in the Indian state of West Bengal. The Bangladesh side of the border crossing is Banglabandha. Border crossing of vehicles between Phulbari in India and Banglabandha in Bangladesh was inaugurated in January 2011. Earlier, Nepal-Bangladesh transit through the border started in a limited manner in 1997. Goods-laden trucks from both sides cross the border and unload the goods at warehouses in the other country. The Indian Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Bangladesh's Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury attended the inauguration ceremony. This border crossing can also be used for the movement of people between Bangladesh and India.

The border is used as a route for smuggling livestock, food items, medicines, and drugs from India to Bangladesh. Moreover, illegal immigrants from Bangladesh cross the border to India. Because of a large number of illegal immigrants crossing from Bangladesh into India, a controversial shoot-on-sight policy has been enforced by the Indian border patrols. This is a region of rampant women abuse, especially around the Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar district and my work is an attempt to bring into focus the living and surviving conditions of the women of the region.

In this respect it is important to note that women face specific forms of marginalisation in border area of Jalpaiguri district. This include harassment by the security personnel including sexual abuse and killings. The border security forces on both sides engage in forcible push-backs – extreme harsh methods of deportation resulting in loss of limbs, lives, money, and dignity. The daily economic activities of many women such as fisherwomen fishing in river-borders are hampered greatly resulting in sustained distress. Long and undue detention at jails and sub-jails when these women are caught while crossing a border. Rampant sexual abuses are common. Undue harassment of immigrant women on the suspicion of either being terrorists or harbouring terrorists. Harassment of women marked as having loose sexual morals and thereby endangering people through sexually seducing them. Undue harassment of immigrant women as harbingers of AID. Harassment of women living in border enclave. Harassment of women belonging to matri-lineal tribes who are seen as susceptible to entanglement with immigrant men.

Women are deprived of ownership of resources such as land. Effects of communalization of women in the borders can also be seen. Lack of proper education of women in the border region. Proper family planning program is not maintained. Adequate health facilities not available. Religious tussle between different communities.

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