

International Border: The Gendered Dimension

Ruchika Raina

Doctoral and ICSSR Fellow
Department of Politics and Governance
Central University of Kashmir

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Abstract

The research paper analyses the gender-specific dimensions of security on the International Border (IB) villages of Jammu region, J&K. It precisely focuses on the experiences and viewpoints of women in their regular lives and times of border-conflict. Using an ethnographic research techniques, the study investigates how women manage and deal with security challenges, militarisation and everyday life in the volatile border-ends of India and Pakistan. The study explores the intersection between borders and women as promoters of peace and agents of transformation in the borderland societies. After in-depth narrative collections and FGDs, the paper concludes with the research-analysis at different aspects to present the level of women engagement in borders and borderland societies.

Keywords: Border, Borderlands, Border communities, border-conflict, Gender, women

Introduction

Borders often known as the practice of restricting entry to a specific territory, has been a fundamental sovereign function of the states (Anderson, 2013). States, as defined by their territories, have consistently established barriers to entry. These barriers serve many purposes such as deterring military/armed forces, imposing taxes on trade, safeguarding domestic producers, and blocking the arrival of individuals considered undesirable. The only power to determine the valid entry of individuals and goods into their territory rests alone with the sovereignty of each independent state (Risse-Kappen, 1995).

Conversely, there has been a significant degree of historical transformation in the preferences and concerns regarding border management. Although military security and economic regulation have historically been the main priorities at the border, some states are now restructuring their border regulatory systems to prioritise law enforcement. Contrary to popular belief, territoriality is not simply decreasing in importance; instead, it continues to exist, albeit with a different emphasis (Sack, 2009). In numerous cases, the process of reducing military presence and promoting economic freedom at borders is being accompanied by a rise in more rigorous border law enforcement.

Frequently, security organisations/agencies and central government departments/administration fail to fully grasp the impact of distinct borderland features due to their imperfect or restricted comprehension of such regions. Borders have a significant impact on the contact prospects of states, either limiting or expanding the range of possible interactions that they might engage in. States that are next to each other will typically have a higher level of connectivity and hence engage in a greater number of interactions (Etzioni & Boulding, 1963). The crucial matter addressed here is that the presence of two boundaries facilitates the possibility of interaction.

However, the level of connections and interactions which rely primarily on the ethnic and cultural basis are not enough in the case of borders of India and Pakistan. The conflict history of India and Pakistan was created with the independence of India and creation of new nation i.e. Pakistan. The division of India and Pakistan led to a minimum of three conflicts and several situations like war, for instance, ceasefire violation on International Borders (IB) and Line of

Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir. The scenario is highly concerning due to the fact that both countries possess nuclear capabilities (Banerjee, 2020).

The region of Jammu and Kashmir has a political history of border contestations that has been seen in escalated ceasefire violations over the time, along all the sectors (Jacob, 2019). The boundaries of IB and LoC remained unstable, with the presence of military control and guard towers across the margins. The military control of boundaries have complete potential to show gun and mortar war for the short term period, in the border areas including residential units (Chowdhary, 2012). The local residential villages of borderlands have marks and memories of numerous cross-fire incidents, armed infiltrations, mine-blasts, and militarisation, drugs-smuggling, weapon-trafficking and their impacts on their socio-political and economic lives.

In this paper, the ceasefire violations as an affecting variable has been explored in the villages of Jammu borders. The guns and shells on these borders have never been silent (Chowdhary, 2012). Though a participant¹ of the study narrated, *“when a bullet comes, it doesn’t identify if its men or women, old or children”*, yet another participant² stated, *“women of the villages usually stays at home, doing domestic chores and nourishing families, they are more prone to violence with no escape from the situation immediately.”* Thus, paper intends to explore the gendered dimension of ceasefire violations in the times of supposed normalcy on borders, during cross-fires and challenges of women in post-cross-fire period.

Methodology

The study employs a semi-ethnographic research to investigate the border villages of Jammu. The borderland women of Suchetgarh sector have been selected for this study. In case of sampling, the 30 women from Suchetgarh sector (Suchetgarh, Krotana, Bidhipur and Nizabatpur) was engaged in the narrative ethnography to examine their family, social, cultural and political aspects in intersection with the issue of ceasefire violations. The study has tried best to cover all the backgrounds of participants like their financial status, social status and political indulgence.

¹ Narrated in Bidhipur village, dated on July 20, 2021.

² Narrated in Krotana village, dated on July 13, 2021.

The researcher has paid multiple visits in the borderland homes and carried out extensive fieldwork in the real life environment of the participants. These attempts involved pilot study, main study and narrative analysis. The practice of participant observation while interacting with border forces, fields and domestic chores, was utilised with observance of their facial expressions and body movements. The method of data collection comprised triangulation techniques like primary information (narratives), secondary sources like documents of local offices, policy documents, interviews with concerned officials and newspapers. The consent of participants and anonymity has been maintained as a part of research ethics.

Borderland Women: A case study

The borders of the world have multiple apparent characteristics like silent and violent, crossing through natural barriers like mountains and rivers, landscapes and oceans but political agreement over boundaries draws significant attention (Shekhawat & Re 2017; Raina 2021). The political agreement has separated India and Pakistan, regulated and militarised redcliff line with constricted cross-border movement (Dabova, 2014). Apparently, the most contested and rigid border of the world has its own internal and external dynamics.

The borderland communities living along the IB sector (210 kilometres along the region) i.e. ranging from Kathua to Akhnoor have faced the impact of power display despite of ‘settled border’³. According to a participant⁴ when asking about borders, *“states fight for themselves, for their political interests, for pieces of land. But, we, borderland people are missing in these fights. If they concern about us, they can at least avoid target on residential villages, both sides may target local colonies across border to satisfy themselves. We, people naturally are involved in this conflict.”*

The ‘symbol of powers’ (Wilson & Donnan, 1998) can easily be perceived in these border villages in controlled lives, regulated movements, military installations and incidents of ceasefire

³ LoC is unsettled border between both states and subject to main dispute. LoC ranges from Akhnoor (Jammu) to Saichen (Ladakh).

⁴ Narrated in Suchetgarh village, dated on July 15, 2021

violations. For borderland population, the militarised notion of security is prominent over all other aspects like rights to life, earning, education, health and information sector. The cross-firing challenges makes the life so intricate that to get escape from the physical harm and material damage comes into the priority over every subsequent aspect. In a discussion over damages in the village, a participant⁵ forwarded, *“we have seen multiple wounds and even killings due to gunshots and mortar shells but we do not want our generation to see all these. Every mother is much concerned about her children, prior to her and every father wants to save his family, prior to him. All other things like agriculture and houses come later. We should be provided with the safe places at mainland, just 4 marlas to construct two rooms for safe living.”*

Borderland women of IB communities having already socio-economic and politically marginalised status as women in Indian traditional societies. The ceasefire impacted lifestyle give an addition to marginalised status with greater responsibilities in villages, psychological trauma in the period of ceasefire violations and constant fear in the post period due to unpredictability of cross-fire to be happened again. The uncertain and untimely cross-fires do not give the time of preparations to both civilians and administration. It can be happen anytime without a reason or directed with reasons like conflicting political statements, over the results of cricket match between India and Pakistan team, to infiltrate the armed militants through tunnel channels or else. But, in all cases there is significant portion of civilian population get affected generally and particularly women section across the borders. The physical situations during ceasefire violations affect overall personality and psychological aspects of women lives, the narratives on different aspects of village lives are as follows:

Physical Damage

The ceasefire violation can be counted on the basis of number of fires exchanged in the period of 24 hours, there is no proper method to count the bullets or shells (Jacob, 2019). But the firing across the borders may or may not be village targeted. The fires can start from either side and answered with same or intense intensity depending on the nature of fires. Most of the times fires

⁵ Narrated in Suchetgarh village, dated on July 15, 2021

are directed towards the village population and properties. The result is destruction of agricultural crops, animal stock and village infrastructure including schools and health centres.

In a statement a participant⁶ stated, *“Our agricultural production and cattle stock are our primary means of subsistence in the village life. Some of us are working in the private and government sector on the lower status jobs. But, major sustenance relies on our fields and animals. Women are more attached to farms and animals financially and emotionally, we have seen the animal cries in the pain and finally poison injections have been given to them to make them free from painful last breaths. It is too hard to see them dying in front.”*

There is no chance to escape in the case of sudden cross-fires as it do not provide required time to shift the place. The latest ceasefire violations to this study were happened in 2018 in which multiple injuries and 15 casualties have been recorded in total. The property damage and cattle stock cannot be counted as such. But, the number of animals died in the ceasefire violations in September 2017, was 53 for which total compensation paid was 15, 06000/- INR in the Suchetgarh sector of the study.⁷ In January 2018, the total number of cattle affected from cross-fires was 147 and 38, 47000/- INR was amount of compensation in Suchetgarh.⁸

There were 145 cases of property damage (partially damaged) that occurred during the ceasefire violations that occurred in January 2018, and the amount of compensation that was given out for each case was 5200/-INR. It was determined that the total amount of compensation that was provided to the inhabitants of Suchetgarh was 754000/- INR.

Agricultural production is the primary means of subsistence in Suchetgarh, and the majority of the village's inhabitants are landowners. However, certain segments of the population continue to work as labourers in the fields and construction sites. The borderland population is also not satisfied with the amount of grant that had been paid to them.

Displaced Life

⁶ Narrated in Suchetgarh village, dated on July 15, 2021

⁷ Data collected from Chief Executive Officer, 1st Class magistrate, Chakrohi. September 20, 2021.

⁸ *ibid.*

Women in any displaced community face variety of challenges on security and regular basis (Beyani, 2014). The ceasefire violations on IB unsecured borderland women along with the children, family and borderland society as large. No doubt, women face it along with family and community, but there are numerous economic, patriarchal, social and cultural factors, women usually face to escape physical injuries/damage in these borderlands. In a narrative, participant⁹ described the situation, *“After getting aware/alarmed of cross-fires, the families try to make the arrangements for cattle in hurry, full their feeding containers. Then, try to manage their material at home as there remains fear of theft, people start to shift themselves either to relatives places or to camps in their own vehicles. The families do not have cars or else, have to wait for the outside help, many of them stay back at villages only. What can they do, if nobody comes for help? Additionally, people have cattle stock here, how would they manage them in the situations so they hide themselves in the houses and face the cross-fires passively.”*

Another participant¹⁰ described the issues related to women/girls displacement, *“Camps are temporarily installed by administration in the schools and colleges of R.S. Pura market, without any sufficient arrangements. The open spaces are usually considered to stay collectively for all the population displaced from various border villages. Nobody knows who comes in those camps, there comes the security issue for girls/women to being harass in a way or other. Unknown boys usually roam in the camps, staring or theft cases are usually seen in the camp sites. To get save from these incidents, we try to send our daughters either to close relatives or we stay back in our homes, hiding ourselves beneath the beds.”*

The political intervention in the displacement camps is almost zero as administration is much engaged with what is happening on borders, not to the borderland lives. The health sector becomes so busy with the cases of injuries, panic and casualties. In the case of pregnant women another level of difficulties have been seen in these times. According to a doctor¹¹ approached during study, *“Most of the patients forget their previous month’s reports at villages in the pregnancy cases. We have to manage the cases at risk, the cases of pre-natal deliveries also rises*

⁹ Narrated in Krotana village, dated on July 16, 2021

¹⁰ Narrated in Krotana village, dated on July 15, 2021

¹¹ Doctor was interviewed in Community Health Centre, R.S Pura

in that time. Women do panic in the situations for the family members left behind in the villages and for the property prone to damage. And cases of polycystic diseases (PCODs) have been risen in the borderland villages due to stress and trauma.”

Post-Cross fire challenges: the period of reinstatement

The post-cross-fires period is so called period of supposed normalcy in the villages, when people return to their so called normal and regular lives. The concept of borders are initially the challenging and unstable where fear and anxiety always persists. In terms of gender dimensions, the borders are the spaces where a woman engages with regular life challengers in the intersection with border challenges. The masculine, militarised and conflicting borders along with the patriarchal family heads, social norms and political marginalisation destabilise and make the women lives loaded with challenges and voiceless.

The study explores the women participation in local, state or national politics is unwanted to patriarchal standards of the societal norms. The women Panch of the villages are just to complete the women quota, with no personal level political activities. The men of their home are working in the village panchayats actually, women are registered as local leaders only on paper to meet the requirements of political reservation. The political participation is limited to voting in the elections.

According to a participant¹², *“The sarpanch of the village have sound economic and political background always. The poor villagers cannot meet the expenditure to contest the elections. During the post-ceasefire violations period, some party-political leaders and workers of the ruling parties do visits in the village but with the cameras. In that period too, they do not listen the village difficulties properly or just surpass the local demands of safe living.*

Another participant¹³ included about the media, *“The media and reporters who visits at this place, usually come in the period of post-crossfires. During ceasefire violations, they do reporting of these villages while showing pictures of any other borders of the region. The do not*

¹² Narrated in Suchetgarh village, dated on July 22, 2021

¹³ Ibid.

cover the actual situations, damage and people's voice. They come to the village with us i.e. in post-cross fires period." The role and responsibilities of media is not satisfactory as these villagers themselves release the videos of damage and challenges on social media which mainstream media picks as suitable to their interest i.e. borders, not the voices of people, participants claimed.

The period of re-instatement comes with great challenges for the villagers, with losses like physical injuries, cattle stock, agricultural loss or housing damage. The losses are not just temporary, it adds burden on economic life and psychological conditions of villagers, especially women. As per girl participant¹⁴, *"we (girls/women) are the individuals in the family who sacrifice many things silently. From emotions to finance, we are the protecting agents of our father's so called honour, brother's lifestyle and husbands home. We do everything for our male counterparts directly or indirectly, knowing that they will never consider it."* In a statement she narrated the patriarchal side of village households, social norms and socialisation of women in the certain way. The economic and emotional impacts of the cross-fires impacts the women and girls in particular way, may be more than the general/male population of the village as they stay always close to the borders and village lives.

Analysis

Borderland women of IB serves as the embodiment of dignity within the family and community, and deviating from a conventional environment can lead to disorder within either the family or the community. The presence of gender-specificity is noteworthy, considering the observation that women, when interacting with the border, also interact with patriarchal systems (Shekhawat & Re, 2018). Furthermore, in the Hindu patriarchal society, women already face various forms of acknowledged and unacknowledged oppression. The ceasefire violations exacerbates these challenges in individual's daily concerns.

Women and girls who are more politically involved are often perceived as disobedient and lacking in social opportunities. The villagers do not explicitly categorize them as disobedient;

¹⁴ Narrated in Bidhipur village, dated on July 23, 2021

rather, it is common for them to engage their dignity in covert grumbling. The study noted that a limited number of women, specifically two or three, engage in political activities, with the exception of Panchayat members, who often have backing from their spouses. Frequently, their spouses participate in the events on behalf of their spouses.

Furthermore, none of the unmarried or younger girls in the hamlet are participating in public gatherings or political competitions. There is a pressing need for more female participation in border communities in order to amplify the voices of women and address their concerns. The issue of women experiencing challenges due to ceasefire violations and displacement necessitates attention and resolution.

On one hand, women is repressed by the traditional ideology of Patriarchy, participating in political gatherings under the guidance of authoritative male leadership and embracing it as a customary aspect of village existence. Conversely, they encounters heightened consequences of border disruptions in the absence of any vocal appeals.

The village exhibits various manifestations of social positioning of women in society, a deteriorated health sector, impacted agriculture and economy, and psychological imbalances within a fearful and traumatic borderland environment, as evidenced by the ceasefire violations and adherence to traditional societal values. The protection of the right to life and the prevention of human rights violations are inadequately addressed in border villages, resulting in inhabitants becoming vulnerable to the political and armed actions of the states. They experience the deprivation of loved ones, undergo amputations, suffer from the loss of livestock and agricultural output, see the destruction of houses and shared assets, and be forced to relocate to other locations or relief camps under unpredictable conditions for an indefinite duration.

Conclusion

In all regions of conflict worldwide, the civilian population is consistently the primary target of violence, regardless of the presence of women and children within the community. The conflict has a significant impact on both the growth and development of the area and its inhabitants. The borderlands separating India and Pakistan, particularly in the region of Jammu and Kashmir,

have played a crucial role in the historical conflict between these two prominent Asian powers. The zero-line village of Suchetgarh serves as a vivid testimony to the pervasive dread and violence that pervades the lives of its inhabitants, particularly in relation to the socio-economic-political norms imposed on women. The accounts provided by individuals regarding their distressing encounters amidst cross-border gunfire and mortar shelling shed light on the tumultuous existence within the Indo-Pak conflict regions. These individuals have no more ambitions from the governments of India and Pakistan, save from ensuring the security of their lives, their residences, and their livestock.

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