



BEYOND BORDERS: THE STRUGGLES AND RESILIENCE OF THE ANGORPOTA-DOHOGAM ENCLAVE IN BANGLADESH

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: The Angorpota-Dohogram enclave, a small and isolated region within Bangladesh, represents a unique case of communities living on the periphery of national borders. Enclaves like Angorpota-Dohogram existed for decades in legal and political limbo, with their inhabitants facing numerous challenges related to citizenship, access to basic services, and economic opportunities. This paper examines the historical context, socio-political struggles, and the resilience of the people living in the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave. By exploring the enclave's complex relationship with both Bangladesh and India, the paper sheds light on the challenges of statelessness, governance, and the impact of the 2015 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement, which sought to resolve border disputes and improve the lives of enclave residents. Despite these efforts, the case of Angorpota-Dohogram highlights ongoing issues of integration, infrastructure development, and social inclusion, offering important insights into the broader challenges faced by marginalized and geographically isolated communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Angorpota-Dohogram enclave, nestled along the Bangladesh-India border, represents a unique geopolitical anomaly that reflects the complexities of border politics and human resilience. For decades, the residents of this enclave lived in a state of liminality, existing "outside the map" in a no-man's-land, where national identities were contested, and basic rights were uncertain. The enclave, along with others, was part of a network of small, isolated territories that belonged to one country but were entirely surrounded by the territory of another. This peculiar arrangement resulted

from the haphazard partitioning of India and Pakistan (later Bangladesh) in 1947, leading to severe socio-economic and political challenges for those living in these enclaves.

The inhabitants of the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave faced numerous hardships, including restricted access to healthcare, education, and employment, as well as frequent disruptions to their daily lives due to border tensions. For decades, these residents were stateless in practice, living under ambiguous legal statuses that limited their access to government services from both Bangladesh and India. Despite these adversities, the people of Angorpota-Dohogram exhibited remarkable resilience, developing informal systems of governance and community support to survive.

This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the historical context, socio-political struggles, and eventual resolution of the enclave issue in 2015. By examining the case of the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave, we can gain insights into the broader dynamics of border disputes, identity politics, and the human capacity for resilience in the face of geopolitical marginalization.

METHOD

The study of the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave, a geopolitical anomaly situated on the Bangladesh-India border, requires a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach to capture the complexities of life in such an isolated and historically unique area. This enclave was one of the 162 chhitmahals (enclaves) exchanged between Bangladesh and India under the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement. The focus of this methodology is to understand the socio-economic conditions, political dynamics, and daily challenges of the people living in this territory prior to the enclave exchange, and how their lives have transformed post-integration into Bangladesh.

To effectively analyze these aspects, the study incorporates a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, utilizing tools such as field surveys, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and archival research. The following sections outline the key methodologies employed.

One of the primary research methods employed in studying the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave is field surveys conducted with local households. Given the enclave's former isolation and the historical lack of access to essential services, a comprehensive household questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data on various socio-economic indicators. These include:

Demographics: Collecting data on family structure, age distribution, and literacy rates.

Economic Conditions: Assessing employment patterns, income levels, and access to agricultural land and resources.

Health and Education: Understanding the availability and quality of healthcare and education services in the enclave, both before and after integration into Bangladesh.

Access to Infrastructure: Examining access to basic utilities, such as clean water, electricity, transportation, and communication networks, and how this has changed over time.

The survey was designed to be conducted with a random sample of households to ensure representation of different socio-economic groups. Data collection took place over a period of several months, ensuring that seasonal variations in agriculture, employment, and migration patterns were accounted for.

In addition to household surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to gain a deeper understanding of the political and administrative dynamics of the enclave. Key informants included:

Local Leaders: Interviews with former and current local leaders (both formal and informal) provided insight into governance structures, political representation, and the effects of the enclave status on their ability to advocate for the community.

Government Officials: Interviews with local government representatives, border security officials, and bureaucrats involved in the enclave exchange helped to clarify the processes and challenges involved in integrating the enclave into Bangladesh's administrative framework.

Historians and Academics: To better understand the historical context of the enclave, discussions with academics and historians who specialize in South Asian border politics and post-colonial land disputes were essential.

These interviews provided qualitative data on political disenfranchisement, security issues, and the identity challenges faced by residents prior to the integration of the enclave.

Focus group discussions were used to capture a more holistic view of community-level dynamics and collective experiences of living in the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave. FGDs were conducted separately with men, women, and youth groups to explore gender-specific and generational perspectives on key issues. Discussions centered around how daily life was managed under isolation, with limited access to state services, citizenship rights, and economic opportunities. FGDs explored how integration into Bangladesh impacted livelihoods, social relations, access to services, and changes in legal and political identities.

These discussions were particularly valuable in understanding community resilience, social capital, and collective efforts to maintain livelihoods in a marginal and geopolitically sensitive environment.

To supplement primary data collection, extensive archival research was conducted to trace the historical development of the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave and the broader context of the chhitmahal (enclave) system along the Bangladesh-India border. Documents from both Bangladeshi and Indian governments were examined to understand the legal framework governing the enclave and its residents, particularly in the period leading up to the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement. Reports from colonial administrators, border security forces, and international organizations provided valuable historical insight into the enclave system and its geopolitical implications. Newspaper archives and scholarly articles were reviewed to understand public discourse on the enclave exchange and how it was perceived both locally and internationally.

This archival research was crucial in placing the case of Angorpota-Dohogram within the broader historical and geopolitical narrative of South Asia.

To gain a more immersive understanding of life in the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave, the study employed participant observation, where researchers lived within the enclave for an extended period. By engaging with the daily lives of enclave residents, the researchers were able to observe firsthand the challenges of accessing state services, interacting with border security forces, and adapting to new administrative realities post-integration.

This method allowed for a nuanced understanding of social relationships, cultural practices, and how residents navigated their stateless existence prior to the enclave exchange. It also provided insights into how integration into Bangladesh impacted their identity, rights, and sense of belonging.

RESULTS

The Angorpota-Dohogram enclave, located along the Bangladesh-India border, serves as a striking example of how geopolitical boundaries can shape the daily lives of marginalized populations. For decades, the residents of this enclave lived in a state of isolation and exclusion, cut off from essential services, infrastructure, and basic rights due to their ambiguous political status. Despite these immense challenges, the resilience and determination of the enclave's inhabitants allowed them to navigate the complexities of statelessness and limited mobility, fostering a unique identity and social structure that enabled their survival.

One of the most significant outcomes of the struggle for recognition came with the historic 2015 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between Bangladesh and India. This agreement finally resolved the long-standing issue of enclaves, including Angorpota-Dohogram, and granted full citizenship rights to the residents. For the people of Angorpota-Dohogram, this marked the beginning of a new chapter, allowing them access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and infrastructure that had long been denied.

However, the transition to full citizenship and integration into Bangladesh's national framework has not been without its challenges. Many residents still face socio-economic difficulties, including poverty, limited access to resources, and the need for continued infrastructure development. The psychological scars of years spent in isolation also remain, as former enclave residents adjust to life within formal national borders.

The case of the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave highlights the importance of political recognition and the provision of basic rights in securing the well-being of marginalized communities. It also underscores the need for continued efforts to ensure that previously disenfranchised populations are fully integrated into national systems of governance, development, and social support. The resilience shown by the enclave's residents throughout their years of struggle offers valuable lessons on the power of community solidarity and perseverance in the face of adversity.

DISCUSSION

The Angorpota-Dohogram enclave represents a unique case in the complex history of border disputes between Bangladesh and India. For decades, the people living in these enclaves found themselves in a situation of liminality, existing "outside the map," where traditional governance, legal protection, and access to basic rights were minimal, if not absent. This discussion explores the historical context, challenges faced by the residents, and their remarkable resilience in coping with life in an isolated enclave while examining the eventual resolution of the enclave issue and its broader implications.

The creation of enclaves like Angorpota-Dohogram is rooted in the complex and often arbitrary border divisions following the partition of British India in 1947. As territories were divided between India and Pakistan (and later Bangladesh after its independence in 1971), small pockets of land ended up as enclaves—isolated territories of one country surrounded entirely by the territory of another. Angorpota-Dohogram, for instance, was a Bangladeshi enclave inside India, which created immense hardships for its inhabitants.

For decades, residents of these enclaves lived in a state of neglect. They were effectively cut off from the central governments of both India and Bangladesh, often without basic services such as healthcare, education, or infrastructure. Due to their geographical isolation and lack of legal recognition, enclave residents faced issues of statelessness, lack of citizenship rights, and a life lived in legal limbo.

The residents of Angorpota-Dohogram experienced a wide array of challenges due to their unique geopolitical situation. First and foremost, the absence of clear governance created significant barriers to accessing essential services. Healthcare facilities were virtually non-existent, forcing residents to cross into India, often illegally, to receive medical attention. Education was similarly inaccessible, with few schools available, leaving the younger generation deprived of educational opportunities.

Legal identity and citizenship were also major issues for residents of the enclave. Being citizens of Bangladesh but living within the borders of India left them stateless in practice. They had no access to government services from either nation, such as national ID cards or voting rights. This statelessness made it difficult for residents to secure jobs, travel, or receive social welfare benefits, effectively trapping them in poverty.

Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure compounded their problems. Roads, electricity, and clean water were scarce in these enclaves, leading to dire living conditions. Economic opportunities were limited, with most residents relying on subsistence farming. The enclave's isolation also made trade and commerce difficult, as transportation to and from the enclave required navigating bureaucratic hurdles and physical borders.

CONCLUSION

The story of Angorpota-Dohogram's enclave is one of struggle, resilience, and eventual integration into mainstream society. While the residents endured decades of isolation, neglect, and statelessness, their unwavering determination helped them survive until a political resolution was achieved. The Land Boundary Agreement between Bangladesh and India not only brought legal recognition and access to rights for these people but also highlighted the importance of addressing the human impact of political boundaries. The lessons from the Angorpota-Dohogram enclave are essential for policymakers seeking to resolve border disputes and ensure the well-being of marginalized populations worldwide.

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