Border Dynamics and Socio-Economic Transformations of the Garo Ethnic Community in the Northeast Region of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The border dividing the Indian subcontinent has profoundly affected ethnic communities, notably the Garos, a prominent indigenous group split between Northeast India and Bangladesh. Historically, events such as British administrative decisions and the Bangladesh independence war shaped their geographical positioning and identity. This research delves into the intricate interplay between border dynamics and socio-economic shifts within the Garo community of the Northeast border region. Utilizing Social Capital Theory as a framework, the study examines the Garos' historical trajectory, socio-cultural practices, and economic engagements by highlighting the influence of borderland on these. Through primary and secondary source analysis, including fieldwork and archival data, this research underscores the experiences of the Garo community, offering insights into border dynamics and their socio-economic ramifications in the Northeast Region of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Garo, Border, Socio-Economic, Social Capital Theory

Introduction

Borders are defined as the lines dividing distinct political, social, or legal territories that are arguably the most ubiquitous features within the field of political geography (Diener & Hagen, 2012). The border of the Indian subcontinent is highly dynamic in terms of political geography. It has historically divided numerous ethnic communities in this region due to constant changes over time. Thus, South Asia's longest international boundary is the 4,096 kilometers of India-Bangladesh –in a zone that cuts across the state of Meghalaya in Northeast India and Bangladesh's Mymensingh district (Sur, 2019). As a result, the traditional indigenous communities residing in Northeast India found themselves divided between two parts due to the creation of a new international border. The Garos, a group of approximately 100,000 people in Bangladesh, is considered one of the country's 54 ethnic minorities who do not identify as Muslim or Bengali and are often recognized as an indigenous community known as Mandi, meaning 'human being', among themselves, while referred to as Garos by society and the international community (Chandra et al., 2013). prominent indigenous communities in Bangladesh and the largest indigenous group in Bangladesh primarily residing in the northeastern region of Bangladesh, with the highest presence in Mymensingh, Netrokona, Tangail, Gazipur, Sherpur, Jamalpur, and Sylhet Districts (Muhammed et al., 2011). In India, Garo people live in Meghalaya in the Northeast area which is very close to the Bangladesh-India border area of Netrokona, Mymensingh. The present geographical positioning in these regions, along with India, gives rise to a distinction between the lowlands and the highland region of Garos. The lowlands relocated to the districts of Mymensingh in Bangladesh (previously known as

East Pakistan), while the Garo hills remained in Meghalaya; three noteworthy events in the 20th century greatly impacted the low-land Garos - firstly, the British administrative acknowledgment of Mymensingh district in 1964 played a crucial role in the establishment of a distinct Garo homeland in Bengal, secondly, the mass migration of Garos across the international border into the Indian hills in 1964, and finally, the Bangladesh independence war in 1971. (Bal, 2007). India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have implemented various measures at the international border to address the process of detachment, resulting in distinct impacts on local self-identification and self-assertion among borderland ethnic communities, albeit yielding similar outcomes. (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Thus, Garos have been seen as an ethnic community in the northeastern part of Bangladesh. The influence of borders on the advancement of ethnographic understanding, tracing its evolution and formation throughout history, while also examining the portrayal of borderlands and its residents from an ethnographic perspective, thereby illuminating the intricate relationship between borders and the knowledge they generate (Maaker, 2022). Due to this knowledge generation on ethnic relationships, the transfer of highly cherished household items, as well as the wider range of political, religious, and gender-related connections that revolved around them, serve as proof of how the border's role and the passage of time have played a crucial part in managing diversity and potential threat in the northeastern borderlands bypassing the national security of states (Sur, 2019). In the contemporary context of globalization in Bangladesh, the younger members of the Garo indigenous community recognize the significance of mobility, encompassing transnational connectivity, spatial dynamics, societal interactions, and economic progress, as fundamental aspects of their everyday experiences and desired future and this insight allows us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical and current processes of social evolution undergone by indigenous communities in Bangladesh, thereby challenging the prevalent notion that these tribal or indigenous groups are fixed in both time and space (Raitapuro & Bal, 2016). Hence, the Garos people, residing in the northeastern region of Bangladesh, possess the remarkable capability to expand their reach beyond their state's boundaries, evident in their immediate proximity to Meghalaya, an Indian province.

This research aims to extensively explore the complex interaction between border dynamics and socio-economic changes within the Garo community residing in the Northeast border region of Bangladesh and India. By analyzing the historical progress, socio-cultural customs, and economic involvements of the Garos, this study endeavors to unravel the intricate network of connections based on Social Capital Theory that shaped their lives in the borderlands. Through a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, including fieldwork, and archival records, this study aspires to contribute to borderland studies, indigenous communities, and socio-economic transformations in the context of Bangladesh. By foregrounding the experiences and narratives of the Garo community, this research aims to offer valuable insights into the border dynamics and their implications on the socio-economic conditions of Garos communities in the Northeast Region.

Theoretical Framework

The social capital theory in borderland encompasses various aspects, as it is characterized by its distinct factors and interconnected with other processes. Unlike being confined to individuals or physical products, it pertains to the relational property of individuals and can be exemplified through networks, norms, and shared experiences that facilitate collective action (DiClemente et al., 2009). Putnam and Goss established the concept of social capital theory in the 1990s, viewing it as a tool for group action, encompassing the ability to access social networks, survive, and propose, even amidst disagreements about its characteristics and ownership, while also reflecting a community's capacity for involvement, collaboration, and interaction. (Putnam & Goss, 1995). More broadly, the main focus of the social capital theory is centered on social relationships and elements of social capital theory are social networks, norms and reciprocity, and generalized trust. In this sphere, networks and associations interlink valuable assets, wherein social capital generates advantageous results for all involved parties, distinguished by the existence of reciprocal norms and trust (Bourdieu, 1993; Coleman, 1988). In the realm of communication, individuals within a group or the collective group itself can acquire plentiful resources and work together towards a shared objective. In essence, this theory of reciprocation emphasizes that the three fundamental components for achieving mutual progress are reciprocity, relational ties, and information. The social capital theory places great emphasis on fostering social connections, relationships, and networks within a community, illustrating how these aspects can be effectively utilized in different facets of advancement, such as economic development and the overall well-being of society as a whole. Social capital is a multifaceted construct comprising of three distinct categories: Bonding, Linking, and Bridging (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Bonding denotes strong interpersonal connections within intimate networks such as friends and family, ensuring the smooth functioning of day-to-day activities, whereas linking pertains to social relations based on the authority that guarantees power, positions, and resources, and lastly, Bridging refers to the ability to bridge and intersect diverse networks, facilitating the accessibility of resources across various social connections.

The Garo community, an indigenous group residing in the border region of Bangladesh and India, benefits from a well-established network that facilitates their access to various resources. In this particular context, the concept of social capital plays a crucial role in understanding and analyzing how the border influences the

socioeconomic conditions of the Garo people. Moreover, it allows us to explore the impact of their social network across the border on their access to resources, support systems, and information. This examination further investigates how the border influences their social interactions, trade relations, and cultural affinity on both sides of the Garo community (Bangladesh and India). In essence, the theory of social capital provides a profound perspective through which we can comprehend the interconnectedness of the Garo community's social and economic conditions, as well as the influence of the dynamic role of the border on their everyday life and overall social well-being.

Ancestorial Background of the Garo Ethnic Community in the Northeastern part of Bangladesh

As a consequence of the 1947 partition, Meghalaya's local regions abruptly transformed into a borderland, resulting in numerous tribals losing their cultivated lands in the flatlands and Bengalis being unable to access the hills, thereby severing previously established ties between the tribes of Meghalaya and the Bengalis residing in East Pakistan/Bangladesh, ultimately accentuating Meghalaya's isolation as a borderland (Majaw, 2021). The Garo ethnic group is found mainly in the Indian provinces of Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, and neighboring areas of the Indian subcontinent (Banna, 2022). Bangladesh, as a neighboring country, is home to a considerable Garo population primarily originating from the northeastern regions of India (Jengcham, 1994). Their contemporary group identities are only relatively recent outcomes of colonial and post-colonial processes of state-making in the region instead of remnants from ancient times. The Garos residing in the Garo Hills and surrounding lowland regions have never formed a cohesive and self-defined community (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Currently, Garos from Bangladesh strongly identifies themselves as Garos within the country of Bangladesh (Bal, 2007). In this region, they made a strong ethnic identity with cultural richness (Bal, 2007). However,it is argued that the name of Garo is given by Bangali and Europeans and they want to identify as Achie (mountaineer) or Achik, (Playfair, 1909). Based on habitat, the Garos of Bangladesh can be categorized into four groups. The vast majority lives in the extreme northern part of Bangladesh which is known as Greater Mymensingh, adjacent to the Indian state of Meghalaya, the second group almost 15% lives in the Madhupur forest and the third group is those who moved to the country after the 1947 partitions and live in the northeastern part of Bangladesh bordering the Kashi Hills of India (Bal, 2007). The fourth and fast-growing part of Garos relocated to larger towns and cities including Mymensingh, Dhaka, and Chittagong (Bal, 2007). In the present day, their names reflect their differences in the Garo Hills their name is Achik (hill person) low lands Garos are named as Mandi (meaning Person or Human being) (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). This is the result of the 1947 partition created an international border that splits Garo into two nations. The vast majority of Garos from the Garo Hills and adjacent plain area of Assam are now citizens of India and the Low land of Garos become a tiny minority in a Muslim-dominated current Bangladesh (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). In 1947 international border establishment separated the hill Garos of India from the lowland Garos of Bangladesh. Significantly restricted cross-border movement and had varying effects on the Garo national ethnic and transnational identities. Finally, India Bangladesh boundary not only separates nation-states but also affects their agriculture system, cross-border trade system, etc. (Raitapuro & Bal, 2016). But nowadays the border emphasizes reciprocity's fundamental role in the Garos, collective life, kinship, and spirituality (Sur, 2019). However, as both parts of the India-Bangladesh border near the Northern part of Mymensingh called the Bijoypur border where Garo people live, still share common values, norms, and cultural ties connected through networking and depend on each other through various cross-border activities such as cross-border trade, festivals, culture.

Social Conditions of Garo People Shaped by Border

The native inhabitants of Bangladesh possess distinctive social practices, dialects, and customs. Being part of the indigenous community, the Garo people have nurtured their traditional way of life and culture for centuries, adding value to the region's traditions. The Garo population is divided into two subgroups, namely Achik (Garo residing in hilly regions) and Mandi (Garo residing in lowlands), who reside on both sides of the Bangladesh-India border. The Garo communities on both sides of the border share a long-standing traditional culture, which is almost identical (Muhammed et al., 2011). They exhibit robust bonds of kinship, emotions, and shared experiences that go beyond biological ties. Their sense of affinity and collective cultural existence are deeply intertwined.

Language and Traditional Cultural Ties

The Garo people have their own language but nowadays they use it when they speak in their own community. Additionally, they can speak Bangla fluently and communicate with Bengali people. They utilize it to effortlessly cultivate harmonious relationships with individuals of Bengali origin, ensuring the avoidance of any potential impediments or difficulties (Sangma, 1998). The term 'Garo Vasa' (Garo Language) has been used by the Garo people who reside near the Garo hills (Banna, 2022). The Garo language is referred to as Achik Katha (Ahmed, 2010). The Achik written pattern was earlier identified in Asam. However, In Bangladesh, the

phonetic structure is different from the old Achik language, and the Garos of Bangladesh use the local dialect (Banna, 2022). Though the dialect of Bengali Garos different from Indian Garos, Bengali Garos are able to understand and use those dialects of Indian Garos.

A teenage girl attending high school confidently claimed her ability to speak Hindi, Bangla, and a language unique to her community called A-chik. It is worth mentioning that the dialects spoken by the Garo people in Bangladesh differ from those spoken by the Garo people in India. Interestingly, Bengali Garos utilize both Bangla and Achik languages, even going as far as to converse in the Indian Garo dialect. This is primarily done to facilitate trade with the Garos residing in Meghalaya, India. By adopting the Indian dialect, they are able to smoothen the communication process with their Indian counterparts. An older Garo gentleman, aged fifty, emphasized the deep-rooted connections shared between these two groups and how they have fostered a strong network. Consequently, they have started embracing a blend of cultural influences, resulting in the emergence and adoption of mixed cultures. But for those who live very close to the border, their language is more like Indian Garo's even their dress-up is also like Indian Garo. On the other hand, who live a little far from the border their language and dress-up were highly influenced by Bengali people. Sister of Ranikhong church and leader of the Garo community (Christian community) added that cultural integration is highly visible because of their affinity, strong networking, reciprocity, and shared experiences, and common cultural ties. According to a retired headteacher of Ranikhong Govt primary school, she lived her entire 59 years of life near the border area. She was even a refugee and lived in Assam during the liberation war period of Bangladesh. After the end of the war, she came back to Bangladesh in her own land. She believes that at people who live in the border area of Bijoypur or the people who live in Meghalaya both are Garo. Though belonging to different nationalities, their strong ethnic identity connects them together. They also have relatives at both parts of the border, they cross the border to meet their relatives, to attend wedding ceremonies, religious ceremonies, and cultural programs (Sikder & Sarkar, 2005). Not only cross-border trade or free trading but also their regular movements across the border area is prevalent.

A Garo student from North-South University whose hometown at Birishiri, Bijoypur said that he likes Meghalaya's Garo song. He follows the cultural activities of the Garo people who live in Meghalaya or Garo Hills. He loves their songs especially Achik songs which are written in their own language. Since 2008, Bangladeshi dancers have been participating annually in the Hundred Drums Wangala Festival in India, which has been conducted in Asanang (West Garo Hills) since 1976 (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). The Garo of India also come to Bangladesh to participate in different cultural programs. Both parts of Garo are connected with their similar traditional norms, culture, and values.

Religion and Festivals

Religion has a deep impact in the daily lives of people. Though the Garos have their own religious beliefs the majority of them have embraced Christianity (Muhammed et al., 2011). Sangsarek is the traditional religion of the Garo people (Jalil et al., 2012). The Garos were animists around a century ago. They practiced the religion named Sangsarek, believing that this spirituality helped them to converse resources and protect them from natural disasters (Dey & Sultana, 2009). During the British Era, the presence of Christian missionaries led to substantial numbers of Garos abandoning their traditional religion and embracing Christianity (Banna, 2022). Currently, The Garo hill region is predominantly inhabited by Christians, however, this transformation occurred especially in the 1970s to 1980s (Makker, 2013). Due to the process of globalization, various NGOs, and Christian missionaries started working in the Garo community. As a result, the Garo people were converted from Sangsarek to Christianity. From the mid-1920s century, the process of converting began. In the 1990s, Catholicism increased to 10,000 from 2500 in 1959 (Khaleque, 1992). As the majority converted from Sangsarek to Christianity, their religious rituals also started to change.

It is obvious that, celebration changes with the change of religion. Currently, the large majority of Garos residing on both sides of the border (Bangladesh-India) are identified as Christians (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Now, both sides of Garo celebrate Christmas, Easter Sunday, and New Year together. Twenty-four-year-old student of North-South University said that at Christmas every year he visits his hometown Birishiri, Bijoypur, and joins the Christmas program at Church. His relatives come from India crossing the international border and joining his family. He also visits his relatives at Christmas in Meghalaya. During the Christmas period, Garos from India- Bangladesh openly cross the border. Sister of Ranikhong Church added that the Christmas Eve celebration represents deep cultural and religious ties between both Countries Garo. The NSU student also added that in Meghalaya Garo people celebrate Christmas in their homes individually but in Bangladesh, it is celebrated centrally by the Church and creates a scope to get together for family and friends from both sides of the border. For this reason, Indian Garos prefer to join Bangladeshi celebrations during this holy period.

Garos from Bangladesh created a Facebook group whose goal was to create an ultimate network from both countries Bangladesh and India fill the gap between them and establish cooperation between Bangladeshi Garo (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). In recent times Garos from both side of the border keep connecting themselves by using other social media platforms. Aside from the new virtual spaces provided by the internet, several religious

and cultural activities have provided platforms for deliberately organized exchanges and connections. In Bangladesh, the Garo Baptist Convention has annual religious gatherings known as the "Boro Sova" (large conference). It attracts a few visitors from India as well. The most visible and certainly the largest event of 2010 was the centennial commemoration of Catholic evangelization in Mymensingh Diocese Shotoborsho jubilee held in Ranikhong, Mymensingh which put Garos from India and Bangladesh together. Similarly, on several occasions, security guards on both sides permitted Indian Garos to cross the border. Many Garos in India cross the border to take part in festivals and to meet their friends and family from Bangladesh (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Even in traditional programs like Wangala (harvest ceremony) in their search for traditional authenticity, The Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples forum invites people from West Garo Hills (India) of Sadolpara village who follow Sangsarek (non-Christian) to perform in cultural presentations (Bal & Chambugong, 2014). Their strong traditional and cultural similarities, religious rituals, and festivals strengthen their transnational identities which ties them together even on two different sides of the border.

Economic Conditions of Garo People Shaped by Border

Border defines the boundaries of a nation-state which is one of the best ways for trading among neighboring states. But sometimes it goes beyond the control of the state. On the one hand, the states and governments are worried about keeping their population on the border and security issues, on the other hand, both people and government are worried about their livelihoods and economic conditions. Cross-border activities are common in the borderland (Sikder & Sarkar, 2005). The idea of *lebensarum* (where the limitations of geographical space, people have a right to spill over the international borders and occupy nearby vacant spaces) is an influential cause of cross-border trade (Rather, 2013). Various types of formal and informal trade occur in the borderland area. Varieties of commodities brought into Bangladesh from India, for example, powdered milk, sharees, cosmetics, many objects of daily uses such as spoons, jugs, various objects in steel even electronics products (Sikder & Sarkar, 2005). In reality, the list will go on. The most dangerous commodities brought into Bangladesh from India are different types of drugs including phenyl, alcohol, beer, etc. (Sikder & Sarkar, 2005). As the Garo people reside near the Bangladesh-India border, these cross-border trades and drug trafficking impact immensely on the economic condition of the Garos.

Cross Border Trade

It is not surprising that the people near the border are involved in both formal and informal trade in order to improve their financial conditions. It occurs between people who live close to borderland but are separated by an international border (Sikder & Sarkar, 2005). Similarly, as the Bijoypur border area is near the hill and almost all people of the Garo community do not have their own land, their scope of agriculture is very limited and there is a low scope of job opportunities. As a result, trade is the primary source of income for the Garo people near the border. However, according to the residents of the research area, the opportunity for formal trade is insufficient for them. Hence, they can depend nothing but on informal trade.

The state views cross-border informal trade as a danger but people of the borderland do it for the sake of their financial conditions. This informal trade is the main source of their income. A twenty-two-year-old boy who is involved in cross-border trade claimed that he was involved in this risky job due to unemployment.

According to an old man who is fifty-eight years old and currently lives in the village Ranikhong (the research area), they do not have any job and due to the culture of matrilineal pattern of the society owning land is very difficult for them. There are no job opportunities in the village and cross-border trade is the only way of their income. This informal trade depends on the season. According to him, in recent times they collect sugar from India's market which is called Baghmara Bazar carried by their own cross the border and sell it to the Bangladeshi market Komlabari Bazar.

Another young boy added that they usually carry Indian soap, shampoo, perfume, and various types of cosmetics from India and sell them in the local market of Bangladesh. Garo people live on both sides of the Bangladesh-India border and they share a common culture and almost the same language. So, this makes their trade easier gives access them easily in India's market, and creates a strong network system. Though this trade is illegal, they think it is the only way to live their life. However, they have changed the supply of the product according to the demand of the Bangladeshi market. In winter, they sell blankets at a very cheap price. A few years back when Bangladesh faced the onion crisis, they sold Indian onions in the local market of Bangladesh. Not only do Bangladeshi Garos cross the border, but Indian Garos also cross the border and enter the local market of Bangladesh and sell their goods like vegetables, sugar, onion, etc.

According to the sister of Ranikhong Church, most of the people who live in the village are Garo and almost all of them are illiterate and poor. People in this area use risky routes to cross the border most of the time to hide from BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh) or BSF (Border Security Force). Due to cultural ties and genealogical similarities, they look the same and it is difficult to identify who are Bangali Garos or Mandi (lowland Garos called them Mandi) or who are Indian Garo or Achik (who live in the hill) (Das et al., 2005). As a result, it is almost impossible to differentiate them.

Garos of the research area from Bangladesh are very poor. So, most of them work as day laborers. A forty-two-year-old man who works as an office secretary at Ranikhong Govt. primary school added that the capital of cross-border business comes from the rich or high-class people who live in the village. He also said that during the period of crossing the border usually they keep maintaining their connection to the other side of Garos from India. Through continuous networking, they inform each other about suitable places or times. To access the resources, their networking with Indian Garo provides them accessibility and helps to achieve their common goals. Garos of Bangladesh usually cross the border with a group. But sometimes poor Garos do not take the whole responsibility of trade by themselves and carry a small amount of product such as 4-5 kg of sugar or spices or cosmetics and sell it local market. As they always have alternative routes to cross the border, they have to hike the hill and cross the river. For that, carrying big amounts of product is impossible. According to thirty-two-year-old Garo women, as Garo follows the matrilineal pattern of society, they are always involved in the process of earning money. So, mainly Garo women are involved in cross-border jobs. A large number of women usually cross the border daily than men, carrying Indian products in their bucket which is traditionally and locally known as 'Thurum', and come back to Bangladesh before evening. If one visits in Bijoypur border in the evening one can able to see Garo women who are returning from the Garo hill of India. Usually, if they are caught by BGB or BSF they do not check their bucket. For this reason, cross-border business is easier for Garo women. Apart from this, their understanding with BGB and BSF is also good. As both sides people are Gar o, they consider their cross-border activities not as threat. But sometimes due to countries' internal issues, border guards of both countries become stricter. If the situation changes after crossing the border, Garos from the other side informs that to another group, and sometimes they have to stay near the house of the border area so as not to be caught. They maintained the whole process by a deep connection between them.

Nonetheless, people not only carry Indian products to Bangladesh but also, take Bangladeshi products to India, especially the women in Thurum. A woman aged thirty-four said that it is easier for women than the man to carry out the products to India. The products include soap, lentils, vegetables, and other day-to-day products.

Drug Trafficking

Though drug trafficking is a major issue in border areas, the Garos are rarely involved in it. The drug trade creates jobs and revenue for people in countries' production and transit where alternative elicit economic activity is unavailable. However, in the long run, it is dangerous for a country. Even the local population becomes dependent on such businesses (Aggarwal, 2010). A man who is forty-eight said that they are not interested in drug trafficking as it might create a huge problem in the long run. The BGB might get stricter and their route of trading might get sealed permanently. But he also said that there are only a few people who are involved in this. According to our respondent, the scenario of night is different in the border area of Bijoypur. A small number of drugs is brought into Bangladesh from India. But he also added the Garos are not involved in this risky drug trafficking voluntarily. Usually, drug dealers are outsiders and they use the route for their benefit. They use the helplessness of the poor Garos to use them in this work. In this context sister of Ranikhong Church said that by nature Garo people are not critical so outsiders or syndicates try to use their innocence.

Employment of Garos

After the independence of Bangladesh, the government identified that the numerically and politically dominant ethnolinguistic community of Bengalis was endorsed as the model for the nation, and ethnic minorities, on the other hand, 'were expected to assimilate themselves within the "mainstream"' (Mohsin, 2002). But there are many differences in the way of living and earnings of these ethnic minorities. Hence, the Garos community residing in the northeastern border area of Bangladesh skillfully sustain their way of life through various means, including fishing, agriculture, and handicrafts, which are closely tied to their distinct position in the borderland. By shedding light on the historical and ethnographic truths within border regions, it becomes evident that individuals and their cultures are not hindered or confined by borders. Instead, borders emerge as potent tools wielded by governing elites and other influential entities, extending far beyond mere control over taxation, land, and resources. Additionally, borders serve to impose and mold an idealized sense of unity within segregated ethnic communities (Bal and Siraj, 2022). Through this notion there have Kinship ties and cross-border marriages persisted, in Domachi as well as in some towns of the northeast region of Bangladesh (Sur, 2012). It has facilitated the Garos of the northeast region of Bangladesh as crossing subsistence traders, daily wage workers, and coal miners who travel from Bangladesh to Domachi, Northeast India, though there are some gender dimensions (Sur, 2012). The Garo women traders from Bangladesh, who gather at the Domachi market, exude a timeless essence in their trans-border trading endeavors: they assert that this trade has persevered through countless generations. The borderlands of Meghalaya and Bangladesh have been shaped by long-standing traditions of migration and trade, showcasing the intricate link between the hills, foothills, and plains in a single sentence (Ludden, 2003) However, like Bangladeshi Garos, Indian Garos frequently travel to Bangladesh for shopping and maintaining kinship ties (Majaw, 2021).In the borderland region of Northeast India and Bangladesh, a fascinating interplay between ordinary Garo villagers and heavily

armed state troops has given rise to webs of exchange and conviviality. This unique dynamic has not only fostered social and economic opportunities but also addressed the risks of disparities and discrimination. By examining the spatial and political implications of this interaction, we can understand the transformative potentials that have emerged while navigating the challenges posed by difference and inequality (Sur, 2019) As a result of poverty, numerous children face barriers in pursuing education, either unable to attend a school or unable to complete their studies. The grim reality was shared by a teenage girl in high school, who revealed that many of her friends had to drop out of school due to poverty and resorted to seeking employment across borders. Providing further insight, a thirty-two-year-old school teacher remarked that the ease of engaging in cross-border activities in this region leads many students to partake in these risky jobs to support their families. This dire situation often compels young individuals like Garo to illegally cross the border and engage in fraudulent activities, such as creating counterfeit ID cards in India's coal stations, solely to earn money for relocation to their preferred cities for educational pursuits (Raitapuro & Bal, 2016). Therefore, the Garos ensure their sustenance by engaging in both internal and external endeavors, establishing robust connections with neighboring ethnic communities in contiguous the border region in India.

Border Haat

Border haats, which are local markets set up on the borders of India and Bangladesh, have been established to promote bilateral trade and economic interaction between the people living on both sides of the border. Border haats have a significant impact on the rural economy of borderland regions, serving not only as marketplaces but also as social spaces that foster connections and reunions with distant inhabitants. The establishment of these haats along the India-Bangladesh border has proven to be a blessing for the inhabitants of remote border areas, enhancing their local communities' well-being (Verma, 2023). Garos are the people northeast region of Bangladesh who can make the blessing-sanctioned border haats in Bhulyapara, Ghoshgaon, Dhobaura, and Mymensingh which is near the Birishiri, Bijoypur of Netrokkona (Cuts International Consumer Unity and Trust Society, 2021). On this border, they can sell their handicrafts and vegetables, poultry products, and ceramics and buy their necessary commodities like Cosmetics, shoes, biscuits, soaps, hair oil, orange, cumin, and tea (Cuts International Consumer Unity and Trust Society, 2021). The haat can bring about enhancements in the quality of life for the people residing in isolated regions by increasing their levels of income and providing access to affordable goods. Moreover, they help in reducing the number of individuals leaving these areas in search of better opportunities. Beyond economic benefits, border haats also promote cultural and social exchange between people from different regions and backgrounds. This can foster mutual understanding and cooperation, creating a conducive environment for economic activities and benefiting the earnings of border people in the long run.

Conclusion

Sometimes mistrust or tensions occurred in the borderland for a short period but in the long term, both sides (Bangladesh-India) of the Garo people are privileged by the border. Seemingly, border plays a pivotal role in shaping the lives of people residing near the area. So, the socio-economic conditions of Garos of Bangladesh who reside near the border in Northeast region of Bangladesh, are heavily influenced by the border. This paper explored that the Garos of India and Bangladesh are divided by the international border, but their affinity, kinship, collective development goal, and mutual cooperative mentality, strong networking help them to gain economic development and access resources along with social change. From the point of view of interviewers, their deep connection and cultural ties keep alive the relation between both sides of the Garo people. All of our interviewers believe that their social conditions, scarcity of resources, strong networking, and cultural unities helped them to develop their social and economic conditions through the border. Perhaps only a few of them have faced a little threat but compared to their advantages, their challenges are less. In a nutshell, the border is not a curse but a blessing for the Garo people of Bangladesh.

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