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The Paradox of Border Security Forces: A Case Study on the Garo Hills-Mymensingh Border after the Partition of 1947

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Abstract:

The Partition of 1947 was a defining moment in the history of South East Asia. Communities were constituted, de-constituted and re-constituted. Two independent nations' viz. India and Pakistan were born. However, there was a cause for joy at the end of Colonialism but the celebration merged with tragic partition which created manifold insecurities especially for the general masses from the border areas. The newly created international border sliced the traditional tribal settlements in North East India dividing them in between two different countries. The redefined borders touched the boundary of North-Eastern part of India on the one side and East-Pakistan on the other. For the people living in the Garo Hills the newly created boundaries came as a strake amongst their own bodies as it cut the hill areas from the plains. The Garo Hills remained to be in Assam while the plains went to the districts of Mymensingh of East-Pakistan. In that time of socio-political chaos and insecurities just after the partition, the Border Security Forces were the sole means of maintaining law and order on the both side of the borders. However, drawing on a variety of primary data on the Garo Hills-Mymansingh border for the year 1951-1954, this study will show an ambiguous and paradoxical picture of the Border Security Forces of India and East Pakistan, instead of its usual generalize notion of security and protection. The study of borders has experienced a renaissance in various disciplines, but the concept of vernacular security in the context of borders has been neglected. The study will show that there is a mismatch in border politics: as security is aimed at, however insecurity is generated.

Key Words: Partiition, Garo Hills, Tribals, Border Security Forces.

Partition through the Garo Hills: The North-East frontier may seem an unlikely site in which to explore the legacy of Partition. For a 96% Muslim majority province which became a part of Pakistan in 1947, it seems a less problematic issue compared to other provinces where the proportion of Muslims and Hindus was not this straightforward. Nor was it like East Pakistan which the Muslim League bargained for and made part of East Pakistan despite it being separated from its western half by the expense of India.¹ The June

3rd 1947 announcement of His Majesty's Government announced that, "In accordance to the provision of Para 5 to 8 of the statement of HMG dated 3rd June 1947 it has been decided that the provinces of Bengal and Punjab shall be partitioned. There should be two Boundary Commissions. These were instructed to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of Bengal on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims."² Once the Commission decided the fate of Bengal it was the turn of other areas. The partition was to divide the Hindu and Muslim areas who demanded separation as they constituted two different nations. Accordingly, Bengal and Punjab which had Muslim majority areas were partitioned into two nations. The entire North Western Frontier Province had gone to Pakistan without any division.³ As far as North Eastern India which comprises of Assam and two princely states of Manipur and Tripura there was no question of any transfer of land as there was no Hindu Muslim issues here. In fact, tribal areas of Assam were overwhelmingly Christian; Chittagong Hill Tract was overwhelmingly Buddhist. It left only the district of Sylhet which was a district of Assam but had overwhelmingly Bengali speaking population. Sylhet came under the Redcliff Commission because it was originally a Bengal district transferred to Assam in 1874 and was demanded by the Muslim League in its proposed state of Pakistan.⁴ Partition and the transfer of Sylhet had huge ramifications on the surrounding areas. The district of Sylhet in Assam had a separate referendum called "Sylhet Referendum" and was partitioned.⁵ Except of those areas the boundaries of Assam were not to be affected. But the Garo inhabited the border areas of Mymensingh and Rangpur (in Bengal) and the Khasi settlement in Sylhet went to Pakistan.⁶ Though the people of Khasi, Jaintiya and Garo Hills were mostly Christian tribals and were no way to be affected by partition, they also bore the brunt of partition on the ground that they were contiguous to Sylhet.⁷ Although it was acknowledged by the Redcliff Commission that the population of these hill areas were no way going to be affected but the demarcation of the boundary of Sylhet took away substantial territory and population of these hills to the proposed state of Pakistan.⁸ The boundary line partitioning the Garo habitat passed through Batlaban, Kanai, Chenggni, Gulpani, Rongara, Dambuk Appal, Daikhuwarchar, Baghmara, Mohendraganj, Balipara, Boraibari and Gasupara areas of Garo hills. While drawing this line Redcliff divided many groups who were not aggrieved parties meaning neither Muslims nor Hindus. They were divided as their habitat fell along the line of partition. Thus, the Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Hajong and Chakma tribes were divided between India and Pakistan (Bangladesh) though the objective was to divide only Hindus and Muslims.⁹ The redefined borders touched the boundary of North-Eastern part of India on the one side and East-Pakistan on the other. For the people living in the Garo Hills, the newly created boundaries came as a stroke amongst their own bodies as it cut the hill areas from the plains. The Garo Hills remained to be in Assam while the plains went to the districts of Mymensingh of East-Pakistan. The Partition of colonial Assam in 1947 adversely affected the social, political, cultural and economic lives of the people residing in the Garo Hills within colonial Assam. It disrupted the traditional trade and trade routes that exist historically which were the life line of the Garos had been destroyed. They were completely dependent on the plains of Bengal for their economic sustenance. Further, the important political events like the

partition of India, the creation of Bangladesh, seemed to have not only affected their socio-political, cultural, economic life but also every dimension of the life creating major questions regarding their identity, ethnicity and cultural practices.¹⁰

The Border Security Forces: Security is aimed at, Insecurity is generated: The partition of 1947 thus given birth of the problems of economic instability, problems of identity, existential security over the host population living on the border areas of Garo hills on the one side and Mymensingh on the other. People from both the countries viz. India and East Pakistan were suffering from greater insecurity from each-others belong to opposite nationalities. At that critical juncture the only solace was the Border Security Forces belong to both the countries. However, the expectation was to get security and protection from police personals but the picture of social security was way too contradictory with the common generalize notion of belief about security and protection. The year from 1951 to 1954 witnessed a number of clashes in terms of communal, social, economic or political by the border security forces in different parts of the Garo hill districts. However, most of the cases of social insecurities generated by the East Pakistan Police Personals (E.P.P.P.) in the name of protecting the common masses living on the border areas of Rangpur, Dewanganj, Mahendraganj, Madhupur etc.¹¹

Insecure Border through the Years of 1951-1954: In January 1951, the East Pakistani Armed Forces made forcible encroachment towards Indian Territory. The Garo Hills border with Pakistan was about 600 miles long and most of it lies along the foot of the hills. By August 1951 Pakistan had 13 posts alongside the border. There were 76 armed Ansars at Lalmanirhat. There was also 1000 man of the Regular army. The total number of Ansars in the Rangpur district was 1200 (armed). On the Indian side there were 10 posts with the total of 160 armed police. So far it was a very striking and dangerous contrast between the positions of two countries.¹² The East Pakistani forces had assumed an offensive role in the area and there has been heavy concentration of rifles and regular units of the army at various points. Their patrol encroaches into Khetarchar and tried to occupy this territory belong to India. Further firing took place by the Pakistani forces in August 1951 at the border areas called Boraibari, Khetarchar, Daikhowa and Salapara.¹³ The year 1951-1954 witnessed many brutal incidents which were recurring by border security forces alongside the border of Garo hills and Mymensingh district. However, in comparison to the previous years, the year 1954 was the most crucial year as more than 36 clashes of the border police of both the countries were took place throughout the year. According to a letter written by the leaders of 'Jugantar' group dated 1-3-1954 that, "the year 1954 witnessed 36 incidents on the border. However, among these 36 incidents, 16 incidents were of firing on the Indian Armed Force by the Pak police and the rest were about cattle lifting, decoity, illegal encroachment etc. In most of the cases it seemed that the attack was made by the Pak forces while the Indian Armed forces were doing self-defence only".¹⁴

Women Harassment: Conversion of the non-Muslim to Muslim became very common on the border areas during the subsequent years after the partition. More than 5 Garo peoples of Gobraakura, dist. Mymansingh were forcibly converted into Islam by E.P.P.P. The Pakistan

forces of border camp used to marry the Garo girls by force or by any means and then forces their guardian to become Muslim. On 18-3-1952, the E.P.P.P abducted the wife of Taruni Kapali of Deaola, PS. Mymansingh. She was in advance stage of pregnancy. On the next day she was found unconscious and later died in Mymensingh Civil Hospital while giving birth to a dead child.

On 7th of May 1954 at about 5 pm four East Pakistan Police Personnels of Baramari Camp, dist. Mymansingh trespassed into Indian dominion and attempted to Kidnap Mrs. Jarina Marak from her house of Dalugaon, dist. Garo Hills. On 14th of May 1954, at about 8.30 am three E.P.P.P. of Baramari Camp armed with rifle, entered into Indian dominion and attempted to rape on the wife of Mr. Brojendra Momin of the village Adingiri of Garo Hills. On 21-12-1953, Anding Marak, along with three Garo women of village Singiri, PS. Dalu, Dist. Garo Hills was on the way to Karnai and 5 Pak armed police of Karnai E.P.P. Camp Dist. Mymansing, crossed the Indian border and arrested them and took them into Pak soil. Anding Marak was mercilessly beaten by Pak police and after extorting Rs. 136, he was released. However, the three women were raped by the above noted Pak Police and released later on. On 17-12-1953, 11am, 12 Pakistani armed Police trespassed into Indian Territory and gave obstruction to some women (mostly belong to Garo Tribe) of Laopathgiri, Garo hills, who were harvesting paddy in their field of Indian Territory. The Pak police threatened them with rifle and the women out of fear left the paddy field. On 18-8-1953, violence and harassment committed by E.P.P. force on two women named Selmoni Sangma, Padmini Marak of village Rasanagiri, PS. Dalu, Dt. Garo Hills. The Pak police after committing rape these two girls released to dead. On 25-2-1954 four Indian Garo women namely Baigo Shira, Phiot Shira, Bausa Shira (D/O- Hemon Marak), Solou Shira (D/O- Rangen Mark), and Hela Marak (D/O- late Gangram Shira) of Dambookga, PS. Dalu, district. Garo hills, went to sell some perishable goods at Lakhipur *hat* near border, while they were coming back home from marketing, two Pak refugee caught them and handed them over to the E.P.P. Camp of (Mymansingh District) and therefrom they were forwarded to Durgapur P.S by the E.P.P for prosecution.¹⁵

Open Firing: The number of Pak forces at the Mymensingh border of Garo Hills increased by about 4 platoons at Dec 1953, In Oct 1953 total strength stood at 7 platoons spread on 23 border camps. In Nov 1953 increased by 2 platoons and about 105 Ansars were helping the regular force. Thus, the systematic increase of Pak force on the South East region of Garo Hills between Baghmara and Mahadeo made them most strong and powerful. However, there were only three Indian border camps at Mahadeo, Rangra and Baghmara against the Pak camps. On 16.4.1952, Pak forces fired two rounds on Indian Nationals grazing cattle at Daikhuwachar. On 6-6-1952 at 6.30 am Pak forces opened fired over the Indian nationals who were harvesting paddy at Kurigram, Garo Hill District. The firing continues for about 8 days. However, no report of loss or casualty was found.¹⁶ Jotish Sangma's (Garo tribe) house towards the North boundary pillar of Bijoupur across the tilla (hillocks), fall within the Pakistan territory. His report says that on the day of 20-1-1954, Wednesday, at 9 am when he was out from his home to Durgapur, open firing took place near his home by Pak

Patrol police, his wife and other inmates of house were fled away and he himself joined them at a house in Kumarkhali village and never returned to his own house. Firing took place at Kunikona village of Garo hills at 16-11-1955. the Pak border Inspector of Police visited Koenoi Camp on 29-1-1954 and told the sepoy that due to the fault of the Garos of Mymansingh border the S.I. of Police (E.P), of Durgapur P.S was killed during the recent firing on the border, he was deliberately incited the sepoy against the Garos. Firing incident took place on the border at Konkana near Baghmara, PS. Dalu, Dist. Garo hills on 20-1-1954. In defence, Indian Armed Police also keep firing about two rounds on 22-1-1954 at Panchgaon(Tura), Garo hills district.¹⁷

Illegal Encroachments: In November 1951, the East Bengal Armed Police entered to the village called Boraibari and harassed the villagers by collecting Chowkidari taxes and exercised criminal jurisdiction therein. Repeated incursions into and occupation of territories by force became very common incidents, which created greater insecurities for the general masses. On January 1952, the Pakistan armed forces were re-occupied the villages called Natun Salapara, Daikhuwachar, some portions of village Boraibari and other disputed areas situated on the Rangpur Goalpara border which added fuel to the fire to the crucial situation. On subsequent months at the day of 25-3-1952 a decoity was committed by Indian Armed Force in the house of Manmohan Barman of Mymansingh district. The dacoits used fire arms, injured the owner of the house, looted cash and ornaments. On 26-3-1952, a communal clash took place between the Muslims and the Boro s at the place called Barkal Bazar at Pakistan border.¹⁸

On 12-12-1953, a person called Lamba Sangma, PS. Dalu; Dist. Garo Hills was going to Mahadeo Hat (India) with 10 srs. Of paddy for sale, 4 Pak armed police of Karani E.P.P camp, Mymansingh Dist. of East Pakistan, trespassed into Indian Territory, attacked him on the way after crossing the border at Karnai, extorted the paddy and left the place.¹⁹ On 12-12-1953 while about 13 Indian nationals belong to Garo tribe while returning from Mahadeo hat on the way to Kornajhar were chased by 6 Pakistani Police (armed). However, they managed to escape through the jungle. On 5-12-1953, while some villagers of Ailatola, PS. Dalu, Dist. Garo Hills were returning from Mahadeo Hat, 6 Pak armed police from Mymansingh trespassed into Indian territory and attacked them on the way. On 19th Dec 1953, 9 Pak armed Police trespassed Indian territory near Baghmara at Garo Hills district.²⁰ 20-1-1954, Pakistani people trespassed into Indian territory of Garo Hills district of Koakona and forcibly took away 20 cattle belong to the tribal people. Protest took place on the subsequent day and E.P.P.P. open fired on Indian personal. Further on 30-1-1954 they arrest more than 10 Indian nationals from the place called Karnai.²¹ On 25-11-1953, 10 Pak police of Charupara E.P.P Camp came to a land measuring 5 Kathas, belonging to Poeram Sangma of Adingiri, Baghmara, OP. Garo Hills, paddy of the said land were reaped and removed. On 26-1-1954 the E.P.P arrested Deben Marak of Govindapur, Kalmakanda P.S, dist. Mymansingh while he was returning home with a bundle of bamboo from Garo Hills with necessary permit.²² On 26-1-1954, 7 E.P.P trespassed into India at Kalariara P.S. Dalu, Dist. Garo Hills, kidnapped Nanda Marak and another man of Chenri village to Pak while

they were returning from Raghunathpur bazar. On 26-1-1954, Ramta Marak of Chengri, P.S. Dalu, district Garo hills, was arrested by E.P.P. of Karnoi Camp, district Mymensingh while he was returning home with a basket of paddy from the Indo-Pak border. On 19-2-1954, at 7.30 AM Jarumani Sangma of Bonbera, under PS. Dalu, district Garo hills was attacked by Pak sepoy at Singkota Police camp, about 27 seers of rice had been taken away from her. 25-1-1954, Nanda Marak along with another man of Chengri, Ps. Dalu, district Garo hills while returning from Raghunathpur hat (Garo Hills) on the way at Kalariara within India territory, 7 E.P.P. personnel trespassed into Indian territory and arrested them and sent them to Kalmakanda Police station, dist. Mymensingh.²³

Unsettled Settlements Continues: The Pakistan Border Police or Indian Civil Armed Forces on both side of the frontier should be restricted to a certain limit within the borders. It should be noticed that the cause of numerous border incidents along the India –Pakistan border involving Pakistan police and Indian Civil Armed Forces was because of their frequent contact which made possible by their patrolling very close to the border and occasionally gives rise to incidents through understanding or otherwise. It would have been desirable to reduce to minimum opportunities for such contacts, thereby eliminating possibilities of clashes. However, on November 1952 the Ministry of Defence of both the countries suggested that patrols of both countries should remain 500 yards away from the border line in order to prevent incidents involving forces of both sides. This might mean the creation of a belt of “No man’s land” 1000 yards wide along the border which might enhance smuggling and illegal entry and exit.²⁴ However, for the first time Pakistan Govt. agreed with the proposal on the border issues more or less on an equal terms as it was the only way of keeping the border quiet but later on they denied the proposal on the ground that if they accepted in respect of the border police it may weakened their position.²⁵ Henceforth, the problem of insecurity was continued in the name of security. Every year during the time of harvesting paddy the cultivators had to suffer greater insecurity by border forces as their paddy fields were disrupted, decoity and firing became very frequent. To prevent recurrence of trouble on this stretch of the border, a joint survey and demarcation by both the government was to be initiated. The East Bengal Govt. stated that this would be under their consideration and their final reaction was awaited and asking for other satisfactory alternatives.²⁶ However, the proposal for the proper demarcation of the boundary between East Pakistan and Assam was put forward during August 1950 at the Indo-Pak Conference of Secretariat Level but till 1960 the proper demarcation of the boundary between the respected areas was not yet done. Due to the absence in progress of the demarcation of boundary alleged border incident were continued to take place into each other’s dominion for nothing and the Border Security Forces were remained sitting there to invite danger to them.²⁷

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