



Citizenship, abandonment and resistance in the India–Bangladesh borderland [☆]



Hosna J. Shewly

Department of Geography, College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 February 2015
Received in revised form 10 October 2015
Accepted 14 October 2015
Available online 23 October 2015

Keywords:

Enclave
India
Bangladesh
Citizenship
Abandonment
Ethnography

ABSTRACT

Drawing on ethnography in the enclaves in India and Bangladesh, this paper explores a multifaceted yet enduring relationship between citizenship, abandonment and resistance. Following the partition in 1947, the enclave residents' citizenry was enacted like other Indian or Bangladeshi citizens' disregarding these enclaves' trans-territorial reality. This paper will demonstrate that enclave dwellers did not live in the 'citizenship gap', the difference between rights and benefits of citizenship, rather they lived without any citizenship rights. Life in these enclaves was highly complex and experiences in the enclaves challenge the usefulness of citizenship as a universal framework of analysis for the people who are ranked as citizen but never have it. In this context, a combination of the reverse conceptualisation such as citizenship and Agamben's conceptualisation of abandonment not only allows for these dimensions of lived experiences to be addressed and explored, it also focuses on the temporal aspect of citizenship implicated in politics. Finally, the paper calls for widening the consideration of the empirical study on everyday citizenship practices and experiences around the globe to extend and intensify the citizenship literatures.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Karim Hossain (aged 28) is standing at the edge of his agricultural land, which is also at the edge of the Indian border, Sheotikursha, inside Bangladesh (Fig. 1). Although legally he is Indian, there are just a few yards of between his land and the India–Bangladesh border that entirely disconnect him from his home country. Here, and throughout the paper, home country refers to the country to which an enclave belongs and of which it comprises a part whereas the host country means the surrounding country. Despite being an Indian citizen he is unable to visit and access any of his citizenship rights because of the international border. Such a territorial arrangement, a fragmented territory of one sovereign power located inside another sovereign territory, is conceptually and legally defined as an enclave. Following the decolonisation process in 1947, India and Pakistan/Bangladesh inherited 111 and 51 enclaves respectively, which comprise 80% of the world enclaves (Van Schendel, 2002). Accordingly, enclave dwellers citizenship was endorsed. Because of an enclave's trans-territorial location (the boundary pillar marks an enclave folk's spatio-legal identity), the enclave residents' life is intrinsically linked with the territorial

power of the concerned states. Since these enclaves are unadministered, Karim Hossain never received any of his citizenship rights.

Over the past sixty-seven years, the enclave exchange initiatives remained unsuccessful because of difficult bilateral relations, initially between India and Pakistan and later between India and Bangladesh. With improved bilateral relations, both countries officially exchanged the enclaves on 1 August 2015 and the enclave dwellers will gradually be granted citizenship rights over the next few years (see *The Hindu*, 13 June 2015). In this period of transition from statelessness to statehood, this paper can be read as a contemporary history from 1947 to 2015. From this context, this paper explores Karim Hossain and tens of thousands of enclave dwellers' sixty-seven years experiences of abandonment based on seven months of ethnographic research.

Korim Hossain, explained how he became completely disconnected from India despite his official status as an Indian citizen. In practice, a national identity card or passport is the formal proof of belonging to the political community in India and Bangladesh. Most of the enclave residents like Korim Hossain have no such document belonging to either nation-state. Thus they become undocumented people. The fenced international boundary and armed border guards restrict his mobility since he lacks proof of nationality. Every Indian is entitled to a ration card from his nearest administrative office upon completion of an application form accompanied by their birth certificate. This ration card is prerequisite for a voter card, possession of a passport and all citizenship

[☆] This research was carried out at the Department of Geography, Durham University, UK between 2008 and 2012. A follow up research was carried out between June 2014 and January 2015.

E-mail address: h.shewly@exeter.ac.uk



Fig. 1. Karim Hossain standing at the edge of his enclave Sheotikursha in Bangladesh.

rights. The absence of formal administration in the enclaves deprives Karim Hussain from a birth certificate. Therefore he is also ineligible for a ration and voter card. He only holds land registration documents showing the land he owns is Indian but this is inadequate to claim education, medical, security or any other basic human rights. Given this fact, Karim Hossain has neither had the chance to cast his vote nor does he even know when elections take place. Similar procedures exist in Bangladesh; the national identity card is the basic document confirming political belonging to the state. The interplay between citizenship technologies, geographic isolation, and the politics of turning a blind eye on enclave realities anonymised Karim Hussain from his rights to citizenship.

Citizenship is generally described as participation in and membership of a state along with rights and responsibilities (Delanty, 1997; Lister, 1998). The enclave dwellers however are excluded from political participation, basic citizenship rights and public services as their citizenship is officially authorised by the home country but never been actualised. In this context, their everyday experience in the enclaves can be equated to abandonment to use Agamben's (1998) term, which can provide a distinct relationship between citizenship and abandonment shaped by political, spatial and legal factors. However, politico-legal actions by the involved states rarely establish short-lived state-citizen connections such as elements of political or civil rights for some enclave residents. In other words, there are moments of citizenship in the general experience of abandonment what I define as transient citizenship.

This article shows a framework of understanding citizenship–abandonment–resistance relations with the examples from ungoverned enclaves in Bangladesh and India. It makes three arguments about citizenship, abandonment and resistance. First, it challenges the usefulness of citizenship as a universal framework of analysis for the people like Karim Hussain who ranked as citizen but never have it. It shows the potential of Agamben's ideas to illuminate how people are abandoned, their rights and dignity are denied. Second, it demonstrates that citizenship and abandonment are not always oppositional, rather they often co-exist. Finally, the argument will be made that abandonment does not necessarily mean the end of all hope. Abandonment invokes resistance as 'concretely situated productive counter-practices' (Elliot, 2011:268). In contrast to Agamben's preoccupation with inoperativity, the paper will illustrate a situation when a communities resistance against abandonment appears to be able to end the dynamics of abandonment.

Methodologically, this paper is based on seven months ethnography in the enclaves located in India and Bangladesh. The field

research, which utilised a snowballing approach, was conducted by the author in 25 enclaves between October 2009 and April 2010. These research sites were selected based on the official statistics, newspaper reports, local journalists and researchers' knowledge and stories learned in the enclaves. Considering religious orientation, size, population and closeness to the border, six enclaves were then chosen for an in-depth ethnography. The ethnography involved intense participant observation at enclave-main land borders, tea stalls in the enclaves and women's social gatherings. Participant observation provided a general idea about everyday life in the enclaves and also provided context for conducting additional in-depth interviews. To understand individual experiences of abandonment, transient citizenship and views on citizenship aspirations, 55 in-depth interviews were conducted with the enclave residents. The ethnography was conducted in the local language of Bengali. The field notes and interviews were then transcribed by the author and crosschecked by two bilingual colleagues. To comprehend the recent citizenship struggles, six follow-up interviews were conducted with the protesters between June 2014 and January 2015.

This paper begins with a concise discussion on the historical background of these enclaves, citizenship provisions in India and Bangladesh and their impacts on the enclaves. The discussion then moves into the multidisciplinary debates on citizenship in Section 3. The final sections illustrate everyday abandonment in the enclaves, transient citizenship and citizenship struggles, respectively. These three empirical sections correspond to the key conceptual ideas employed in the paper—abandonment, citizenship and resistance. Everyday abandonment section illustrates mundane enclave life without *any* citizenship rights. It shows how the home country abandons their citizens living in the enclaves. Transient citizenship section describes moments of citizenship for some enclaves and/or some enclaves residents while most of the enclave residents experience abandonment. And, the final empirical section extends the discussion to the coexistence of abandonment and resistance with examples of recent citizenship struggles in the enclaves' spaces. Thus, these three empirical sections will show a complicated condition when abandonment, citizenship and resistance co-exist. This paper concludes by arguing that citizenship literature needs more diversification to encapsulate on-ground complexities existing in different places across the globe.

2. State-citizen relations and the enclaves

Mughal and Cooch Behar kings' soldiers occupied each other's land during the wars and these small pieces of land acquired enclave status through the peace treaties of 1713 (Whyte, 2002; Majumder, 1965). All these small pieces of land, or the enclaves, became international following the decolonisation of India in 1947. This Bilateral antagonism between India and Pakistan and later between India and Bangladesh not only obstructed enclave exchange initiatives but also severely affected the enclave dwellers' communications with the main territory on either side of the border. Each country occasionally demanded full access to its own enclaves, but was unwilling to allow reciprocal access to the other. As a result, neither country made a serious attempt to extend administration to the enclaves locked in one another's territory (Karan, 1966; Van Schendel, 2002). It is also unclear how many people presently live in the enclaves. The official census conducted in 2011 cited that 51,000 people live in the enclaves (The Hindu, 2011a), while the previous research and local estimates identify 100,000 enclave residents (Whyte, 2002; Jones, 2009). The enclave residents can neither enter their mainland legally nor receive any state services. Hence, they are completely

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073737>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073737>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)