

Chapter III: People of Nowhere - the Enclaves' People

According to a popular legend, centuries ago during the British period in India, the Enclaves were used as chess pieces in games between two regional kings, the Raja of Coochbihar and the Maharaja of Rangpur. The Enclaves are locally known as Chits, compared with the checkered pattern of a chessboard, and extend into foreign territory. These are like landlocked islands surrounded by the other country's land, clustered on either side of the international border.

In June 1947, the then British Government had appointed Sir Cyril Radcliffe for the boundary demarcation of the two countries in five weeks, stipulating the partition of British India into two new sovereign states - India and Pakistan (Pakistan and East Pakistan now Bangladesh). However, Radcliffe and the other commission members lacked the expert knowledge and information needed for the task of boundary demarcation. Soon after independence, a problem arose of Enclaves who were ignored by the Boundary Commission members at the time of boundary demarcation.

On 15th August 1947, people of India and Pakistan immersed in independence and freedom, but the 172 Chits or Enclaves turned into a foreign territory marooned in a country where it was earlier part of the same country. Restrictions on movement of people beyond the Enclave and trade embargo began since then. The oppression of humanity started soon as the people of Enclaves realized that they were being labelled as foreigners in the country where earlier it was the same country they belonged to. The Enclaves were left in a stateless state of abandonment. They were pockets of abject poverty without government administration in the way of public services: with no education, infrastructure like water, electricity, hospitals, etc, people were not citizens of any country. Their citizenship status was a major obstacle in resolving the problem, while they faced persecution from Indian and Bangladeshi authorities whenever they stepped out of their enclaves, being treated was a foreigner without having valid travel documents. This they needed to do often to sell their agricultural produce, buy essentials, access healthcare or even earn a livelihood. More than 75% of the residents of the Bangladeshi and Indian enclaves have spent time in prisons, arrested for violating the Foreigners' Act. The social system was paralyzed and continued for 68 years. Illegal social activities and crimes happened outside of the Enclave territory, but the area became a shelter for criminals, as the police or local administration are being prohibited to enter there being of a foreign country. People outside of Enclave area made the oppression on the Enclave people by terrorizing them and keeping them under constant threat of torture and extortion, as the later needs the help of outsiders for survival.