

Supreme Court of India, is because the Indian health ministry saw merit in the arguments of the said support group, and differed with the views of the Indian home ministry, which categorically ruled that homosexuality was against Indian culture, and was a Western import not indigenous to the culture of India.

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Masculinity at work, masculinity at stake: 'Male' negotiations along the West Bengal- Bangladesh border

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The news of a disturbing incident which took place on the 19th of January 2012 shook the people of West Bengal and India at large. The news was that of the violence perpetrated by a group of Indian border officials, the Border Security Force (BSF) on an alleged smuggler trying to cross the border from West Bengal to Bangladesh at Raninagar border in Murshidabad district of West Bengal. This was the only person in a group of a few who could be caught while the others fled. On being caught by the BSF, he was stripped and brutally beaten by the BSF. One of the BSF officials present at the site videotaped the whole incident in an act of fun, promising to 'bluetooth' the video to the rest in the group (as evident from the voice of the recorder in the video that somehow got leaked and landed up with the media). The convict was then thrown over to the Bangladesh side of the fencing and left in that state, till some of his fellow men took him back to his house on the Bangladesh side. While Bangladeshi media protested vehemently against such an incident, BSF officials did not find a suitable explanation. Eight of the BSF jawans involved in the incident were suspended after the news was widely circulated through newspapers and social networking sites, BSF was also careful in emphasising the fact that the victim of violence was no ordinary person but was a smuggler, involved in smuggling contraband items across the West Bengal-Bangladesh border. But questions like why a person, in spite of whatever crimes he is convicted

with, would be so brutally beaten up, why would he not be taken to a hospital following the incident and why would he not be officially arrested and be made to go through the conviction process in a legal manner did not find satisfactory answers. Local people in the area clearly mentioned the frequency of such acts by the BSF, stressing on the BSF's motive of sending out a warning signal through such exemplary punishment to deter any future occurrences of smuggling. Local sources confirmed that the victim was a Bangladeshi citizen and had recently crossed the border to West Bengal. He was caught on the day of the incident when trying to cross over to the Bangladesh side.

This is just one of the hundreds of incidents which occur along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border ever since its inception in 1947, after the partition, followed by the formation of East Pakistan from erstwhile Bengal. With the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 (East Pakistan having attained independence from West Pakistan) and with the decision to fence the entire border between West Bengal and Bangladesh, cross-border activities in varied forms have seen a sharp rise, resulting in such violent negotiations between the civilian population and the border guards. Incidents of violence perpetrated by the border officials on the people who live and earn along this border have increased to an extent that they have almost become regular occurrences in these parts. Given their regularity, these incidents have increasingly become part of the miscellaneous news bits in newspapers from being the headlines, apart from few such incidents which somehow manage to get the attention it deserves.

The complex nature of the West Bengal-Bangladesh border, in terms of its ethnic and religious composition, its economic structure and its social set up, has resulted in a number of interesting studies carried on by academics and non-academics alike. While it is true that gender has been one of the more important aspects of these studies, the difference in approach to male and female gendered studies is also evident. That is to say,

studies of any kind of violence against women along the borders have had a clear gender-approach to them, while studies of violence against men have failed to evoke such gendered understandings and have exclusively been studied as issues of violation of rights. While violence against women has often been studied in the light of femininity and sexuality (Banerjee, Basu Ray Chaudhury, 2011), violence against men has hardly been studied in the light of masculinity. This chapter, as part of a bigger project of understanding borders, is an attempt to look at violence against men at the borders as a gendered act with reference to the West Bengal-Bangladesh border.

Why masculinity, why border?

Masculinity, unlike femininity, is most often unseen or unnoticed due to the normativity of its nature. It is unmarked because it is taken to be the norm and not thought about unless in opposition to something else. It is precisely because of this 'significant absence' (Barthes, 1967: 77) that its silence speaks. Over the years and across numerous contexts, men's bodies have become important sites where masculinity has been played out. This chapter concerns itself with masculinity functioning over men's bodies in the context of a specific territorial borderland—the West Bengal-Bangladesh border. Extensive field studies in the various border areas along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border, as part of my larger project of understanding the West Bengal-Bangladesh border, has revealed some very interesting facets of how gender relations are at play here. Masculinity, in these border areas function at two very distinct levels, apart from the other complex intricacies which form the omnipresent web between these two levels. At one level, the more commonly seen male-female gendered relations function between the male and female civilians who live along this border. This involves the usual control of the male members of the families and/or communities over their female counterparts, in terms of the physical and mental violence perpetrated on them, control of

movement, livelihood opportunities, voicing of opinions and involvement in socio-political platforms of these female members. At this level, masculinity makes itself conspicuously visible. At another level, a different type of gendered relation is at work, involving the relation between the male civilians and the State-appointed border guards (henceforth BSF and BGB), in-charge of the border outposts at various border areas on either side of the West Bengal-Bangladesh border, who are mostly male. The afore-mentioned aspects of male-female negotiations are also seen in such male-male negotiations. In fact, these aspects are often seen in their more grotesque forms in such negotiations between male civilian and male border guards, especially when it comes to violence, both physical and mental. What adds to this specific gender relation, though, is the aspect of State-centric masculinity that is evident in the day-to-day negotiation between the male civilians and the male border guards.

Masculinity as performance

Masculinity is not a uniform practice and nor is its manifestation. As a performance, masculinity is practiced as hegemony, subordination, complicity or marginalisation (Connell, 1995: 77-81). Practices of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'marginalised masculinities' are not fixed character types but are results of changing structures of relationships (Connell, 1995: 81). Thus, to understand these practices, one needs to study them in the specific contexts in which they are generated. Likewise, a state-civilian negotiation forms the context for my study here.

A state/nation is metonymically thought of as masculine because it is considered to be composed of physical elements coded as masculine. Masculine aspects of men often engender the state as well. As it is, 'the body is a model that can stand for many bounded systems. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened and precarious' (Douglas, 1969) features which represent a state's borders as well. 'Many underlying similarities between the nation and masculinity-between the

body politic and the body of the man-are commonly perceived or experienced and is made possible by a shared characteristic of masculinity and nation: both are constructed through representation and discourse' (Reeser, 2010). Masculinity and the male body are often equated in terms of the way by which both are constituted. The male body, perceived as a bound entity, as against the fluid nature of a female body, is often equated to the bound or bordered nature of a state/nation, resulting in a merger of national and masculine representations of social structure. Simply put, avoidance of fluidity in constitution is a common characteristic of both state and masculinity. Moreover, citizenship is most often considered to be inherently male, as Anderson rightly infers (Anderson, 2006). It is in the light of such similarities, that the study of the negotiation between the male civilians and the male border guards along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border becomes significant. This negotiation is a study of the practice of masculinity in its various forms-hegemonic, subordinated, complicit and marginalised. This directly or indirectly, decides the civilians' lawful claim to citizenship.

To go back to where it started, the West Bengal-Bangladesh border is replete with such occurrences. Newspapers report of such occurrences number in hundreds if accounted for the last five years alone. Reports of firing by border guards, mostly BSF, do not fail to make its presence felt in the daily dose of news from one or the other border areas between West Bengal and Bangladesh. Those caught by the BSF trying to smuggle cattle, fake currency or any other contraband items across the border or trying to cross the border illegally for any other purposes are brutally beaten up and in most cases shot dead. In *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (a leading Bengali daily in West Bengal) alone, numerous such incidents were reported between 2009 and 2011 (2009: 28 October, 13 November; 2010: 7 February, 12 March, 25 March, 5 May, 18 June; 2011: 7 January, 21 January, 18 April, 7 May are a few). 2012 began with the afore-mentioned incident followed by

more such news. It is simply because the video footage was leaked was the incident able to stir up public opinion and a wide-scale debate regarding the violence perpetrated by the border guards at this border. Otherwise, such incidents are rarely noticed.

The perception of 'threat' is omnipresent in every person surviving at the border. A constant fear of being victimised by the border guards made its presence felt over again in the interviews which I conducted during my field studies in the various border areas between West Bengal and Bangladesh. Interestingly, the fear of being physically and mentally harassed was more conspicuous amongst the male respondents, rather than the female respondents as would have been normally expected. The practice of masculinity as both a physical performance and as an ideology becomes visible in the context of such responses.

The masculine state

Engendering between the state and its gendered subjects is a dialogic process. The nation creates masculinity, masculinity creates the nation (Reeser, 2010). It is not simply the state institutions like military, police, border guards that creates a masculine paradigm for its subjects, but the masculine archetype of these subjects contribute to creating these institutions as well. In the context of borders, the interface between masculinity and institutions is clearly spelt out in the form of an essentialist masculine image of the border guards. These border guards are prototype of male physicality as also representation of the state apparatus that is essentially masculine in ideology. The state unabashedly promotes a masculine version of its apparatuses and institutions as it needs to defend itself (defending the borders form an integral part of that defence mechanism) both physically as well as from being ideologically de-masculinised as a weak state by the other stronger states. Over the years, such gendered performance by the state becomes the norm an inextricable characteristic of the national culture. And so does the meaning accorded to the bodies which perform masculinity.

The influential Cartesian tradition established in the seventeenth century considered the mind and body as separate, with the man linked to reason and the mind, and the woman linked to the body. Consequently, the mind came to be defined as masculine and the body as feminine. So, any kind of abuse of the body came to be signified as a feminisation of masculinity or a de-masculinisation of the male body. Perception of a body differs, depending upon the perceiver of that body. To a civilian male living at the border, his body and mind performs masculinity in their most expected forms that of being a male body with stronger physical attributes as well as a male figure in the family controlling the movement, activities and psyche of the female members. But this same body of a civilian male takes a new, often denigrated, meaning in the eyes of the perceiver, i.e. the border guards. To the border guards, the bodies of the male civilians are as much sites for them to perform their masculinity as would be any other female body in similar or other contexts. The bodies of male civilians are perceived as both a site for physical performance of masculinity, in terms of direct physical control and abuse (a feature directly induced by the lack of female presence in the camps and posts of the border guards) as well as a site for the ideological performance of masculinity, by virtue of representing the state machinery (this has more to do with an ideological de-masculinisation of the civilians as subordinated male subjects rather than the physical aspect of masculine performance). Corporality becomes essential in the construction of masculinity by a national culture for meeting its various ends, defending the territories of the state being the most crucial among them. Thus, the male bodies of both the civilians living along the state's borders and the border guards defending the borders acts as tabula rasa for masculinity, where the masculine performances, both physical and ideological, are inscribed and reinscribed (Reeser, 2010), resulting in a complex web of what Bourdieu refers to as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2001: 42), signifying habit and habit's inscription on the body. Habitus becomes decisive in

the way the negotiation between civilian men and the border guards shape up.

The body strikes back

In the backdrop of such complex negotiations, hegemonic masculinities create, what Foucault refers to as 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977). But as power and discourse operate through the body, it fabricates not simply docile bodies, but also resistant bodies which perform subjugated masculinities in their own unique way. Masculinity as a performance in the West Bengal-Bangladesh border creates male bodies which are caught somewhere between power and lack of power, between docility and empowerment (Reeser, 2010). The codification of these male bodies as docile or empowered depends on the perspective in which it is studied and does not necessarily assume a simple linear narrative. A body which at one time might seem empowered may under a different perspective seem docile and subjugated and vice versa. Political discourse of the state constructs a masculine image of its institutions (the border guards in this case) which over long periods of performance becomes hegemonic in nature. The control over the civilian male's body and psyche that the border guards wield over years of operating in the borders, stand proof of this hegemonic masculinity. But, ironically these state-created institutions are also, in a way, docile because of their subjugation to the interests of the state. The bodies and psyche of these border guards are as much under the state's control as are the civilian male's body under theirs. Most hegemonic of male subjects can, thus, take the form of subordinate masculinities (Reeser, 2010).

It is not simply by being subjugated to the whims of the state machinery that the border guards are turned into docile bodies. More interesting is the way by which the very bodies that they subjugate, i.e. the bodies of the civilian men, turn the table on them. It is these docile civilian male bodies which become resistant and conspicuously, albeit unlawfully, empowered.

The West Bengal-Bangladesh border has, over the years, since its creation, become a haven for unlawful cross-border activities. These activities include movement of both items and people across the border without official permit, which makes it illegal by definition as far as statist constructs of legality is concerned. The border guards posted on either side of the West Bengal-Bangladesh border (BSF on the Indian side and BGB on the Bangladesh side) are responsible for maintaining law and order along the border, which also includes preventing any kind of illegal activities from being carried out along the border. But closer studies of some of these border areas reveal some grave reality. Numerous kinds of cross-border activities take place along this border right under the nose of these border guards. Smuggling of large herds of cattle across the border is not only the most rampant but also the largest amount of cash-involving activity in this border. Herds numbering up to hundreds are made to cross the border with the help of a perfectly co-ordinated network of people on either side of the border. A person or a few of them lead on the herd from one side (mostly from the Indian side) of the border across an unfenced area of the borderline and another person or a group receives the herd from the other side. The herd is then taken to a nearby cattle market, not more than half a kilometre from the border and sold to businessmen coming from near and far. The cash involved in such cross-border cattle business amounts to lakhs. The people involved in this business are all male. Involvement of female members, if at all, is extremely rare and indirect.

Smuggling of drugs is another such activity that has become widespread in this border over the years and has proved to be irreparably harmful. Cough syrups like Phensidyl (used for addiction) and other narcotics like marijuana and heroin are regularly smuggled across this border in hundreds, the smuggling spots often being closely located to the border posts. People involved in these activities are male with ages ranging

between 8 and 40. In this case, it is not simply the participants of the activities who are male but it is the male civilians along the border who are the worst affected by it. Huge number of male members of the families living near this border, either as direct participants in drug smuggling or as consumers of the smuggled drugs, have been harmed.

Smuggling of fake currency notes across the border is yet another common activity along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border. It is often carried out as part of the cattle smuggling network, where fake currency notes of one country are smuggled into the other side in exchange for cattle. The fake notes are then circulated within the country in to which they are smuggled. Again, it is male civilians who are involved in this activity.

Smuggling in contraband goods electronic items, mobile phones, computer parts, steel utensils, food products like lentils, flour, cane sugar, onions or biscuits, fruit juice and chocolate, raw materials like jute, clothes, audio and video disks is also a common activity along this border which involves mostly male civilians, though women are also seen to be involved in this case.

Yet another cross-border illegal activity involving male civilians is helping people cross the border, illegally, on to the other side. People who, for livelihood purposes or purposed of illegal trading, need to cross the border without a legal permit, i.e. a valid passport, are helped by such persons whose work it is to co-ordinate this crossing without being caught by the border guards. These 'linemen', as they are commonly referred to locally, take those wishing to cross the border to a suitable place (where it might be easier to cross) and then lead them on to a certain point across the border from where his counterpart on the other side takes charge. This activity involves only men and the term 'lineman' is true to its literal meaning, in terms of non-involvement of women in this 'job'. Off course people who cross the border illegally consists of women besides men, but people who earn as linemen are men, and almost never women.

It is in the context of such involvements in unlawful activities that the docility-resistant dichotomy is played out. The fact that all these activities are performed despite the rigid monitoring mechanism of the border guards is indicative of how mechanisms of negotiation are evolved by these civilian men when it comes to defending their masculinity. The demasculinisation and impotence of the male at one point means that at other moments he remasculinises himself in some other ways (Reeser, 2010). The abuses by the male border guards on the bodies of male civilians create a tension between the notions of what their bodies should ideally be (strong male bodies) and what they are (abused docile bodies). The feeling of such unmanliness provides the impetus for these civilian men to resort to unlawful activities. Just as the hegemonic masculinities of the border guards are both physical and ideological in nature, so are the unlawful activities of the civilian men. While the use of their bodies in such activities (which often involve physical strength) are their mechanism of resisting physical hegemony, the creation of a widespread, almost parallel, illegal economy in complete disregard for state security is their way of resisting ideological hegemony performed by the state apparatus. Masculine domination by the state and its apparatuses instigate a tension between them and the subjugated masculinities, creating a situation in which men are 'dominated by their domination' or in which masculinity itself functions as the 'other' to the male body (Reeser, 2010). If the BSF can, in any way, be made to participate in such illegal activities, in terms of being party to the cross-border movement of items or people or by being made to receive any monetary favour in return for the help extended for crossing the border, resistant masculinities imagines it as double an achievement. The tone of revenge is clear in what the male interviewees involved in illegal activities explained. For them, it was not just they were challenging the dominant masculine performances of the border guards, they were going a step ahead in pulling down their hegemony ("bringing these

border guards down") by involving the border guards in their 'unlawful' acts.

But the negotiation between hegemonic masculinity and resistant masculinity is not as simple as the above examples would have it seem. The above discourse would be true for the negotiation between the BSF (Indian border force) and the male civilians on the West Bengal side of the border. The negotiation is far more complex, and interestingly so, on the Bangladesh side of the border.

Complicity, mutuality

In discourses on masculinity, there is still another pattern of masculinity which exists besides *hegemony*, *subordination* and *marginalisation*, and that pattern is *complicity* (Connell, 1995). While relation between two male might, for most instances, be based on competition and violence, there is also sometimes a peaceful lack of rivalry or a non-problematic male bonding (Reeser, 2010). This form of relation is based on mutual protection where vicious hostility is conspicuous by its absence. Rivalry, if at all, is explicit in such relations and does not involve silent undercurrents of vindictive actions. These relations, thus, comfortably accommodate aspects of both rivalry and mutual protection.

On the Bangladesh side of the border, such incidents of non-violent performances of complicit masculinities are more common unlike the abusive versions of dominant masculinities on the Indian side. The performance of masculinity by the BGB (Border Guards Bangladesh) on the Bangladesh side of the border is distinctly different from BSF. While the BGB is as much representative of state power at the borders as are the BSF on the Indian side, a pattern of mutual protection characterises their relation with the Bangladeshi civilian male living along the border. The attitude of the BGB is visibly protective, even lenient, towards these civilian men. More like guardians, the BGB uses warnings and, at best, admonitions in dealing with civilian men

involved in unlawful activities. Instances of direct physical abuse or even use of abusive language are rare. This is not to suggest that unlawful activities are any less on the Bangladesh side of the border. But the psyche behind the involvement in such activities is rarely the result of performance of resistant masculinity. Interactions with a large number of such men involved in unlawful cross-border activities on either side of the West Bengal-Bangladesh border brings out the characteristic differences between the two. The attitudes of the men involved in illegal cross-border activities on the West Bengal side of the border clearly has a tone of vengeance and conscious disregard for the BSF. Language or speech plays a very important role in the construction of dominant and subjugated masculinities on the West Bengal side, where most of the border guards do not speak local dialect, i.e. *Bangla*. Most of the civilians, both male and female, fail to understand *Hindi*, a language that most of the BSF officials use. The BSF finds it difficult to identify themselves with the local Bangla-speaking populace and, thus, easier to use abusive body language. The very content of certain kinds of speech, as explained by Judith Butler, can be understood in terms of 'the action that the speech performs' (Butler, 1997). Certain language and tone of speech does not simply relay a message of inferiority, but that act of relaying is the verbal institutionalisation of that very subordination (Butler, 1997). Often such ways of conduct has the backing of the state. Effectively, the state allows for the injury of its citizens, making the victim of the hate speech a stateless person (Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, Crenshaw, 1993). The West Bengal-Bangladesh border is a study in the importance of speech as a tool for the performance of power and masculinity. Over consistent performance of offensive speech, the speech does not remain merely the representation of power, but the *modus vivendi* of power itself (Butler, 1997), and is manifested in the erosion of lawful claims to state agency and citizenship of the victims of such performances.

The BGB, on the other hand, can comfortably communicate with the local populace by virtue of having a common language, i.e. Bangla. While a common complaint against the BSF by the West Bengal border civilians is their lack of effort to communicate with the local people, this is a non-problematic aspect on the Bangladesh side, since language plays an important role in bridging the gap between the BGB and the local Bangladeshi populace. Sharing a common language, interestingly, prevents frequent instances of the use of abusive speech by BGB with the local Bangladeshi populace, as has been testified by the numerous interviews that I took among the civilian border population on the Bangladesh side of the border. Thus, speech becomes decisive in the construction of resistant masculinity on one side and complicit masculinity on the other. In fact, such complicity can also be found on the Indian side of the border when it comes to how the BSF deals with the women civilians found involved in unlawful activities. While, a male smuggler would be treated to physical violence if not death, a female smuggler or 'carrier', in most cases, would be warned, at best threatened. And in most cases, such exemption from visible violence on the women civilians will, discreetly, be in return for sexual favours. An undercurrent of mutual favour and protection can be seen in such negotiations.

Economy of a state has a lot to do with the kind of livelihood practices that the people of that state involve themselves in. And the rampant existence of illegal activities across the West Bengal-Bangladesh border is indicative of the helplessness of the people, who in most instances, are forced into such activities due to the absence of any other alternative means of livelihood. Border areas, around the world, are prone to illegal activities. But that is an altogether another perspective of looking at such activities. But what makes the study of these activities along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border interesting is how, through the negotiations between the border guards and the civilian border population,

distinct yet discreet aspects of masculinity are created. The fact that most of the gender related studies of this border has been women-centric and, in a way, predictably analysable, makes the effort to study the same border in a male-centric way, significant. It is indeed interesting to see the construction of the various patterns of masculinity in the otherwise uncomplicated interaction between the border guards and the male populace along the border.

Masculinity versus the 'other'

The performance of masculinity in the border guards versus civilians discourse takes an altogether new dimension in certain parts along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border where a large number of transgenders, are seen to be actively involved in illegal cross-border activities. These transgendered persons involve themselves mostly in smuggling drugs across the border. The Hili border point between West Bengal's South Dinajpur district and Bangladesh's Dinajpur district is a case in point. During my interviews with some of them at the Hili border area, they were clear in mentioning their relation with the border guards on either side of the border. They would be seen fearlessly squatting along the railway tracks which passes right beside the border on the Bangladesh side, mostly in an intoxicated state (courtesy: Phensidyl or heroin) and in very close proximity to the camps of the border guards. On being asked about their livelihood, they would explain unabashedly how they were involved in cross-border drug smuggling and how their unique gendered status helped them in their work. The fact that they were *Hijra* (a South Asian term for Transgender) exempted them from the physical violence perpetrated by the border guards on the other 'normal male' smuggler. The border guards did not want to 'handle' Hijras (out of dislike), literally, and so they thought it better to leave them to fend for themselves, even if that meant the involvement of a large number of Hijras in illegal activities. Some of them also thought, contrary to the earlier version, that the reason behind the

border guards' not wanting to handle them is 'sympathy' towards them for the fact that the Hijras lacked any family support (since most of them are abandoned by their families due to their gender status) and such cross-border illegal activities were an easy way for them to earn a livelihood. Such contradictory versions of 'dislike' and 'sympathy' fitted in comfortably in my understanding of the performance of masculinity when my interview with the Hijras was followed by interviews with the border guards in whose jurisdiction these Hijras lived and earned. From what these border guards had to say it was clear that as a 'normal male', it was below their dignity to deal with the Hijras ("does not suit us"; "does not look good" were the exact phrases used to explain the reasons for the border guards' not wanting to interact with the Hijras). Even when the border guards would try to impress upon me that they were sympathetic towards the plight of these Hijras, a disrespectful pity in their tone of speech was enough to express their innermost dislike for such 'unmanly' performance. On one hand, dominant masculinity is expressed, in this case, by depreciating other forms of masculine performances through both action and speech by the border guards. On the other hand, interestingly, the Hijras were not ready to place themselves in a victim's shoe because they thought they could 'use' their 'type of gender' ("guys like us") to their own advantage. They were clearly at an advantage when it came to their livelihood and had less to fear than what the other 'normal men smugglers' did. In a way, this also exemplifies resistant masculinity by marginal (both physically and socially) male subjects.

Conclusion

There are a thousand ways to study borderlands. Politics, religion, economy are some of the usual aspects which find place in the study of various borderlands around the world, apart from ethnographic and cultural studies. Gender discourses have, of late, been added to the array of such context in which borders are

studied. The West Bengal-Bangladesh border is no different. But most of these gender discourses with reference to this particular border consists of the obvious, to a large extent predictable, male-female relations, where the female body and mind has been the site for the performance of masculinity by male figures (both the male civilians as well as the border guards). The feminity-versus-masculinity narrative has been the central theme of most of these studies (Banerjee, Basu Ray Chaudhury, 2011). Relation between the male figures in this border, i.e. male civilians and male border guards, even though highlighted, have failed to be studied as a gendered narrative. That such a relation is as much a performance of masculinity in terms of domination, subjugation, marginalisation and resistance, has failed to catch up with researchers studying the West Bengal-Bangladesh border. Questions of human rights violation have surely been posed in the contexts of such violence and abuse of people living along the border. But trying to understand such relations in terms of performance of masculinity by male figures on the bodies and minds of other male figures have, strangely, been not in the agenda. Over years of negotiation between male civilians and male border guards along the West Bengal-Bangladesh border, a complex web of narratives-both physical and ideological-have evolved. Patterns of dominant, hegemonic masculinities have evolved through the figures of the border guards (a majority of whom are male). Physical abuse, firing, offensive speech has been the manifestation of their pattern of masculinity. Subjugated, marginal and, in the long run, resistant masculinities have evolved through the figures of the male civilians whose body and mind have been the sites for the performance of the dominant masculinities. Involvement in cross-border unlawful activities has been their way of contesting and subverting the physical (visible abuse by the male border guards) and ideological (omnipresence of the state machinery) masculine domination. Understanding such narratives of masculinity is important not

simply in the context of studying performance of masculinities but also because such negotiations have a direct effect on the lawful claim of the civilians to citizenship. Claiming agency to an essentially masculine state has always been a struggle for women, especially in the context of South Asia. But situations where claiming agency and lawful citizenship has been jeopardised for male members of the society as well, needs to be understood as well. Studying the relation between male civilians and male border guards in the context of such territorially peripheral spaces as the borderlands provides a very important backdrop for such an attempt. For the subjugated and marginal masculinities, the struggle towards claiming rightful citizenships is as hard as it is for subjugated women or any other marginal gendered positions. In fact, it is often harder, because for a male figure, agency to the state is imagined to be an obvious occurrence. But when such, apparently uncomplicated, 'male' claim to a 'masculine state' becomes complex, issues of citizenship and claim to state agency takes new dimensions. Labels, like smugglers, carriers, linemen do have a direct effect on the position of the male civilians in this border, who are then at a receiving end of not just physical abuse but social stigma as well. The shift from subjects of power to a set of practices in which power is actualised in its effects, like the performance of masculine physicality and ideology, reconceptualises certain given notions of sovereignty and forces us to rethink politics, law and the question of right.

There is no "being" to masculinity, but only "co-being" (Holquist, 2002). Masculinity cannot be performed alone, but needs an 'other' for expression. Masculinity is dialogic in nature and, thus, has to be performed with a co-being. It is through the discourse that is created through the process of dialogue between the two performers that masculinity evolves into a physical and ideological performance, branching out into its many patterns. Because masculinity is dialogic, its finer nuances have to be

understood contextually and in reference to social, political, geographical and ideological contexts. Studying masculinity in the context of such peripheral spaces as borders is such an attempt. To that end, this study, based in the peripheral yet highly sensitised border areas between West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh will, hopefully, be worth an effort.

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