



e-ISSN: 2319-8753 | p-ISSN: 2347-6710

IJIRSET

International Journal of Innovative Research in
SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE | ENGINEERING | TECHNOLOGY

Volume 12, Issue 7, July 2023

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 8.423

9940 572 462

6381 907 438

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www.ijirset.com

Impact of Refugee Influx: Assessing the Socio-economic Implications of Bangladeshi Refugees in India

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ABSTRACT:- The problem of migration and refugees is one of the prominent issues of the present states that have often linked with their sovereignty, independence and even existence. According to a UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs report (2009), India was ranked ninth in terms of number of international migrants. India has received refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Srilanka. The influx of such a large number migrants particularly in the Border States has proved to be a huge challenge for India with serious implications for its resources and national security. It has substantially contributed to changing the demographic pattern in the north- eastern states of India, where the locals feel overwhelmed by the outsiders. Under this background the present paper made an attempt to understand the migration and refugee issue between India and Bangladesh and their impact on the northeastern states of India. The paper will focus into the emergence of the refugee problem, its causes and impact of migration and refugees between these two States.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Refugee, Stateless, Inter-State Relation

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of migration and refugee between India and Bangladesh has been a matter of concern since many years. It is one of the bones of the contention between these two nations. The migration from Bangladesh to India takes place in various phases and a number of ethnic groups like Chakmas, Hajongs, Hindu Bengalis, have been migrated from Bangladesh to different parts of India and particularly Northeast India in different periods. The start of the migration can be traced back to the Liaquat –Nehru Pact (1950) which stated that minorities in the both countries should be provided complete equality which also included the freedom of movement. However issue of migration assumes more importance particularly after the India's role in the liberation of East Pakistan. After the creation of Bangladesh an extensive migration was witnessed and has remained a continuous process due to fear and insecurity among the Hindus. In fact, about ten million Hindus took refuge in India during the liberation war of Bangladesh. Similarly Chakmas and Hajongs were displaced from Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the early 1960s because of Kaptai Hydroelectric dam on Karnaphuli river, and later due to religious persecution. They had initially crossed over to the lushai hills districts of Assam (now Mizoram). But fearing trouble between the Mizoram and the Chakmas, the Assam Government sent them to Tirap (presently known as Arunachal) division of Northeast. Under this background the present paper propose to study the influx of migration of refugees from Bangladesh to India. A special focus has been laid on Hindu Bangladeshi refugees. The main objective of this paper is to understand the causes and impact of such migration on North-Eastern states of India.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term refugee and migrants are frequently used interchangeably. But there is a difference between these two terms, in their concept and meaning. Refugees are those who migrates across borders leading to the cause of armed conflicts, natural calamities. The United Nations (UN) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees held on 28th July 1951 defined a

refugee as any person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race , religion , nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion , is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear , is unwilling to avail himself on the protection of that country; or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. This Convention was further amended on 10th September 1969 which came into force on 20th June 1974. According to it the term refugee shall apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality (Ghosh, 2016). On the other hand Migration is generally defined as a permanent change in place of residence by the crossing of specified administrative or political boundaries. Migrants choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, cause but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. According to Myran Wiener migrant are the unwanted people who are not liked by the host community. On the other hand refugees are the people who have been rejected by their own government or the people or who have fled due to oppression by brutal regimes (Ghosh, 2016). However, in the present study the term 'migrant' has been used in a manner as to include both senses. Historical Background of Migration from Bangladesh to India The migration from Bangladesh to Northeast India has its own history. Initially, migration had started in the late 19th century British India and subsequently continued upon the partition of India, and even after the creation of East Pakistan in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971. Though this migration had been taking place historically, these people were not recognised as Bangladeshi migrants until 1971. The Hindu Bangladeshi migrants from Bangladesh mostly settled in three Indian states, namely, West Bengal, Assam and Tripura.

III. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION CRISIS OF IDENTITY

The influx of immigrants created a crisis of identity among the indigenous Assamese. Their cultural survival will be in jeopardy, their political control will be weakened and their employment opportunities will be undermined by such illegal migration. Assamese found that though the immigrants had settled in Assam, most of them failed to identify themselves with the mainstream. The recent Bodo-Muslim violence in the BTAD has its root on the issue of illegal migration. Environmental degradation: Large areas of forest land were encroached upon by the immigrants for settlement and cultivation. The state experienced declining percent of land area under forest from 39% in 1951-52 to about 30% now. Difficult to identify the illegal migrants: Due to the similar language spoken by illegal migrants from Bangladesh and the indigenous Bengali speaking Muslim of Assam, it becomes difficult to identify and deport the illegal migration from Assam soil. Community tension: The commission on integration and Cohesion found that tension usually exist with the presence of high levels of migration combine with other forms of social exclusion like poverty, poor housing etc. Economic consequences Increase financial burden: Immigration has increased pressure on the part of state government, as the government has to increase the expenditure on education and health facilities to the immigrants. India's administration had to deal with both security concerns and the influx of East Pakistani migrants. A refugee camp was built in West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura by May of 1971. In the months of March to December of 1971, during the Bangladesh war, the total number of refugee camps in various Indian states is shown in Table-1. According to the government's report to Parliament in June 1971, India was sheltering 4.7 million refugees; by the middle of July that year, there were 1,000 camps housing 6.9 million refugees.



State	No. of Camps	No. of Refugees	No. of Refugees on their own	Total
West Bengal	492	4,849,786	2,386,130	7,235,916
Tripura	276	834,098	547,151	1,381,249
Meghalaya	17	591,520	76,466	667,986
Assam	28	255,642	91,913	347,555
Bihar	8	36,732	-	36,732
Madhya Pradesh	3	219,218	-	219,218
Uttar Pradesh	1	10,619	-	10,619
Total	825	6,797,615	3,101,660	9,899,275

Table 1: Refugees in India from 1970 to 1972

Period	Assam (in %)	India in (%)
1901-11	+11.0	+5.8
1911-21	+20.5	-0.3
1921-31	+19.9	+11.0
1931-41	+20.4	+14.2
1941-51	+19.9	+13.3
1951-61	+35.0	+21.6
1961-71	+35.0	+24.8
1971-81	+23.3	+24.7
1981-91	+23.6	+23.5
1991-01	+18.8	+21.3
2001-11	+16.93	+17.6

Source: CMIF, basic statistics relating to Indian Economy.

Table 2: Decadal population growth rate of Assam



Districts	Decadal Growth rate in 2001(in %)	Decadal growth rate in 2011(in %)
Dhubri	22.97	24.40
Goalpara	23.03	22.74
Barpeta	19.62	21.40
Morigaon	21.35	23.39
Nagaon	22.26	22.09
Dhemaji	19.45	20.30
Cachar	18.89	20.17
Karimganj	21.87	20.74
Hailakandi	20.89	21.44

Source: Census data Assam [2].

Table 3: Decadal growth rate of nine districts of Assam

Year	Population in lakh	Density per sq. km.
1901	33	74
1951	80	176
1971	146	186
2001	266	340
2011	311	398

Source: CMIF basic statistics relating to Indian economy.

Table 4: Demographic profile of Assam

Displacing native workers: There is a fear particularly during a recession that immigrants take jobs which would otherwise be taken by local people; in particular place and circumstances there can be competition and conflict.

Decreases wage level with the increase of population: Illegal immigrants in every year have been adding a good number of people in Assam. It is one of the main reasons of population explosion. Due to this there is a possibility of decreasing wage level.

Political consequences

Assam agitation: The failure of government to respond the issue of illegal migration led to the agitation by the Assamese under the leadership of All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and All Assam Student’s Union (AASU). Assam witnessed governmental instability, sustained civil disobedience campaigns and worst cases of ethnic violence. Assam accord was the result of this agitation.

Illegal voters: Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants have got their names enlisted in the voting list illegally, thereby claiming themselves as citizens of the state. The immigrant’s population act as a vote bank for the political parties in Assam. The recent initiative NRC (National Register of Citizens) is meant for the detection of illegal Bangladeshi migrants. However success of such initiative will depend on the strong political will.

Issue of terrorism: Pakistan’s ISI has been active in Bangladesh supporting militant movements in Assam (Lt Gen S K Sinha, 1998). It is alleged that among the illegal migrants there are also militants, who enter into Assam to carry out the terrorist activities.

Some Recommendations to Meet the Problem

- i. The Central Government should appoint a National Immigration Commission to frame a National Migration Policy and a National Refugee Policy. The Commission should examine ways of strengthening the Foreigners Act 1946, as well as feasibility of Identity Cards for both citizens and non-citizens and Work Permits for migrants.
- ii. Border fencing in Assam must be completed forthwith on a war footing. The existing Border Security Force posts and the BSF water wing should be strengthened.
- iii. Our nationals in the border districts and for that matter in the whole State should be provided multipurpose photo identity card.
- iv. The ongoing NRC updating should be completed without delay and proper arrangement for the deportation of illegal migrants should be done.
- v. The Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal (IMDT) Act of 1983 should be repealed.

IV. CONCLUSION

The issue of migration between India and Bangladesh has been a burning issue for Northeast India. To deal with the problem India will have to take the initiative to enter into a bilateral agreement with Bangladesh under which the two countries would agree to take back their nationals staying illegally in the other country after due verification process. However considering Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interest in developing the eastern part of India, we can hope that present NDA government will take proper initiative to solve the problem immediately.

A problem which has its historical roots so deep cannot be solved overnight. The dangerous consequences of large scale illegal migration from Bangladesh, both for the people of Assam and more for the Nation as a whole, need to be emphatically stressed. No misconceived and mistaken notions of secularism should be allowed to come in the way of doing so. Illegal migration from Bangladesh is no longer a regional problem which can be pushed under the carpet. These migrants are now spread in several states and distant places such as Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and so on.

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INNO SPACE
SJIF Scientific Journal Impact Factor
Impact Factor: 8.423



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