

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Migration is a constant global phenomenon, which is as old as civilization is. Since times immemorial, people worldwide are on a move for various reason and purpose. In search of economic gain, better condition of living, security, poverty alleviation, and educational opportunities etc. people moves from one area to another area, which was not a problem before the creation of the artificial boundaries of states. However, after the creation of modern states the movement of people from one place to another has become problematic due to because of limited resources of the states. This global phenomenon has its implication in India too. The North East Indian states particularly Assam is a bad victim of illegal migration from its neighboring country. Assam is situated in the northeast of India- bordering seven states and two countries viz. Bangladesh and Bhutan. The large volume of influx of migrants have modified the population structure of Assam in respect of ethno-religious composition, occupation structure etc. and host of associated population problems in changing socio-political disturbances. It has posing a serious threat to Assam in many ways namely security, economic, demographic etc. It adversely affects the social, economic and political environment of Assam. This paper is an attempt to look into the overall problem of illegal migration and remedies of the problems.

Keywords: Migration, Population, Demography

INTRODUCTION

Illegal Migration into Assam has been a major problem to the state since the British Raj in India. The unrelenting influx of illegal migration change in the demographic pattern of the State has been a matter of grave concern. It poses a serious threat both to the identity of the Assamese people and to our national security. It threatens to reduce the Assamese people to a minority in their own State, as happened in Tripura and Sikkim. Migration from Bangladesh to the Northeast region of India has been continuous throughout the twentieth century due to the reason of historical links, geographical and physical proximity. Illegal migration has generated a host of destabilizing political, social, economic, ethnic and communal tensions. Politically, the Bangladeshi migrants are in a position to influence the results of the elections in a large number of constituencies in Assam. Economically, increased pressure on land, resulting in depletion of forest wealth, undercutting of wages of unskilled jobs, forcible occupation of Government land by the migrants and a host of other such issues, generate a ripple effect in the entire state. There is a tendency to view illegal migration into Assam as a regional matter, affecting only the people of Assam. Its more dangerous dimension of greatly undermining our national security is ignored.

Migratory movement into Assam it began nearly 200 years before Christ. Tribes from different parts of the world belonging to different races came to Assam throughout history. The Mongoloid race from West China, The Austric race, the Drabian race, and finally the Aryan race from the Gangetic plains have all immigrated to Assam before 1st century A D. Successive Mongoloid rulers invited Brahmin priests to Assam and got converted to Hinduism. Around 12th century, the Ahom rulers from Burma established their long lasting rule till the advent of British. “The Ahom rulers also converted to Hinduism but encouraged the co-existence of all other religions.”¹ The captured Mughal soldiers also set up their families in the region. The British conquered entire region of Assam and brought together the various tribes in Assam under the administrative umbrella of Assam province. The British, soon after their occupation of the region found the soil and climate highly conducive to the cultivation of tea.

They developed the tea industry in Assam. The Assamese people at that time were cultivating one crop per year, were not interested in working as labor in the tea gardens. Therefore, the British encouraged peasants from present Bangladesh to move into Assam for putting virgin land under cultivation. This influx was accounted to availability of cheap and plentiful supply

of virgin lands and the easy settlement procedure in the Brahmaputra valley. Besides in order to run their administration smoothly the British rulers brought trained people in various professions like doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, clerks, railway and post office staff etc. to Assam, as to the Assamese population at that period had no proper training to run administration. The two major famines of Bengal in 1943 and 1970 (after independence known as East Pakistan) also compelled a large number of people to move to Assam. Moreover the partition of the country compelled a large number of Hindus to migrate to West Bengal and Assam. Another major stream of immigrants to Assam was from Nepal. To get better means of livelihood and to escape compulsory service in their native country, a considerable number of Nepalese entered Assam from the beginning of the 19th century. They came through Darjeeling district in West Bengal, largely through Gorakhpur and Deoria districts of Uttar Pradesh, and also through the Nepal bordering districts of Bihar. They occupied the wastelands of the valley, mostly in Darrang, Kamrup and Lakhimpur districts. They engaged themselves in livestock and dairy farming. Besides grazing buffaloes and cows in the tracts, they also settled in hill slopes. The settlement of Nepali continued unnoticed since the beginning of the 19th century, as they settled on uncultivated and unknown hill slopes, which were not demanded by the indigenous Assamese people.

LITERATURE REVIEWED

There are a number of studies that focus on the socio-ethnic, political, and economic issues related to migration. This study comprehensively analyzed the study and political conflicts and cleavages that have resulted from the responses of the indigenous population to migration into Assam.

Sanjib Baruah in his book “India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality” emphasizes how tea began to play a crucial role in Assam to attract migrants from different parts. Sanjoy Hazarika focuses on the rise of insurgency and violence in Assam and North-East states due to Illegal Migration in his book “Strangers of the mist.”¹ Chirantan Kumar established the link between migration and refugee. He also analyzed the factors, which are responsible for the large-scale migration from Bangladesh to India and its impact on the demography in his work “Migration and refugee issues between India and Bangladesh”². Namrata Goswami in “Illegal migration in Assam: A Concern for India’s national security”³ argues that the presence of a large number of illegal immigrants potentially enables external actors like Pakistan and China to influence events in the Northeast. Uddipana Goswami reflects

on the so-called “lebensraum” theory that sees the influx of Bangladeshi immigrants as a part of a conspiracy to make Assam a part of greater Bangladesh in His work “Internal displacement, migration, and policy in north-eastern India.”⁴ Jagadish ch. Sah in “Aspect of Indentured Inland Emigration to North East India”⁵ discusses various issues relating to non Assamese immigrant labour and the role of colonial and local government.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives of the study is to

1. To understand the problem of illegal Migration
2. To examine the factors of illegal migration to Assam
3. Effects of illegal Migration in Assam
4. To put forward some suggestion to solve the problem of illegal migration.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is a qualitative one based on descriptive analytical method. The interpretation is based upon the analysis of secondary data and synthesis of various conclusion collected from various source like books, newspapers and web links.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Decadal growth of population and population density in Assam and in India, from 1901-2011

Assam is facing a formidable problem of alarming growth of its population. Since 1901, Assam had the distinction of recording one of the highest growth rates of population among all the states. The following table shows the difference of growth of population decade wise between Assam and India as a whole –

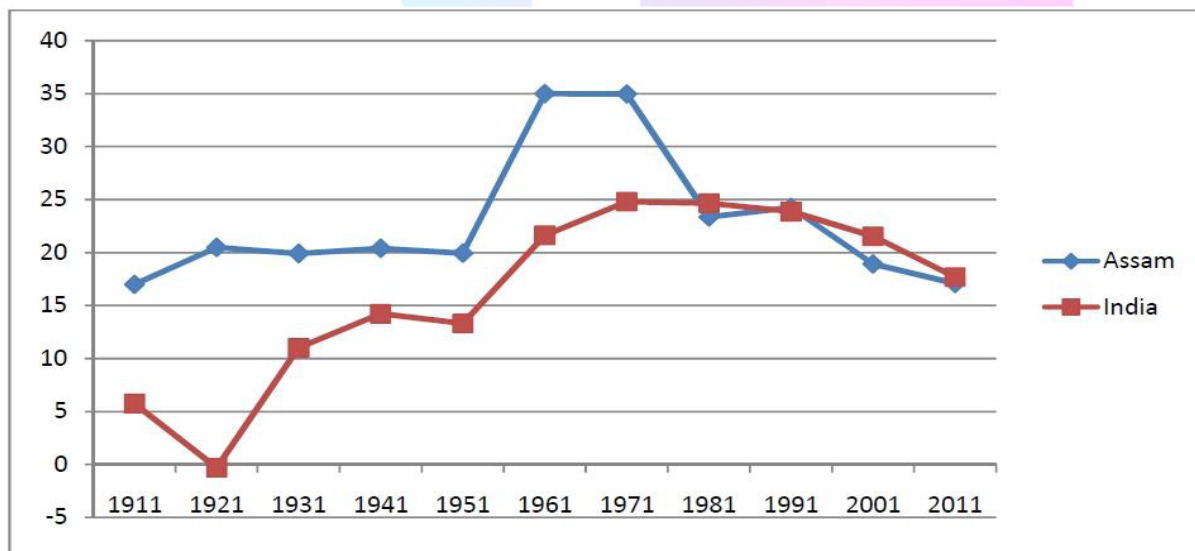
| Years | Population (In Lakh) | | Percentage Decadal Variation | | Density (per kilometer) | |
|-------|----------------------|-------|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------|-------|
| | Assam | India | Assam | India | Assam | India |
| 1901 | 33 | 2384 | | | 42 | 77 |
| 1911 | 38 | 2521 | +16.99 | +05.75 | 49 | 82 |

| | | | | | | |
|------|------|-------|---------|--------|-----|-----|
| 1921 | 46 | 2513 | +20.48 | -0.31 | 59 | 81 |
| 1931 | 56 | 2789 | +19.91 | +11.00 | 71 | 90 |
| 1941 | 67 | 3186 | +20.40 | +14.22 | 85 | 103 |
| 1951 | 80 | 3611 | +19.93 | +13.31 | 102 | 117 |
| 1961 | 108 | 4392 | +34.98 | +21.64 | 138 | 142 |
| 1971 | 146 | 5481 | +34.95 | +24.80 | 186 | 177 |
| 1981 | 180* | 6833 | +23.36* | +24.66 | 230 | 230 |
| 1991 | 224 | 8463 | +24.24 | +23.87 | 286 | 167 |
| 2001 | 266 | 10270 | +18.92 | +21.54 | 340 | 325 |
| 2011 | 312 | 12102 | +17.07 | +17.68 | 397 | 182 |

Source: referred to census of India in-

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282647096_MIGRATION_AND_POPULATION_GROWTH_IN_ASSAM_A_DISTRICT_LEVEL_STUDY

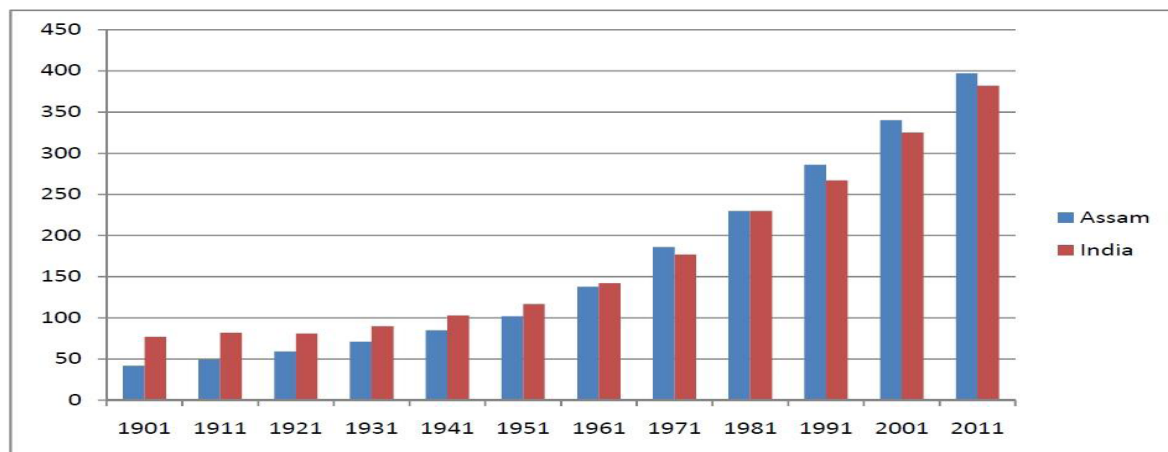
Percentage decadal variation in Assam and in India, during 1901-2011



It is revealed from the above table and graph that the size of population in Assam has been increasing at a rapid rate, i.e., for 33 lakhs in 1901 to 46 lakhs in 1921 and then to 80 lakhs in 1951. Further, the size have increase to 146 lakhs in 1971 and then to 224 lakhs in 1991, 266 lakhs in 2001 and 312 lakhs in 2011. The decadal growth rate shows huge difference in 1911, 1921, 1961 and in 1971.

The difference of growth rate in population can be regard as a testimony of illegal migration to Assam because by the general process of birth the growth rate cannot be as high as was in 1991, 1921, 1961 and 1971 which was almost above 10 percent more from national growth rate.

Density of population per sq. Km in Assam and in India, during 1901-2011



In 1901, the density of population per sq. km in Assam was 42, while corresponding national average was 77. The density of population in Assam was below the national average till 1961. But it crossed the national average in 1971, when the density of population per sq. Km in Assam reached 186, while corresponding national average was 177. According to census of India, 2011, the density of population in Assam has increased to 398 as compared to 340 in 2001 and the density of population in India has increased to 382 as compared to 325 in 2001.

CAUSES OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION

There are several causes or factors of illegal migration to Assam. The factors as a whole can be discuss under two heads— Push factors and pull factors.

Push factors – the push factors are attributed to some unforeseen events. Those are

1. Partition of India and Pakistan is a major cause of influx to Assam from East Bengal. A huge group of Hindu population moved to India leaving everything behind to due to fear of religious persecution and atrocities.
2. In the time of liberation of Bangladesh a millions of people moved to India to take shelter, many of which did not returned.
3. The heavy pressure on land owing to high density of population in the districts of Bangladesh.

4. Peoples who lost everything in natural calamities moved to Assam to take shelter.

Pull factors -

1. Possible employment opportunities
2. Availability of abundant cultivable land
3. Higher wages and facilities of modern life

Besides these, there are multiple factors that have paved the way for migration to Assam is -

Open border: The open border between India and Bangladesh cover a length of 4096.7 K.M. out of 262 K.M. of Assam and this border includes plains, reserved forest, rivers, mountains, agricultural lands, national parks etc. The lack of permanent boundary pillars is also responsible for the illegal migration.

Persecution of minority communities: The national identities construction in Bangladesh has led the persecution of minority communities. After declaring Islam as a state religion, the ethnic minorities (Hindu Bengali) found themselves to be minorities in both the ethnic and religious sense.

Vote bank politics: some Indian political party in Assam encourages illegal migration from Bangladesh to strengthen their political base and capture favorable votes in election. Moreover the peoples of borderland of both Bangladesh and India shares almost similar culture, customs, rituals and tradition as these places were homogenous before the annexation of British. Again the Bangladeshi labours are chip in cost for which some people seeks such labour to meet their daily need of labour. 1

CONSEQUENCES OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION

Social consequences of illegal migration:

A. 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..

B. *Environmental degradation:* Large areas of forestland 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.

C. *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.

D. *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:

A. *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.

B. *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.

C. *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 consequence:

A. *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.

B. *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.

C. *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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After studying the Problem of illegal migration some recommendation can be put forwarded as below-

1. A considerable portion of the problem of illegal immigration lies in the fact that we have no such effective refugee policy. Central government should frame a refugee policy.
2. Government should introduce identity card for the borderland people who frequently used to cross borders for different reasons.
3. There should be a work permit policy for the migrants affixing a fixed period to work in India.
4. There is a vast area of border between India and Bangladesh that are not protected by fencing. Central government should complete the border fencing.
5. Border guards like BSF, ITBT should be strengthened and a second line of defence should be created by the State government through state police force.¹
6. Peoples of borderland should be made aware of the problem created by the illegal migrants.
7. The ongoing NRC updation should be completed without delay and in proper manner so that no name of illegal migrants placed in NRC.

CONCLUDING REMARK

A Problem of illegal migration which has its historical roots so deep cannot be solved overnight. The dangerous consequences of large scale illegal migration both international and intra-national to Assam need to be emphatically stressed. Religious consideration should not be there in dealing with the Migration problem. No misconceived and mistaken notions of secularism should be allowed to come in the way of doing so. Illegal migration 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.

Thus it is high time to solve the problems of illegal migration to save Assamese people in their own land and to save the nation from the threat of immigrants. It is important for the policy makers to address the problem of migration by talking into account the long term effect instead of looking a short term expedience.

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