



STATE, MIGRATION AND IMPACTS: A POLITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

Migration is not a new phenomenon for Assam. Historically, Assam has witnessed a rise in ethnic tensions, identity crisis, questions on cultural survival of the indigenous Assamese people, which to a large extent has been triggered by this pressure on their land created by the illegal migrants. As land and asset acquirement serves as one of the significant incentives for these migrants, there is a large population influx of these migrants due to the easy availability of land and other resources in Assam. Such population influx results in an increasing scarcity of land and resources. This article is an attempt to overview the various aspects of this illegal mass migration. Firstly, it attempts to draw a history of immigration from Bangladesh to Assam and further discusses the different social, economic, and political impacts of such immigration on the community and the state as well.

Key Words: Illegal, Migration, Identity, indigenous.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another with the intentions of settling permanently or temporarily in a new location. Being a worldwide phenomenon, India is also not an exception in this regard. In the North-Eastern part of India it was the Britishers who encouraged movement of settlers in Assam and Bengal for numerous reasons. Subsequently, in independent India it was the 1971 war which resulted in large scale migration to escape religious prosecution and in search of better livelihood. From 1971(Bangladesh war), the flow of illegal migration into Assam has been increased. 10 million people entered into Assam during the Bangladesh war. Apparently, Illegal migration has posed a serious identity threat to the indigenous people of Assam. As a reaction gainst this illgial migration

several agitations have already been staged by the indigenous groups in Assam. The Assam agitation or Assam movement was started from 1979 and ended in 1985 against the illegal migration.

OBJECTIVES

1. To know the history of the illegal migration in Assam.
2. To examine the impacts of migration in Assam.

METHODOLOGY

This article is Qualitative and Descriptive in nature. The secondary sources of data include secondary sources like books, magazines, articles, journals, commentaries etc on the subject.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF MIGRATION IN ASSAM

With the discovery of tea in 1821 and setting up of tea industry in 1830 and shortage of labour, a great number of people basically peasants were brought from areas where population was dense. As a result of which great number of peasants migrated from West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. Those people were poverty stricken and in a dream of earning better livelihood they migrated and thus the 'tea tribe' group came into being which is the oldest migrants group in Assam.

Apart from that, In the beginning of the 19th century there has been a huge influx of migrants from Nepal. These people migrated to earn better livelihood and also to escape compulsory duty in its state. These Nepali people engaged themselves in livestock and dairy farming and grazing buffaloes and cows. During the beginning of the 20th century, many trained Hindu Bengalis were brought into Assam to run the administration as such trained professionals lack in Assam during that time. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists etc were some of the professions. To look after the trade and commerce during the British rule, the Marwaris settled in Assam. However, inflow of Muslim Bengali migrants was seen throughout the entire 19th century. These people migrated in order to occupy the land in Assam which was cheap and the procedures were hasslefree. Many Muslims also settled in Assam during the Partition of Bengal which led to a large scale refugee influx from Pakistani Bengal into Assam besides West Bengal and Tripura. In and after 1971, there has been a huge influx of Bangladeshi peasants in Assam.

Apart from the illegal migrants, there have been a huge number of interstate migrations in Assam. In the last two decades with the growth of urbanization in Assam, there has been continuous movement of people from the rural to the urban settlements nearby¹. In rural areas, it was found that labor migration was one of the main ways of earning money for most of the unemployed people in the regions. Moreover, natural calamities such as flood which is very common in Assam also urge people to move to areas which are less prone to such calamities. If we see the census report on migration in Assam, there has been continuous increase in the number of migrants in the urban areas. Because of

¹ Dutta, AkhilRanjan, (24 feb, 2013)“ political destiny of immigrants in Assam: National register of citizens”. Economic and political weekly, vol 53, issue no 8.

the growing population, scarce resource, limited opportunities in the rural areas, people tend to migrate to the areas which serve them with better opportunities.

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS OF ILLIGAL MIGRATION

- i. Increasing pressure on land and mounting unemployment in Bangladesh due to uncontrolled steep rise in population and high density of population (964 per sq. km, according to 2011 estimate) possibly has backed the rise of migration into Assam.
- ii. The large scale migration from Bangladesh to India, especially in Assam, has been possible mainly due to the porous India-Bangladesh border of 4,096 kilometers, the fencing of which has not been completed so far.
- iii. Better economic opportunities across the border.
- iv. Competitive politics of vote-bank and the patronage extended to them by political parties/vested political groups in India.
- v. Presence of strong pro-Bangladesh lobby in India often creates myths and confuses Indians about the gravity of the problem.
- vi. Large segments of population in Bangladesh uprooted as a result of severe floods and cyclones.

IMPACTS OF ILLIGAL MIGRATION:

Social Impacts

1. Crisis of identity:

Due to the influx of migrants, the indigenous Assamese people are struggling for their indigenous identity. Their fundamental cultural identity is jeopardized, and significantly their political control will be weakened and their employment opportunities will be undermined by such illegal migration. Assamese found that though the migrants 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.

2. Environmental degradation:

It is worth mentioning that still 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.

3. 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.

4. 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

1. Increase financial burden:

Illegal migration has posed a very critical situation for the entire population of the state. It pressurises on the part of state government, and is creating some emergency consequences over the entire state in terms of education, health, employment and so on and so forth. As the government has to increase the expenditure on education and health facilities to the immigrants.

2. 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.

3. 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

1. Assam agitation:

The failure of government to respond to 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.

2. Vote Bank Politics:

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. Indian political parties used immigrants as vote bank for their party. Political parties used them to gain their vote in election. Such group of people cast it votes on the political leaders who give them security, government facilities etc. In Assam, The All Assam Students Union (AASU) allegedly gave the statement that the BJP led Government enacted the citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 for vote bank politics. This act gives Indian citizenship for illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

3. 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.

4. National Register of citizens (NRC):

The NRC is the list of Indian citizens and was prepared in 1951 on the basis of the census of 1951. The process of NRC update was taken up in Assam as per Supreme Court order in 2013. In order to wean out cases of illegal migration from Bangladesh and other adjoining areas, NRC Updating was carried out under the citizenship act, 1955 and according to rules framed in the Assam Accord. In the case of Assam, there was a cut off date march 25, 1971 after which all foreigners as per the Assam accord were to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law. The final updated NRC for Assam was published on 31 August, 2019. It contained 3, 11, 21,004 persons names out of 33 million population. It's excluded 1,906,657 people from Final NRC.

5. D voters:

D voter's means doubtful voters. Doubtful voters create a major problem in the clear Updation of NRC. D voters are those who have been disenfranchised during electoral roll revision for their alleged lack of proper citizenship credentials.

6. Rise of Communalism politics:

The influxes of large scale immigration have caused the rise of communal violence in Assam. In Assam, there was influx of large scale immigration of Bengali speaking Muslim from Bangladesh. Therefore, two types of communalism have emerged in Assam politics- one is Hindu politics and another is Muslim politics.

Immigration of large scale has increased ethnic tension between the state's indigenous population and Bengali migrants. In Kokrajhar, Muslim migrants were attacked by Bodo separatist's rebel. More than 100 migrants were killed in one such raid at Bansbari, a makeshift camp for displaced Muslim in 1993. (What lies behind Assam violence, 26 July, 2012, BBC)². In July, 2012, communal violence happened between indigenous Bodos and Bengali Speaking Muslim. As of 8 August, 2012, 77 people had died and over 400,000 people were taking shelter in 270 relief camps, after being displaced from almost 400 villages. Eleven people have been reported missing.

² Doley Bitupan (2020) Migration into Assam and its Political and social Impacts on society. European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine ISSN 2515-8260 Volume 7, Issue 04, 2020.

Illegal migrants were employed as a vote bank by Indian political parties. Migrants were welcomed by political parties in their respective states. The political parties claimed that the migrants should be provided with government services. They were utilised by political parties to acquire votes in elections. Such a group of individuals votes for political leaders who provide them with protection, government amenities, and other benefits. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) claimed that the BJP-led government in Assam passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 in order to play vote bank politics.

Illegal migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are granted Indian citizenship under this act. The indigenous people of Assam face a major identity threat as a result of the large-scale immigration. The Assamese culture would be insecure, and illegal migrants will reduce local people's employment opportunities. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a list of Indian citizens that was created in 1951 based on the 1951 census. Assam began the process of updating the NRC in 2013 in response to a Supreme Court ruling. NRC Updating was carried out under the Citizenship Act of 1955 and in accordance with the Assam Accord in order to wean out cases of illegal migration from Bangladesh and other neighbouring territories. In the case of Assam, there was a cut-off date of March 25, 1971, after which all foreigners were to be found, erased, and ejected in line with the law, as per the Assam accord. Assam has seen an increase in communal violence as a result of large-scale immigration. In Assam, there has been a huge influx of Bengali-speaking Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh. As a result, in Assam politics, two sorts of communalism have emerged: Hindu politics and Muslim politics.

CONCLUSION

This issue of Illegal Migration purely is of historical origin which cannot be solved out in a single day. It needs both Centre as well as State Government's political goodwill will be of utmost importance in this regard. Otherwise, the centre have to redistribute the illegal migrants of Assam to other parts of the country too to safeguard the Assamese people and their indigenous identity as well as economical interest. Worth mentioning that Large-scale immigration has exacerbated ethnic tensions between the state's indigenous people and Bengali migrants. Muslim migrants in Kokrajhar were attacked by Bodo separatists. In 1993, a raid on Bansbari, a makeshift camp for displaced Muslims, resulted in the deaths of over 100 migrants. (BBC, July 26, 2012, What lies behind Assam unrest.) Communal violence broke out in July 2012 between indigenous Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims. The flood of immigrants triggered not only an identity problem among Assamese natives but their cultural existence will be jeopardised, their political power compromised, and their career chances harmed as a result of illegal migration. Although the immigrants had arrived in Assam, the Assamese discovered that the majority of them did not identify with the mainstream. Illegal migration is at the foundation of the latest Bodo-Muslim conflict in the BTAD.

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