

# Migration- A Threat to Human Security in Assam

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## Abstract:

Migration is a common phenomenon in the whole world. Most factors that led to migration of people from one place to another are due to climate change, in search of job opportunities, peace and security, education purposes etc. In the same way in case of Assam also we have noticing the same factors which attract the people from neighbouring countries to this land. Assam had been the melting pot of many ethnic groups and also received many migrated groups from the distant past. Till today the migration process is going on. But time by time it is also seen that some conflicts arouse among the migrated and the indigenous people of Assam. Therefore it is to be noticed that whether these migration has caused disturbance to the indigenous people or not? Whether indigenous people have accepted the migrated people heartily? What is the status of migration in Assam today? All these questions come to our mind when we think of migration in Assam's context. All these aspects will be discussed in this paper. In actual sense influx of large number of people into Assam has led to many problems which are sometimes due to scarcity of land or sometimes due to some other factors. People of Assam are insecure in their own land. Therefore it is very important to be aware of this. This paper aims to study the different aspects of migration that disturbed the human security in Assam and tries to highlight how migration can be a threat to Assam's peace and security.

**Keywords:** Migration, Threat, Security, Assam

## Introduction:

Migration is a global phenomenon. The reasons for migration can be divided into two main aspects, the so-called "push and pull" factors. Push factors are those in their old place which force people to move. For example, there may be civil wars or wars in general in the country, but political or religious oppression, climate changes, lack of jobs or simply poverty are all important push factors. Pull factors are factors in the target country which encourage people to move; these include peace and safety, a chance of a better job, better education, social security, a better standard of living in general as well as political and religious freedom. There are two main types of migration: first, internal migration, i.e. migration within one country, and secondly international migration, which means the movement from one country to another.

Migration is always a reality in Assam, the north-eastern state of India. It is to be mentioned that Assam has been receiving a large number of migrated people from other countries mainly from Bangladesh, from Nepal. The present scenario of Assam has been facing lots of problem due to such influx of people from other parts of India and from Bangladesh. Assam is compounded by immigration problems and

demographic changes which have pitted indigenous people against the migrants. So time by time it has been seen that there are some conflicts arise between the receiving areas people against the migrated people. It is because of their different socio- economic and cultural backgrounds that they cannot adjust with one another and unfortunately in some cases there are resistant groups who do not accept other group and surface issue like insider-outsider adding to the conflict.

The trend of migration from other countries to Assam has been continuing since time immemorial. However the impact of such influx of people from other countries is a big threat to the host country or the state. Again migration from the same country is also a threat. The factors of migration may be related to job opportunities, peace and security, land etc. but these underlying factors lead to clashes between the migrants and the receiver. Impact of migration is many sided. That is why migration is being associated with security threat. Assam has been facing the illegal migration from Bangladesh since many decades.

This paper aims to study some aspects of migration especially illegal migration from Bangladesh to Assam and the internal migration that disturbed the human security in Assam and tries to highlight how migration can be a threat to Assam's peace and security.

### **Trends of Migration in Assam**

Migration is a global trend and it is the most common factor in Assam. It is difficult to say with certainty when and how Assam was populated due to lack of full-proof historical evidence. However, if the physical type, language and history of the different races residing in Assam are studied, it appears that the state was populated by different people coming from different directions at different times. The forefathers of today's races of the state had migrated from Myanmar (Burma), China, Japan, Thailand. The study of history from a long term perspective shows that Assam is, in fact, a land of migrants. Assam is a state sharing the international borders of countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. If we trace the history of migration into Assam then we have to mention about the various linguistic groups who entered Assam from different passage. During the British period we have the accounts on migration of various people from Bangladesh who came to Assam as a workers and tea planters.

During the colonial period, when the British rulers established their effective rule in Assam, they ordinate posts in the administrative system. The British administration had encouraged migration of thousands of people who came from Bihar to work on the tea plantations and of hundreds of thousands of Bengali peasants to settle on the vast uncultivated tracts of Assam.

Between 1939 and 1947 Muslim communalists encouraged Bengali Muslim migration to create a better bargaining position in case of partition of India. Partition led to a large-scale refugee influx from Pakistani Bengal into Assam besides West Bengal and Tripura. In 1971, after the Pakistani crackdown in East Bengal, more than one million refugees sought shelter in Assam. Most of them went back after the creation of Bangladesh, but nearly 100,000 remained. After 1971, there occurred a fresh, continuous and large-scale influx of land-hungry Bangladeshi peasants into Assam. But land in Assam had by now become scarce and Assamese peasants and tribal feared loss of their holdings. However, this demographic transformation generated the feeling of linguistic, cultural and political insecurity, which

overwhelmed the Assamese and imparted a strong emotional content to their movement against illegal migrants in the eighties, massive, anti-illegal migration movement. The leaders of the movement claimed that the number of illegal aliens was as high as 31 to 34 per cent of the state's total population. They, therefore, asked the central government to seal Assam's borders to prevent farther inflow of migrants, to identify all illegal aliens and delete their names from the voters list and to postpone elections till this was done, and to deport or disperse to other parts of India all those who had entered the state after 1961<sup>1</sup>.

The most disturbing development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Assam had been of population explosion. It has increased from 3.3 million in 1901 to 22.3 million in 1991 while India, the country as a whole from 238.4 million in 1991 to 843.9 million in 1991. Decadal variations in the same period will also exhibit Assam had much higher rate than of Indian average although in natural growth there is no major difference between Assam and all India. Had Assam's population increased at the same rate as that of India from 1901 to 1991, which is 54 percent, the population of truncated Assam in 1991 would have been 14.9 million are by and large immigrants and their descendants. From the study of different routes, Internal migration within North east and external migration also took place from decadal growth of population it is seen that tribal places like Nagaon, Morigaon etc. started feeling pressure due to the encroachment of tribal lands by the immigrant population and specially the bordering districts<sup>2</sup>. Migration of people in general into North east India and particularly in Assam is an old history. It occurred in different times and from countries like China, Myanmar etc. The internal migration within North east India also dates back during the time of British administration.

### **Status of Migration in Assam**

The present status of migration in Assam is a threat to human security. Though it is assume that migration has not been always associated to threat but in actual sense it is noticed that it is due to migration many clashes arose among the indigenous and the migrated people in Assam. As discussed earlier that Assam has been receiving lots of migrated people from the distant past and it is still in continuing but the difference is that earlier we did not find any clashes among the both sides of the people. But the present scenario is quite distinct from the past. Now the people are very conscious about their own identity and security in their own land. So they don't allow the people from other parts of the world to enter in their land. Though there is no actual data in our hand but it is estimated that Assam's demographic changes caused due to illegal migration from Bangladesh. The bordering districts of Assam have been congested with illegal migrants. Rapid changes in Assam's demographic composition played an important role in the construction and evolution process of Assamese identity.

According to provisional Indian census for 2011, Assam has a population of over of over 31 million with an area of 78,438 square kilometres (48,739 miles). Assam is home to several indigenous tribes including the Bodos, who are numerically the largest tribe in state comprising just over 5% of the total population. The mass population movement of Bengali Muslims into Assam continued after the departure of the British and proliferated with the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Since 1971, large numbers of Muslim migrants from Bangladesh have illegally crossed the porous Indo-Bangladesh border into India's north-eastern states, including Assam for economic reasons<sup>3</sup>.

Migration whether it is internal or external always leads to disequilibrium of various kinds of socio-political and economic life of the people.

### **Migration and Conflicts among the People in Assam**

Assam the north eastern state of India and the land of many ethnic groups is well known for conflict between many ethnic groups since time immemorial. Many tribes like Bodo, Karbi, Kuki, Mishing, Rabha, Tiwa etc. are the inhabitants of Assam. Difference in aspirations and dreams often ignite conflict among the ethnic groups. There have been a large number of conflicts among the ethnic groups of Assam since independence. The nature of those conflicts was sometimes political, sometimes linguistic, sometimes due to immigration problems.

Migration might not be the immediate cause for the conflict, but it does germinate conflict. Due to migration there is always a tension in the receiving areas, which varies from economic to insecurity between the insider and the outsider. The receiving groups, who are the indigenous groups feel a threat of losing land in the hands of outsider when there is any change in land use pattern, increase in number of outsider and aspiration in dominating the land. The internal migration and resource conflict are closely linked and the worst manifestation of this kind can be seen in the form of inter-ethnic conflict. In cases where, ethnic community claimed exclusive right over a space, which they defined as their homeland, on the ground that they are the original indigenous groups of the land, holding that outsider have no right to settle in that particular land. While on the other hand, the minority groups feels a sense of being subjugated by the majority groups and seek justice to what they claim is their right.

The recent clash between Bodo and immigrant Muslim can be taken into account. There is a history of violent conflict over land in Assam between the indigenous Bodo tribes and ethnic Bengali Muslim settlers. The first recorded one was dating back to 1952, with subsequent violent clashed occurring in 1979- 1985, 1991-1994 and 2008. The most recent riots and violence between Bodos and Bangladeshi Muslims erupted in July 2012 in the BTAD districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang and Dhubri<sup>4</sup>.

There are no official statistics on the number of illegal Bangladeshis in India in general, although some unofficial estimates put the number at 20 million similarly there is no concrete data on the number of Bangladeshi migrants in Assam specifically, although in 2005, the former Assam Governor Lt. General Ajai Singh reported that close to 6000 Bangladeshi enter Assam every day<sup>5</sup>. It would be reasonable to carefully claim that the clash between Bodo-Muslim was a result of the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants rapaciously encroaching upon land belonging to the native communities, inevitably inviting spontaneous retaliation by exasperated natives.

Another instance can be found in Assam Agitation. The racial turn in Assamese nationalism could be traced back to the influx of illegal migrants from East Pakistan after partition of India in 1947 and later Bangladesh since 1971 onwards. This massive migrants flow created immense anxieties amongst the ethnic Assamese population, who resented the rapidly changing demographic profile of the state and the loss of land to the Bengali migrant. The dominant Assamese fear in that the Bangladeshi illegal migrants will demographically dominate Assam politically, socially and economically. This issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh resulted in the non-violent highly visited Assam-Agitation (1979-1984)<sup>6</sup>

spearheaded by the All Assam Student's Union. However during the period of Assam Agitation, one of the most visible and horrific incidents precipitated by the narrative of demonising immigrants was the Nellie massacre of 18 February 1983 in the undivided Nagaon district.

### **Question of Security Threat**

To discuss about the migration as a security threat we have to look into it from two perspectives i.e. migrants can harm the security of our state and on the other hand the question of security for the migrants. In order to provide security for their population, nations develop traditions. Traditions, system of justice and rights, ensure the security and stability of a nation. Through the disruption of existing traditions, immigrants, who bring with them different cultures, imbalance the nation. The principle or position which links immigrants and the demise of the nations is that cultural differences threaten the existing way of life<sup>7</sup>. It is thus seen as rational to preserve one's culture through the exclusion of other cultural groups. This negative attitude towards the migrants should be understood as racism. This negative belief and a discriminatory action toward somebody on the basis of his or her social membership is prejudice. This racial prejudice that migrants face is a result of refying race and cultural difference and associating such difference with threat.

Similarly, the reclaiming of the individual has reinforced the link between security and migration. Organisations and states concerned with migration and refugees have shifted the focus from human rights to "Human Security". The human security approach attempts to re-centre the place of the individual, making the human subject the analytical focus. This "people-centered" approach was given its empirical form through the 1994 United Nations Development Report. The reports highlight the importance of measuring human security as well as human development. It contends that "to address the growing challenges of human security, a new development paradigm is needed that puts people at the centre of development and respects the natural system on which all life depends". The call for a new development paradigm, as seen in the development Report, represents a shift from defining security in terms of states and military capacities. Instead, the human security approach is concerned with potential vulnerabilities and risks that threaten population. The United Nations has highlighted these new threats to populations. Threats include trans-border challenges, such as unchecked population growth, environmental degradation, excessive international migration, narcotic production and trafficking and international terrorism<sup>8</sup>.

In migration discourses identity of the host population is often used as an argument justifying securitisation. The Bangladeshi migration as a threat to the Assamese identity is a very strong argument used in the newspapers to legitimise exclusion and deportation of Bangladeshi migrants. The link between identity and migration is made explicitly and the "influx of illegal Bangladeshis into Assam" is constructed as a threat to "the ethno-cultural identity of the people of the region. This category is then easily applied to the Assamese Muslims who settled in Assam before 1971. Indeed, when identities are securitised their complex nature and flexibility are denied and suppressed. Securitisation, according to Barry Buzan and Ole Waever - who once coined the concept, means "the staging of existential issues in politics to lift them above politics. In security discourse, an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; thus, by labelling it as security, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means" The key idea behind the idea of securitization is that security is a 'speech act'.

There are no security issues per se, but all issues can be constructed as security issues through ‘speech acts’ by ‘securitising actors’. “The utterance itself is the act” In the process of constructing the Bangladeshis as a security threat to Assamese identity, the Assamese identity is reduced to a static exclusive version of itself that does not account for its historical complexity and formation against the Bengali-speakers from West Bengal that further creates problem in the ongoing migration from Bangladesh. The Assamese Muslims and their identity crisis is a case in point.

### Conclusion

The above discussion indicates that migration is a threat to human security. As mentioned above that the main focus is on the migrated people from Bangladesh to Assam has threaten the security of the indigenous people of Assam. The impact of migration caused many clashes and the problem of identity crisis. Clashes arose among the insider and the outsider due to scarcity of land, due to cultural differences and so on. Although the national security argument still holds its primary position; the 1998 Governor’s report recommendation provides a telling summary of the identity threat construction: “Awareness should be promoted about illegal migration into Assam being not only a threat to the identity of the Assamese people but what is more, being a grave threat to our national security”. The same types of threat in relation to identity can be found in the newspapers examined below. In order to justify protection of the Assamese people, the press resorts to discourses of differentiation whereby the Assamese and the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh are juxtaposed to one another. However, the difficulty of distinguishing, for example, Bengali-speaking Indian nationals from foreigners for purposes of expulsion and deportation leads to the proliferation of the ambiguous category of “suspected illegal migrant”.

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