

INFLUX OF ILLEGAL MIGRANTS AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF BANGLADESHI IMMIGRATION IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Human groups have a tendency to move towards and settle in the areas of plenty from the areas of scarcity due to economic factors. However, when socio-political aspects are involved, such movements are really of serious consequences. The ever-changing demographic and ethnic composition of people influenced the political and economic set up even before partition of India. Consequences of Bangladeshi immigration in Assam can be viewed in different ways but it cannot be separate from each other. First the economic consequences by immigrants, second the conflict between indigenous tribal and immigrants due to illegal occupation of land, third the crisis of identity of indigenous population and the fourth is the most important and the recent one, the movement against foreigners. The later one is the most important factors in Assam for its social disruptions and political instabilities and also important from the point of view of different act and law related to immigration and citizenship and governmental roll in the state. This paper also try to analysis all the push and pull (economic) factors of migration and its consequences of major streams that have taken place during pre and post-independence period in Assam, with special reference to illegal immigration from Bangladesh.

Keywords: Conflict, immigration, in-migration, out migration, Internal, International, consequences, identities, Assam, Bangladesh.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Migration is one of the most controversial issues in the current debate on socio-economic and political policies in many countries of destination, Assam is also not lacking behind. It has been playing a predominant role in demographic changes. It is a form of geographical or spatial mobility between one spatial unit and another, generally involving a change of residence from the place of origin to the place of endpoint ¹. It is a necessary element of normal population adjustment and equilibrium within a nation or a sub-national spatial unit. Migration means change of place of living beings for almost long stable period. It implies giving up some political boundary. When people leave one place and go to a new place for temporary span of time, it is not migration from the demographic point of view. Migration is shifting of the home and not the house. It is closely connected with economic changes and with important national

socio-economic and political events ². Migration takes both quantitative and qualitative changes in the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of a region. It is now recognized as an important factor in determining plans for social, economic and political development, especially in developing countries. At present the researcher has been interested in making relation of migration to regional economic growth, business cycle, the supply of skill and unskilled labour, the growth of industry, outflow and inflow of income, wage differences between the place of origin and the place of destination of migrants, etc. For all these reasons migration becomes an important topic of analysis for the population researchers.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

The study of migration is one of the major branches of demography. It is the third demographic component of population change along with fertility and mortality. The importance of migration in effecting the growth and decline of population and in modifying the demographic characteristics of the areas of origin and areas of destination had long been acknowledged. A population may gain in size by experiencing an influx of migration and it may diminish in size by an evacuation of some of its members to join another population. If this in-migration or out-migration is selective, of people with particular demographic, social or economic characteristics, it will affect not only the size but also the composition (age, sex, language, religion etc.) of the population. Therefore, the study of migration is one of the major branches of demography. It is closely connected with economic changes and with important national socio-economic and political events.

Migration involves a complete change of residence and community affiliations of the individuals. In the process of changing his residence and community, the migrant tends simultaneously to change employers, friends, neighbors and many other social, economic and political stakeholders ³.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

The exploration of future trends of migration is not new. **Gregory (1928)** studied in London he found that migration has a multiple effects of social, political and economic levels after that a numerous scholars have considered the manner in which migration may change in the future.⁴

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) has produced an in-depth analysis of global migration scenarios. In 2001 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, found that the traditional approach to exploring the future of migration is to use statistical data

to analyse previous trends, they make assumptions about the main relationships with several key variables, and forecast migration flows into the future. The advantage of this approach lies in the fairly systematic use of historical and current migration data.⁵

Erzan et al., (2006) produced projections for immigration from Turkey to Germany considering demographic developments, urban and rural growth, productivity, internal migration and unemployment. This led to the development of two scenarios, one emulating for Turkey the actual experience of EU countries with free movement of labour, and the second repeating the experience of the guest worker agreements until 1973. One of their conclusions is that 'it is possible that if Turkey loses the membership perspective, the EU may end up having more immigrants than under a free movement of labour regime with a prosperous EU-member Turkey'.⁶

There are a number of studies that focus on the socio-ethnic, political, and economic issues related to migration that has been taking place in large scale well into the postcolonial period in Assam. These issues have been of vital importance in recent decades. **Weiner (1978)**⁷ takes an in-depth look into the social and political conflicts and cleavages that have resulted from the responses of the indigenous population to migration into Assam. In a related work, **Weiner and Katzenstain (1981)**⁸ evaluate government's preferential policies towards natives who lagged behind the migrants in grabbing economic opportunities in the state. **Hazarika (1994)**⁹ discusses migration into Assam and other northeastern states as a part of the historical and political context of the rise of insurgency and violence in recent times.

IV. DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

The methodology to be used in this paper will be conventional and analytical. The data collected were processed and analysed as per the requirement of the study to draw inferences and conclusion. Important inputs for the study were also received from the experts, made available from different journals, published books, news papers and various websites etc. Personal experience and knowledge in the field also helped to make meaningful interpretation

V. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The present study has been pursued keeping in view the following objectives-

- [a] To analyse the push and pull factors of migration and its consequences for neighbouring countries from Bangladesh that have taken place during pre and post-independence period in Assam.

[b] To analyse the socio-economic and political consequences of illegal immigration from

Bangladesh

[c] To analyse the role of government and different political parties against the illegal migrants

from Bangladesh.

[d] To propose some suggestions to protect Assam for the illegal migrants from Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries.

A. Migration during the Pre-Independence Period :

A new phase of migration started with the annexation of Assam by the British. Several streams of migrants originating from different parts of the sub-continent started entering into Assam since the growth of British commercial interests in the mid nineteenth century. Five such prominent streams of migrants since then have been identified. These are: (1) Tea Garden Labourers, (2) Muslim Peasants from then East Bengal, (3) Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), (4) Nepalese and (5) Other Migrants from different parts of India.¹⁰ The total number of illegal immigrants, during post-independence period, amounting to 32.50 lakhs from East Pakistan/Bangladesh (excluding their off-spring) has constituted nearly 12 per cent of the total population of Assam in 2001. These immigrants including their off-spring have brought a major change in demographic pattern of Assam. This is clearly depicted in the following table-1.1 & Fig-1.1((**Annexure-I**))

From the table-1.1 and figure-1.1(**Annexure-I**) we have found that in 2001, the percentage of Muslim population has been about 30.91 against 28.43 in 1991 in the State. Some districts of Assam which were traditional destinations of the Bangladeshi immigrants such as Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nowgaon, Karimganj and Hailakandi have Muslim majority population in 2001. (**Figure-3, Annexure-I**)

(a) Tea Garden Labourers : With the discovery of tea, and its profitability and potentiality has awakened interest of the British capitalists to cultivate of this plant in Assam from the early part of the 19th century. The acreage under tea and production thereof started growing rapidly from that time. But because of the scarcity of the local labourers the planters had to face serious difficulties in expanding tea cultivation¹¹. The planters complained to Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India that 'scarcity of labour is one of the most serious and real difficulties with which we had to contend. The indigenous population has been wholly insufficient to develop the province'.¹² According to the C.A. Bruce (Superintendent of Tea Culture in Assam) employ of Assamese labour cost is very i.e 'an extent of 300 by 300 will cost from Rs 200/- to Rs

300/- i.e. according to the manners in which the miserable opium-smoking Assamese work. This alone ought to point out the utility of introducing a superior race of labourers who would not only work themselves, but encourage other women and children to do the same.

Therefore, scarcity of local labourers made the British to import labourers from other parts of the country, where the population was dense or less secure and more accustomed to working for wages. So, a *Tea Planters Association* was formed in 1886 for the purpose, of a labour importation system was organised from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Chotanagpur, Madhya Pradesh, United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh), Tamilnadu, Bombay (Maharashtra) to Assam Valley. Most of the labourers were brought along with other members of their family because single labourers tended to run away from the estates, more often than those with families ¹³. Moreover, the children and women of the labourers also worked in the garden. The principal recruiting areas of garden labourers generated several push factors which provided main motive force behind such migration. Thus, the demand for labour to work in the tea gardens of Assam generated a pull effect, the unfavorable economic conditions in the recruiting regions created a push effect to migrate ¹⁴. The total number of tea garden labourers imported from different places from 1876-1931 is shown in the following table-1.2: **(Annexure-I)**

From the table-1.2 we have found that, Annual Reports on Immigration in Assam for respective years mention the total number of tea garden labourers (accumulated) consisting wholly of migrants were 67500, 107000, 243400, 385700, 461800, 723700, and 747200 in 1876, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931 respectively excluding those who left gardens after the expiry of the contract period and took up independent agriculture outside the garden ¹⁵.

(b) The Muslim Peasants:

The second stream of migration started in the early 20th century was the Muslim Peasants from the East Bengal Districts of Myamansingh, Pabna, Bogra and Ranpur. These were mostly the victims of extra-ordinary rise in the prices of food grains acute indebtedness pressure of population on land, oppression of the Zaminders, high land rent, etc. **Firstly**, the cheap and plentiful supply of virgin land with freedom of ryotwary settlement in the Brahmaputra Valley offered attractive opportunities to those unfortunate farmers of Eastern Bengal. **Secondly**, when Assam had lost its separate identity as a province during the partition of Bengal in 1905 and was administratively merged with the Dacca Division of Bengal with a view to forming a new province called the 'Province of

Eastern Bengal and Assam' with headquarters at Dacca, the communication gap between the people of Assam Valley and those of Eastern Bengal narrowed down. This also facilitated movements of people from one region to the other. **Thirdly**, there took place great improvements in railway transport between Eastern Bengal and Assam in the first decade of the 20th century. Prior to this period, the only conveyance between Assam Valley and Eastern Bengal was navigable river transport provided by the river Brahmaputra. But in 1902 the Valley was connected by railways with Western Bengal through Eastern Bengal and in 1904 with Eastern Bengal through the Suruma Valley. These developments in railways greatly reduced the remoteness of Assam from the rest of British India which had increased the mobility of the Bengal peasantry and large number of farmers from the overcrowded districts of Eastern Bengal started pouring into the Assam Valley from the first decade of the 20th century. **Fourthly**, the political development in India during the twenties of the 20th century also helped in attracting East Bengal peasants to settle in Assam. Therefore in 1951 Census Report remarked that Muslim migration to Assam began merely as a result of the inter-play of economic forces in East Bengal vis-a-vis Assam though later it took some political color.

Presently, a study made in the OKD (Omeo Kumar Das Institute) Institute of Social Science and Development in 2003, the natural growth rate of immigrants of Assam was estimated at 19.68 per cent during the decade 1981-91, birth rate being 33.15 and the death rate being 13.47 against Assam's aggregate natural growth rate of 17.3 (Birth Rate 26.9 and Death Rate 9.6).¹⁶ Applying this natural growth rate of immigrants to the total Muslim population of 64 lakhs in 1991, the total number of Muslim population in Assam should have been 76.60 lakhs against the 84 lakhs as per 2001 Census. Thus the excess of 7.4 lakhs Muslim population of the State can roughly be attributed to the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh during 1991-2001.

From the different census report it is clear that the approximate number of Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan/Bangladesh living in Assam during 1951-71 would be 18.65 lakhs, whereas 1971-91 would be 6.45 lakh and 1991-2001 would be 7.40 lakhs.

(c) The Bengali Hindu Migrants :

The third stream of migrants is the Bengali Hindus who were brought by the Britishers for their office and other professional works. It happened because of their early initiation to English education and the British-India administrative system. The movement of this stream was intensified along with the opening of new railway lines, post and telegraphs offices, development of tea and petroleum

industries in particular. The 1951 Census Report gave the total number of refugees in Assam including present Meghalaya as 2,74,455 of which 2,72,075 came from then East Pakistan. Cachar being the nearest district received the highest number (93,177) followed by Goalpara (44,967) and Kamrup (42,871). Sibsagar district received the lowest number (7,514) while Darrang and Lakhimpur received 18,833 and 13,965 persons respectively.

(d) Nepalese Migrants: The fourth stream of migrants into Assam consists of the Nepalese immigrants. They were more or less unnoticed because they mainly settled in the forest areas near the food hills and out-skirts of two areas supplying milk and fuel to the urban dwellers. At present a major part of the business of milk and milk products are in the hands of these Nepalese migrants. Besides, the availability of the educated local Assamese people, still a large number of Nepalese are employed as porters, *chowkidars* and office peon throughout the State.

The total Nepali population in Assam was only 21,347 in 1901 constituting nearly 0.65 per cent of the total population of Assam, which increased to 83,306 in 1931. During the post independence period there was sudden increase in the immigration of Nepalese into Assam. Their number increased to 1,01,338 in 1951 to 2,15,213 in 1961, to 3,49,116 in 1971 and further to 4,32,519 in 1991. In 1991 the Nepalese constitute nearly 1.93 per cent of the State's population. Twenty one per cent of the total Nepali population in Assam are living in Sonitpur district followed by 17.60 per cent in Tinsukia district in 1991. The immigration of Nepalese migrants still continues as the citizens of Nepal do not require any passport to enter India, under the terms of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950, the Tripartite Delhi Agreement of 1951 and the 1956 Revised Indo-Nepal agreement. Thus, free interchange and flow of both country's nationals as well as their right to own property in either country is allowed unhindered and without restrictions. These agreements only made official a situation which had existed de facto from the British period. The reciprocity which the agreements formulated still continues with 3.24 lakhs Indian-born population in Nepal and 5.25 lakhs Nepal born population in India according to the Census Report of 1971 of both the countries. Bihar alone accounted for 23.27 per cent of the Nepal born population in India which was the highest among all States in 1971. Assam stood next to Bihar by absorbing 17.41 per cent of the Nepal born population in India in 1971.

(e) The Migrants from Different Parts of India: The fifth stream of migrants into Assam are the migrants from other parts of India seeking economic opportunities in trading, construction works and white coloured jobs, particularly from Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh,

Tamil Nadu, Kerela and West Bengal. It is to be noted that the migrants from Rajasthan need a separate historical analysis because of their significant role in the economy of Assam since the British period. The majority of the migrants from Rajasthan are from Marwar and they are popularly known as *Marwaris*.

The 1891 Census reported only 4,877 migrants from Rajputana and their number has increased to 22,000 in 1961 and further to 70,000 in 1971. They are mostly concentrated in the urban and industrial centre's and virtually the entire business and commercial transactions of the State at present can be said to be in their control.

Secondly, the migration from the States of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh also started with the beginning of British rule in Assam. The migrants were absorbed as washer-men, barbers, sweepers, cobblers, load carriers, wage labourers in construction and their inflow increased with the extension of railway lines and steamer service which opened new avenues of employment in Assam. Their inflow was further intensified after independence when their services were in great demand as a result of industrialization and urbanization in the region. Thus their concentration is found in the urban and industrial areas of the State.

Thirdly, the in-migration of the people from other States of India is mostly a post-independence phenomenon. Of these, the Punjabi migrants are somewhat economically more significant as they are mostly engaged in commercial and industrial establishments of their own while most of the other migrants are either salary holders in some companies or public sector undertakings, as a contractor or a wage labourer in construction activities. The most of the internal migrants from other States of India are found in the urban areas of the State. The trend and intensity of inter-state and international migrants in Assam as per the 2001 census of India is shown in the following table:1.3. (**Annexure-I**)

B. Socio-economic and political consequences of illegal immigration from Bangladesh :

In this section an attempt has been made to highlight a few major socio-economic and political consequences of this stream of migration into Assam.

(A) Economic Consequences:

The settlement of Muslim immigrants in Assam in initial stage increased State income, agricultural productivity, expanded area under multiple crops and also encouraged local cultivators to adopt improved agricultural practices and introduced the cultivation of cash crops like jute, vegetable, tobacco, oil seed, sugarcane, etc.. But subsequently the immigration had put tremendous pressure

on land leading to declining output per agricultural worker, enhanced they created the problem of unemployment in the local society. Sir Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam at the end of nineteenth century found four-fifth of cultivable waste lands untouched by plough. He wanted to cover these lands with food crops. Since, only three percent of the state's population belonged to the working class (Census, 1891-1901) he felt to increase labour supply from the neighbouring areas of the state. The hope of Sir Henry was fulfilled with the completion of Assam-Bengal and Eastern-Bengal (Present Bangladesh) Rail Projects which accelerated inflow of migrants from Bengal. Many of these labourers settle down permanently (Census, 1891& 1901). Of the cultivators, only a few migrants from the neighbouring districts of East Bengal crossed the boundary and settled down in Sylhet and char or riverine lands of the districts of Goalpara. This situation, however, altered at the turn of the century. The pressure on soil, diluvium on their home districts, and availability of cheap, plentiful and fertile lands on easy terms in Assam in places of expensive and uncomfortable holdings as sub-tenants in Bengal drove the immigrants, particularly of the district of Mymensing, to move up into the valley. During 1911-21 an appreciable size of Bangladeshi population was found in all the then four lower middle districts (Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang and Goalpara) (Census, 1921).

According to the Land Revenue Report, during 1930-40, the vast amount of land (6,162 thousand acres) was settled with Bangladeshi immigrants. In the next decade, 1940-50 the area settled was even larger i.e.8,926 thousand acres (Census of India, 1951).¹⁷ The immigrants occupied in organised way wastelands particularly grazing and forest reserves. 'Their hunger for land was so great', remarked the Census Superintendent (1951), 'that the eagerness to grasp as much land as the could cultivate, they not infrequently encroached on government reserves but also on lands belonging to the local people from which they could be evicted only with great difficulty.'¹⁸ Fearing the possibility of peace the disturbance of Government implemented some rules for the favour of the indigenous population, particularly of tribal people. New comers were not allowed to settle in the areas where tribal people were inhabitants, and lines were drawn on maps of different localities to indicate boundary beyond which immigrants were not allowed to settle. A considerable area had been settled on by immigrants, but the demand for land has continuously out-stripped the progress of ordered settlements and many immigrants occupied lands set apart as professional grazing reserves, where they paid a grazing tax to government. In many areas there were conflicts between tribal people and immigrants, due to capturing of tribal people's land by immigrants. The Line System, devised in 1916, was enforced in 1920 in the districts of Nagaon and then subdivision of

Kamrup district compelling the migrants to settle in segregate locations. Under the Line System lands were divided into three categories: (i) open to immigrants, (ii) close to immigrants, (iii) and where a line was drawn only where they could settle only one side of it. The system was practically successful in restricting indiscriminate occupation, but 'mixed' and 'closed settlements' turned into immigrant settlements mainly because of insincerity and corrupt practices of the settlement officers (Guha, 1977). The Line System was opposed by the immigrants and the Government appointed a committee to review the whole system. While emphasizing the need to develop extensive wastelands, the committee desired retention of the Line System for the protection of tribal settlements. On the resignation of the Coalition Government, Sir Saadullah, who came to power in November 1939, wanted abolition of the Line System to encourage settlement of Muslim immigrants to make Assam permanent base of Muslim League.¹⁹

In a study conducted regarding the pressure of population on agricultural lands of Karbi Anglong district in Assam by Borah and Sachan, found that the East Bengal (Bangladesh) origin people in the district of Karbi Anglong increased by geometrical progression. From the field evidence, that authors had collected, it was found that the plain dwellers among the Karbi of Howraghat Development Block were forcibly alienated from their fertile cultivable lands by the erstwhile East Bengal immigrants. The Karbi population of this area were economically very weak and taking advantage of this the immigrants manufactured certain devices, by which they could gradually and methodically grab arable lands from the farmer's possession.²⁰

(B) Social Consequences :

(a) Consequences of illegal immigration on Language Problem:

The British, on assuming power in Assam took two important steps that have left deep scars on the politics of Assam. The first was systematic exclusion of the Ahom aristocracy from the portals of power and the second employment of large number of Hindu Bengalis in low profile jobs of the East India Company. These Bangladeshis brought with them not only their language and culture but also ethnic arrogance with disastrous consequences for Assam.

For absolutely no rhyme or reason, the British rule made Bengali the official language of Assam in 1837 and it continued to remain as the official language for next 35 years. This decision of British rulers did incalculable harm to the cause of peaceful relationship among Assamese and Bengalis and the relation between these two have never been cordial ever since. It may be mentioned here that Assamese and Bengali are totally different languages although they are written

in the same script. This imposition of Bengali language over the Assamese language has been attributed to a British official Francis Jenkins who had taken the decision and wrote: "It was I who was at the root of the advice in favour of introducing Bengali. It was my order that Robinson carried out" (Chattopadhyay, 1988).

The motive of British was not against the Assamese language by imposing Bengali language, but they wanted to satisfy those Bengali immigrants' worker, who was working for their company to get better work from these workers. This not only gave a serious setback to the growth of Assamese language but had other consequences too. So, even when Assamese was restored to its original status in 1872, facilities for teaching Bengali had to be provided in school if twelve or more student requested to use Bengali. This gave rise to conflict over the medium of instruction in schools and colleges of Assam which spilled over the next century resulting in enervating conflicts between the rival regional chauvinism based on the religion, culture and language. The Assam Domiciled and Settlers Association (Assam Citizens Association), a middle class Bengali association, in the meeting at Nagaon district, 24 March, 1940, demanded for equal right of education through the medium of one's mother tongue.²¹ The immigrants in the beginning did not create any problem for the indigenous society as they were exclusively settled in immigrant localities along riverine tracts. With the increase in their number they very often encroached upon the government reserves and wasteland of the indigenous farmers. This led to frequent frictions with the local farmers who petitioned to the Indian National Congress. Ultimately, the Government had to interfere by introducing line system, colonization scheme and tribal belt to keep away the immigrants from the occupation of land in the periphery of the local people. To allay the fear of the Assamese and to obtain a permanent footing in Assam, the Muslim immigrants started accepting Assamese language and culture. According to the census report (1961)-*Bengali Hindu always returned Bengali and nothing else as their mother tongue, Bengali Muslim immigrants into Assam Valley, on the other hand, have a tendency to return Assamese as their mother tongue even in the independence days because what they want is land in the valley and if knowledge of Assamese can help them to become indigenous, they do not mind about their mother tongue. After independence the Bengali Muslim immigrants in to Assam Valley have, almost to a man, returned their mother tongue as Assamese whether they know the language or not.*²² As a result, the number of Assamese speaking population increased from 2 million in 1931 to 5 million in 1951.²³ The table-1.4 (**Annexure-I**) shows the Percentage of Assamese and Bengali speaking population to total population from 1931 to 1991.

However it is observed from the table and fig-1.2 (**Annexure-I**) that, the percentage of Bengali speaking people has been declining continuously. It is also observed that high increase of the Assamese speaking population does not generally represent an actual increase in the number of original Assamese speaking people and that the increase is due to adoption of Assamese language by people speaking other languages. The adoption of Assamese language was a continuous process by the Bengali immigrants till the half of the nineteenth century. But the process is still continuing by those Bangladeshi immigrants who came to Assam even in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

As the matter of fact from the figure-1.4 in the census of 1931 when the linguistic tabulation was recorded, the district of Sylhet was an integral part of Assam having nearly a quarter of Bengali-speaking of the total population. The separation of Sylhet in 1947 and the desire of Muslim immigrants like the tea tribes to adopt Assamese as mother tongue in the land of their adoption, the number of Assamese-speaking rose from 31.4 percent in 1931 to 56.7 percent in 1951. The immigrant Muslims identified themselves linguistically and culturally and returned their mother tongue as Assamese in successive censuses although they continued to speak their own language in their home.²⁴

Thus, encroaching lands and affecting the identity of indigenous population fresh immigrants are reported to have committed various other acts of lawlessness, creating tension among the indigenous people. In the last quarter of the 20th century, problems associated with Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants turned towards another dimension. Assam has experienced many religious conflicts, large-scale violence and communal riots between Muslim immigrants and local people and a complete breakdown of law and order situation in the state. As a result large-scale agitations take place by the student against the foreign nationals, particularly against those Bangladeshi Muslims who illegally stay in the state. It has not only affected the socio cultural, economic situation in the state, but has also adversely affected the political situations.

(b)Consequences of illegal immigration on environmental degradation:

Another serious consequence of the immigration from Bangladesh and also from Nepal was the environmental degradation with the fall in forest coverage in Assam. Large areas of forest land were encroached upon by both these streams of immigrants for settlement and cultivation. The State experienced declining percentage of land area under forests. It was 39 per cent in 1951-52 that declined sharply to 28 per cent in 1965-66 and further to 26 per cent 1976-77 which was far below the National Forest Policy's requirements of 33 per cent. However, with the Supreme Court's order of banning deforestation and the Government's

policy of a forestation the percentage of land area under forests in Assam has marginally improved to about 30 per cent now.²⁵

(c) Consequences of illegal immigration on Crises of Identity: The influx of the immigrants created a crisis of identity among the indigenous Assamese. If the pressure was allowed to continue, they feared, as in the case of Tripura, their economic, political and cultural life would be endangered and their very existence would be at stake. The Assamese found that though the immigrants had settled in Assam but most of them were averse to identify themselves with the mainstream and considered themselves as minorities and often looked upon their counterparts elsewhere for inspiration and guidance. Some of them did not even hesitate at times to do harm to the State to suit their interests. The failure of immigrant population to adopt themselves to the local language, customs and traditions had accentuated the identity crisis. 'A proper socialization process, which alone could have helped to generate understanding among different communities, was frequently impaired in the wake of periodic inter-community clashes and killings and the tendency of each person to continue himself to his own group.'²⁶

(d) Consequences of illegal immigration on Agricultural Land:

Another social consequence of immigration was the change in the agrarian structure of the State. A petty landlords and money lending class emerged among the immigrants. A few intelligent immigrants who used to sell either government or private lands to the immigrants at an inflated price and lent money to the immigrants at high rate of interest became so rich that they emerged as petty landlords and money lenders. This class of people was popularly known as Mutabbars among the immigrants.²⁷

(C) Political Consequences:

It is seen that in India a good number of politicians bloom on emotionally and morally extracting the voters into voting in favour of the candidates on the basis of caste, community, language or religion. With the changing demographic pattern tilting towards equal numerical strength between the Hindus and the Muslims in many immigrant dominated areas of the State, the immigration issue which was essentially a socio-economic problem assumed a political character as the immigration had strengthened the base of Muslim communal politics in the Province.²⁸

The failure of the government to respond to the issue led to the agitation by the Assamese under the leadership of All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and All Assam Student's Union (AASU). To counter the offensive, Bangladeshi

immigrants organized themselves, which led to one of the most extreme examples of inter-group conflict in the early 1980s. Assam witnessed governmental instability, sustained civil disobedience campaigns, and some of the worst cases of ethnic violence. The situation became so volatile that on 2nd February 1980, AASU submitted a memorandum to the Indian Prime Minister to shoot down the Bangladeshi migrants.²⁹

The formation of a congress government in Assam led by an Assamese Muslim, Anawara Taimur in December 1980 brought further confrontation among native Assamese Hindus and migrant Muslim Bangladeshis. The increasing violence forced the fall of Taimur government and central rule was imposed in Assam in June 1981. Congress party at the centre, in an attempt to limit the damage, brought in an ethnic Assamese Hindu, Keshab Gogoi as the new Chief Minister in January 1982 but his reign did not survive more than two months. Once again, from March 1982 Assam came under direct central rule. By the beginning of 1983 it was reported that the capital of Assam, Guwahati and most of the townships in the Brahmaputra valley were turned into virtual armed camps. Para-military forces were flown in from other parts of India to strengthen the hands of government. In February 1983, in spite of explosive atmosphere, the ruling Congress Party at the Centre went for state legislature election with the intention of winning the contest with the support of the immigrants. The native organizations called for a boycott and resisted the balloting. Congress won an easy majority and formed the government in Assam but its price was frightening. The violence between the native Assamese and Bangladeshi migrants caused more than 3000 lives. Few days before the election, more than 8000 native Hindu Assamese surrounded a village called Nellie and systematically killed the Bangladeshi Muslim migrants. The toll of the five-hour rampage was more than 1700. Rajiv Gandhi, after becoming the Prime Minister of India in 1984, made an earnest effort to bring a peaceful solution to the Assam problem. He accepted the demands of the Assam Movement leaders while signing an accord with them in August 1985. In this accord, it was agreed to disenfranchise and expel the migrants, those who had arrived after 1970s. Exactly two months after the signing of the Accord, the Movement leaders formed a political party, known as Asam Gana Parishad (AGP) to contest the next election (Hazarika, 1988). Bangladeshi Muslim migrants in Assam, feeling betrayed by the Congress Party and in order to resist onslaught of AGP, formed a political organisation under the banner of United Minorities Front (UMF) to fight the state election in December 1985 Their withdrawal of support from Congress led to the defeat of the Congress Party and AGP captured the power in Assam. However, due to inefficiency and factionalism, AGP could not fulfil its election pledge of identify the foreign nationals in the state.³⁰ The non-co-

operation of the Congress government at the Centre in its efforts to win back the Muslim migrants to its fold, was another reason for AGP's failure.

This two-pronged strategy of Congress to defame AGP and to win back the Muslim migrants, paid back handsomely in the 1990 election and it came back in to power. The pro-migrants policies of the new Congress government also led to the gradual demise of the UMF. Yet, the seriousness of the situation forced the Congress Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia to acknowledge in the Budget Session of the State Assembly on 10 April 1992 about the large-scale illegal migration from foreign land to his state. This change of tone again brought the migrants together and in May 1992, they floated a new organization, Muslim Forum, and in its first convention at Guwahati issued political threats to the Chief Minister. The political power of migrants in Assam can be gauged from the fact that the chief Minister decided to withdraw his statement in a public meeting in the migrant-dominated district of Nagaon on 7th June 1992 by saying, "there were no illegal migrants in Assam".³¹

Serious violence occurred in Assam in July 1984, when a militant from a native Assamese Bodo tribal group clashed with Bangladeshi Muslim migrants in the Barpeta area. About 3,500 migrants families were affected by the violence and 1,500 people were forced to shelter in relief camps.³²

In spite of presence of Chief Minister in the troubled area, Bodo militants managed to attack a relief camp in Bansbari and killed 60 Muslim migrants in the mid-night of 23 July 1994.³³ The Indian Army was called in to restore the situation. The failure of the State Government in protecting the migrants was severely criticised by the Muslim migrant community. To solve the situation, the Chief Minister of Assam initiated various pro-migrants policies to bring back their confidence.³⁴ The Assam Unit of the Congress Party even went on opposing "totally" the Chief Election Commissioner of India's order of 8 December 1994 for an intensive revision of the electoral rolls of the state.³⁵

The failure of AGP, the pro-migrants policies of the Congress and the increasing strength of the Muslim migrants provided opportunities for Hindu fundamentalist political organisations. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and militant organisation like Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS) are working hard to organize Assamese Hindus on the migration issue. The slogan "***Bring BJP, Save Assam***" could be found written in almost every corner of Assam, but the party was primarily concentrated on the migrant dominated area to attract the support of Native Hindu Assamese.³⁶ The RSS started setting a number of ***Vidya Bharati*** schools in the interior areas of Assam to teach the students the Hinduised version of history and is also using the schools for its membership recruitment.³⁷

Another important consequence arises when the AASU's demand for deportation of the illegal immigrants was genuine and legal and they protested against the illegal immigration in a democratic way. But the governments both Central and State instead of fulfilling their demand for deportation of illegal immigrants, tried to suppress the Assam Agitation through the most brutal way, thereby protecting the interests of the illegal immigrants. Hundreds of youths were killed and thousands injured in both the CRPF and the Assam Police actions in several places of the State. The brutality meted out to the agitationists reached such a level that a section of the agitationists joined the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a secessionist insurgent group of Assam and a considerable section of the Assamese society extended moral support to the cause of the ULFA. This had encouraged the ULFA to intensify their subversive activities against the Governments.

The present four-party coalition government of Bangladesh headed by the Bangladesh National Party of Mrs Khalida Zia includes two fundamentalist political parties, viz. the Bangladesh Islamic oikya Jote and the Jamaat-e-Islamic. The latter coalition partner is well known to have maintained close relations with the powerful fundamentalist insurgent groups of Bangladesh, the Harkut-ul-Mujahideen-at-Islamic (HuJAI) and a few others minor fundamentalist groups like The Jagrata Muslim-janata, Bangladesh, The Jamaat-ul-Mujahiden, etc. The HuJAI maintains good rapport with and receives support from the Islamic fundamentalist groups like al-Quada of Osama Bin Laden and the Hamas of Palestine and the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and the Islamic country, bordering India. It is important to note that the HuJAI is 15 insurgent groups of the North east India in Bangladesh. The North East insurgent groups with the help of the HuJAI are establishing 195 training camps in Bangladesh, where HuJAI and al-Quada personnel support training to these groups.

The presence of such a strong network of Islamic fundamentalist groups, the Islamic terrorist groups like *Al-Quada* and *Hamas*, and the agents of ISI in a neighbouring country, viz., Bangladesh, is itself dangerous for safety and security of India, a secular country. The presence of a huge army of Islamic illegal immigrants has further worsened the situation. These immigrants suffer from the syndrome of dual nationalism. By virtue of acquiring citizenship certificate, with the patronage of a few political leaders, they enjoy all political rights and civil liberties in India. But the fear of detection and deportation refrains them from snapping contacts they had in Bangladesh. Their loyalty rests with Bangladesh. Such people are potentially dangerous for the safety and security of India as the Islamic fundamentalists have easy access to such immigrants for propagating their Islamic fundamentalism. ³⁸

C. Role of government and different political parties against the illegal immigration from Bangladesh:

A. Role of government: The illegal immigrants coming across the Indo-East Pakistan (Bangladesh) border into Assam had attracted the attention of the Home Ministry, Government of India (GOI), in early sixties. The Home Ministry even estimated that during 1952-62 period around 2.5 lakh Muslim immigrants entered the State in a clandestine manner and settled in Nowgaon, Darrang, Goalpara, Kamrup and North Lakhimpur districts of Assam. Even the then Home Minister Mr. G.L. Nanda and the then Home Secretary, GOI, Mr. Viswanathan visited some of these areas. After consulting this matter with then Chief Minister Mr. B.P. Chaliha, the Home Ministry deputed Mr B.N. Mullick, the then Director of Intelligence Bureau to investigate the matter of illegal immigration and submit a report. Mr. Mullick had suggested in his report a few measures to tackle infiltration issue.

1. To increase substantially the number of border outposts so that the maximum distance between the two borders posts was not more than five miles.
2. Border fencing could not help stopping the infiltration as a large number of water channels were dividing the boundaries.
3. One-mile belt all along the border should be cleared of human habitation, though cultivation and grazing could continue.
4. Finger print slips of the illegal immigrants who were detected should be prepared.
5. All the residents of Assam (which consisted of present Meghalaya and Mizoram), Manipur, Nagaland and North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (Arunachal Pradesh) should be issued identity card.
6. National Register System should be adopted in India as it was done in many other countries.
7. The entire work of controlling infiltration should be placed under the administrative and executive control of an additional IGP.
8. A Joint Director from the Home Ministry from New Delhi should visit the border areas regularly to inspect the measures taken in the field.³⁹

B. Role of different political parties:

No political party can afford to support of immigrants in the political power game though the problem of infiltration had impinged the integrity and security of the country. Hence almost all political parties in Assam at the time of election selected immigrant candidates in those constituencies where immigrants constituted a sizable number of voters.

Although the AGP was in favour of repealing the Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunal) Act 1983 (IM (DT) Act) when they were getting power in Assam for two terms, still they failed to take any initiative in repealing the IM(DT) Act even when they were a partner of the NDA Government at the Centre because of the fear of losing votes.

Secondly, when BJP announcing the 7 point formula of his party on 'Assam Day' at Jaipur on 11th January, 1981, and the President of BJP Mr. A.B. Vajpayee praised the Assamese people for having succeeded in focusing the attention of the entire nation on a problem which impinged the integrity and security of the country. Mr. L.K. Adwani had assured to solve Assam's aliens issue permanently but when the BJP was in power at the Centre it changed its strategy on deportation of illegal immigrants and then nothing to solve the problem.

Thirdly, the illegal immigrants positively opposed the repeal of IM (DT) Act in 1983 which was formulated by the Indira Gandhi Government in the Parliament. The party had nourished the immigrants as their 'vote bank' and it had the maximum number of MLAs and other party functionaries from the immigrant community.⁴⁰

D. Suggestion and policy prescription :

Following policies are recommended to minimize the existing problems and to stop illegal migration inflow.

(I). The exceptional growth of population of Assam is catching the eye of even government. Chief Minister of Assam on 14th March, 2000 said in the Assembly that the population growth of the State was much higher than the national average. Since time immemorial the state government has been spending millions of rupees under five year plans in family welfare measures to control the birth explosion. But millions are entering into India in the form of illegal immigration, which has neutralized the positive effects of family welfare measures. Therefore, the issue of checking illegal immigration across the border should be given top priority in India's Population Policy.

(II). The Census of India does not take any special efforts to identify the illegal migrants. Therefore, there has to be either have some separate agency for surveying such immigrants or additional questions be added in the schedules of census and should be asked to the doubtful foreign nationals areas where immigrants are settled.

(III). Though the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Police (BP) of Assam personnel are posted for the same purpose of checking infiltration, it is alleged that there is no coordination between the two forces. For example, the Assam Police personnel are not allowed to move in the border roads at night when the BSF imposes night curfew on the border roads. ⁴¹ The corrupt security officials involved in undocumented migration process should be punished.

(IV). The present police force working in the border are not young enough to take fresh training to handle sophisticated weapon to check infiltration effectively. Therefore, the proposal of the Assam Government submitted to the Centre for creating another police force after the BSF in the Indo-Bangla border is an attempt in the right direction which if implemented, will succeed to a great extent in checking infiltration across the border. It is proposed that this second line of defense will be created with personnel having skill in handling modern weaponry, motivation and patriotism.

(V). Revival of the process of preparation of National Register of Indian Citizens (NRC) is very urgent. Preparation of a computerized database listing for every citizen is required. Linking of registration of birth and deaths to update NRC automatically is prescribed.

(VI). Government should issue Multi-purpose Colour Photo Identity Cards (MPCPICs) to all national and these cards should be renewed once in every five years. In the border districts this should be accorded higher priority.

(VII). General awareness campaign should be created among the people of Assam against the illegal migration for providing some export groups in every districts of Assam to discuss their social evils regarding illegal migrants.

(VIII). The government should take proper steps about the purchase of land by the immigrants and it needs to be declared illegal. It is also important on the part of the Government to highlight the evil side of immigration so that the awareness can be enlightened among the ignorant people and also further steps are to be taken to band the illegal markets which are commonly found in the broader areas.

(IX). Last but not the least; the government should provide two scanning committee, one from each districts and other from their own side, for proper inspection of NRC progress in every district levels, but these committee should not have interlink or interdependence. They should inspect separately without

depending each other. This will reduced the loopholes and unfold the real NRIC scenario in the district levels.

CONCLUSION:

Thus, migration has been a part of human history since its very beginning, it is clear from the above analyses that the overall impact of migration on economic development of Assam in terms of accelerating the level of development in the various sectors has not been yet significant. But if this rapid rate of illegal migration is going on then it will create a overwhelming effect for entire Assam, now the Bangladeshi Muslims have become the king-maker and king-breaker in Assam. Many Muslim insurgency organizations came up in the Assam and permanently settled in different places of Nowgaon, Darrang, Goalpara, Kamrup and North Lakhimpur districts of Assam and finally they are involved in different criminal and anti-social activities such as- kidnapping, killing, stealing and extortion etc. if the government will not take serious steps for the further inflow of such immigrants then the entire Assam might be a part of the greater Bangladesh as planned by the entrusted groups.

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[30] Many Assamese who were involved in the anti-foreigners' movement and supported AGP come to power are quite angry over the failure of Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his AGP Ministry in dealing with the migration issue. D.N. Bezboruah, one of the highly respected journalist in Assam and the Editor of The Sentinel in his interview with Ashok Swain (Author of "The Environmental Trap: The Ganga River Diversion, Bangladeshi Migration and Conflicts in India") on 27 December 1993 did not hesitate to describe Mr. Mahanta and his party as "unmitigated disasters for the State of Assam", In: Ashok Swain "The Environmental Trap: The Ganga River Diversion, Bangladeshi Migration and Conflicts in India" Report No. 41, p. 98, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 1996, Sweden.

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[36] AGP usually comes out in the local press, criticising the pro-migrant policies of the Congress Government, e.g., The Sentinel (Guwahati), 21 December 1993. Interestingly, there has been report also that AGP, which had come to power in Assam in 1985 on the strength of a sustained six year agitation against illegal migration, is considering to shift its political stance and start wooing the Bangladeshi migrants to its fold for electoral reason. The Times of India (New Delhi), 31 December 1993.

[37] For instance, the Assam unit of BJP held its State Executive meeting at migrant dominated Nagaon Town of Nagaon district of Assam on 6-7 November 1993, where it also made the first of its resolutions against Bangladeshi 'infiltrators'. See, The Press Release of the Baharatiya Janata Party, Assam Pradesh, 9th November 1993.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Annexure-I:

Table Section:

Table1.1: Proportion of Muslim Population in India and Assam, 1911 – 2001

Year	India	Assam
1911	22.39	16.23
1931	23.49	22.78
1951	9.91	24.68
1961	10.71	25.30
1971	11.21	24.56
1991	12.12	28.43
2001	13.42	30.91

Source: Authors' calculation based on data from of India: Various Years

Table- 1.2 : Total number of tea garden labourers from 1876-1931.

Years	1876	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Tea garden labourers	67500	177000	243400	385700	461800	723700	747200

Source: Annual Reports government of Assam.

Table-1.3: District wise Estimated Illegal Bangladeshi Migrants in Assam, 1971-2001

Serial No	District	Inter-state	international
1	Dhuburi	1.34 (1.24)	0.47 (0.37)
2	Kokorajhar	1.98 (1.59)	0.96 (0.64)
3	Bongaigaon	2.25 (2.08)	1.40 (0.90)
4	Goalpara	10.07 (0.80)	0.96 (0.51)
5	Borpeta	0.40 (0.31)	0.55 (0.34)
6	Nalbari	0.56 (0.32)	0.48 (0.26)
7	Kamrup	4.29 (3.47)	0.64 (0.41)
8	Darrang	1.21 (0.91)	0.65 (0.44)
9	Sonitpur	2.07 (1.60)	0.63 (0.39)
10	Lakhimpur	1.46 (1.14)	0.33 (0.17)

11	Dhemaji	1.65 (1.16)	0.53 (0.22)
12	Marigaon	0.56 (0.44)	0.52 (0.30)
13	Nagaon	1.11 (0.84)	1.13 (0.69)
14	Golaghat	2.06 (1.42)	0.18 (0.10)
15	Jorhat	2.36 (1.56)	0.14 (0.09)
16	Sibsagar	1.97 (1.48)	0.11 (0.07)
17	Dibrugarh	2.89 (2.13)	0.30 (0.19)
18	Tinsukia	4.43 (3.27)	0.69 (0.45)
19	Karbi Anglong	3.53 (2.63)	0.82 (0.52)
20	North Kachar Hills	2.89 (2.50)	0.64 (0.42)
21	Karimganj	1.24 (1.28)	1.60 (1.51)
22	Hailakandi	0.96 (0.93)	0.59 (0.46)
23	Kachar	1.32 (1.33)	1.62 (1.44)

Source: Computed Census Reports, Assam 2001

Figures without brackets indicate percentage of migrants to total population based on place of birth data. Figures with brackets indicate percentage of migrants to total population based on place of last residence data.

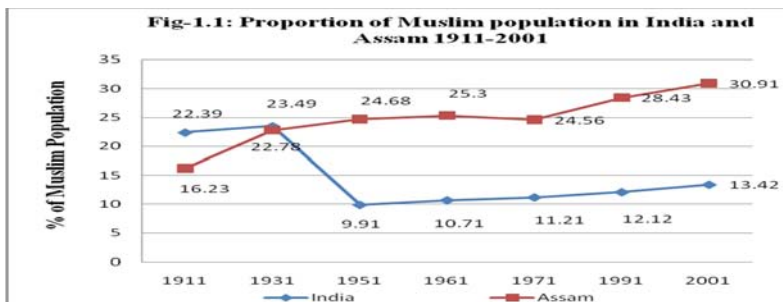
Table 1.4:

Percentage of Assamese and Bengali speaking population to total population form 1931-1991

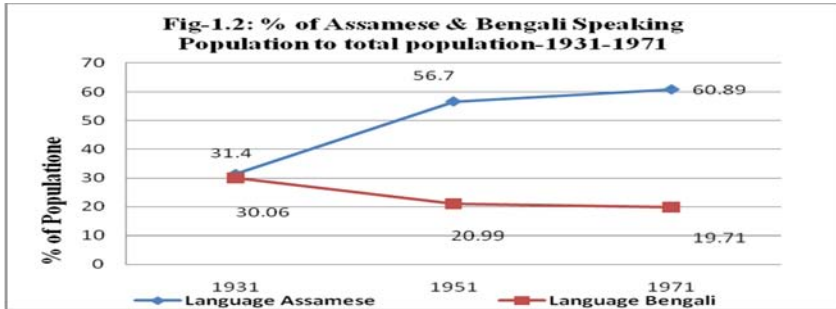
Year	Language	
	Assamese	Bengali
1931	31.4	30.06
1951	56.7	20.99
1971	60.89	19.71
1991	57.29	21.51

Source: Census, 1971-1991

Figure Section:

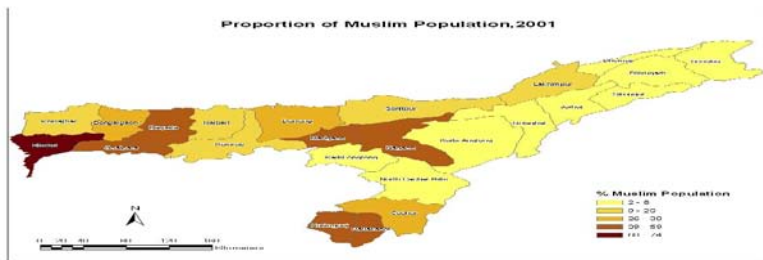


Sources:-From Table-1.1



Sources:-From Table-1.4

Figure 3: District wise Muslim Population in Assam in 2001



Sources:Census of India-2001

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