

ROOTS

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Aim & Objectives

Academic Excellence in research is continued promoting in research support for young Scholars. Multidisciplinary of research is motivating all aspects of encounters across disciplines and research fields in an multidisciplinary views, by assembling research groups and consequently with this projects, supporting publications programmes. organizing inclination and Internationalization of research work is the unit seeks to develop its scholarly profile in research through quality of publications. And visibility of research is creating sustainable platforms for research and publication, such as series of Books; motivating dissemination of research results for people and society

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A CRITICAL PERCEPTION ON THE ISSUE OF FORCED MIGRATION-(CASE OF EAST BENGAL AND WEST BENGAL)

Dr. Baishakhi Dutta

Associate Professor in Geography RJ College of Arts, Science and Commerce Ghatkopar, West, Mumbai

Abstract

The paper focuses on forced migration at the backdrop of the partition of Bengal into East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and West Bengal (India) in 1947 which was a religion based partition dividing the province of Bengal. This partition was a watershed in the history of the region, when political boundaries were redrawn. The partition of Bengal not only killed thousands of people but displaced millions from their motherland. The migration started after the Liaquat-Nehru Pact in 1950 and continued also after the independence of Bangladesh. Over the years lakhs of people have crossed over from East Bengal (Bangladesh) into West Bengal (India) due to geographical nearness and ethnic similarities between the two. Large number of migrants from East Bengal were either victimized or fled forcefully due to the fear of violence, hoping to find peace and security on the other side of the border. This influx of refugees from East to West Bengal continued for many years after partition and still continues in various forms. On account of ceaseless infiltration of migrants, there was a tremendous pressure on population density of West Bengal. The geographical area of West Bengal is 88,752sq kms and accommodates 91,347,736 (Census Report) of India's population. This had a severe implication and posed multi-layered challenges to the Indian government. Looking at the complex phenomenon of migration, this paper intends to analyze the social, political and economic impacts on the migrant Bangladeshis in West Bengal and their impact on the development of the state of West Bengal. The paper also tries to understand government responses and various schemes implemented by the government of West Bengal to settle the refugees and try to imbibe them into the main stream of development.

Keywords: Bengal Partition, Displaced, Migrants, Security, Population Density.

Introduction

Population movements are a very structural natural process in the transformation of societies and economies. migration involved past, establishment of new habitats in fertile and virgin lands, today it is characterized by movement of populations to other countries carrying cultures of their own. It therefore raises issues related to loyalty, identity, development and security. Tran's border migration from one country to another has been a very controversial and sensitive subject of discussion. Forced migration is a burning issue worldwide which occurs when people have to leave their shelter, family ties, culture in search of better life. The partition of Bengal in 1947 was one of the cruelest partitions the world has ever seen in history. With this partition, people from East Bengal (Bangladesh) started migrating illegally into West Bengal (India) majorly and many other states of India. Demographers are of the view that outmigration of people from resource poor regions to less poorer regions are bound to occur like water reaching its own level. It has been estimated that approximately 15ml Bangladeshi nationals have occupied the soil of India illegally. (B. Banerjee, It has been observed that undocumented migration causes harm to our social and economic wellbeing as well as to our national security and harmony (Nath, 2003). The case of East Bengal and West Bengal migration can be well

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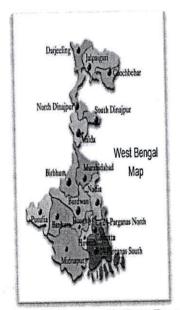
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connected to U.S – Mexico migration which was reformed through high level government policy reforms between the two countries (Borderline 81, 2001).

History

The former province of Bengal was divided in 1947 into West Bengal, which went to India, and East Bengal, which went to Pakistan; later, East Bengal became the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971. Bangladesh has always been a center of Bengali culture and heritage. From the historical point of view Bangladesh was liberated from the English in 1947. From 1947 to 1971, Bangladesh was in the In 1971, Pakistani hands of Pakistan. troops surrendered and the leaders of East Pakistan declared the region independent as Bangladesh. Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world with an area of 1,44,000 sq.km and a population of 120ml. Majority of the population are Muslims. Its dominant religion is Islam. population 1947, Hindu Since Bangladesh has been dwindling from 30% to 10% in coming years due to terrible political terrorism. West Bengal, the Indian state has housed the poor illegal migrants from Bangladesh especially the Hindus in the border districts of Kolkata, Parganas, Nadia, Maldah, Murshidabad, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar etc. 1947, massive illegal refugee migration took place which later was considered legal after 1971. Upto 1971, 4.7ml Hindus sought refuge in West Bengal while 10ml more crossed over to India after the Liberation War in 1971 which was a sizable section of undocumented migrants. (Guha Roy, 2003)



Eastern Districts of West Bengal Sharing migrants from Bangladesh



West Bengal and East Bengal border

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Bangla boundary Tripura, M eastern par Bangladesl minorities West Ben insecurity the ountr that ese: experiencir economic facilities in the margin haven whi West Ben major role scurried a Indian Bo limited res migration State of W group have agricultura especially Behar, etc. from the lo to work at gen) p€ locais in Bangladesl economic rehabilitati demands resources Bengal an future deve Many provided

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Bangladesh shares a common boundary with some Indian states like Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Assam and eastern part of West Bengal. Infiltration of Bangladeshi especially Hindus and other minorities are continuing till today into West Bengal to escape violence and insecurity following Muslim party ruling the country. It should be borne in mind that these illegal Hindu migrants have been experiencing communal disharmony. economic instability and curtailment of facilities in Bangladesh. This have caused the marginalized group to migrate to a safe haven which is physically the nearest i.e. West Bengal. Fear psychosis played a major role and Hindus from Bangladesh scurried across the border for shelter. Indian Border Security Force with their limited resources could not stop this illegal migration posing a threat to the Indian State of West Bengal. This marginalized group have spread themselves over some agricultural based border districts especially 24 Parganas, Nadia, Cooch Behar, etc. because of very stiff competition from the local people and they were forced to work at low wages (Pramanik, 2003). The general perceptions of the West Bengal locals in the early 1950s, was that the Bangladeshi refugees were a tremendous economic liability and that their rehabilitation would makeenormous demands upon the meager economic resources of the nascent province of West Bengal and jeopardize its prosperity and future development.

Many research and studies have provided piecemeal information. This paper tries to explore the various motives operating behind this migration process, its impact on West Bengal and some probable solutions to the problem. In this study undocumented Bangladeshi migrants are meant to be those who have entered West Bengal without valid documents after

March 25, 1971 (March 1980, National Consensus).

Causes of Migration

A. Push Factors

Various factors motivating migration are complex and interrelated. Migration mainly can be attributed to push – pull factors. Push factors have negative characteristics operating at the center of origin while pull factors are of positive characteristics at the center of destination. The factors are basically economic, demographic, religious, social law and order etc. which are the causes of illegal migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

Economic Factor plays a crucial role in the process of migration. Lack of employment opportunities, forced grabbing of land from the weak minority group in Bangladesh, Poverty, economic depression created a push like situation for migrants to illegally crossover and settle in West Bengal.

Social Factor often causes people to migrate forcefully from place of origin to the place of destination. Due to large scale movement of population after partition, the communities were fragmented. marginalized Hindu minority group faced problems for matrimonial alliances. Educational curricula were framed according to Islamic teaching which did not suit the requirements of Hindu minorities. There was tremendous social insecurity among women. Hindu girls were forced to become Muslims. If Zamindar was Muslim, the husbands were forced to mortgage their wives to get agricultural works. Girls from aristocratic families migrated to West Bengal to escape from this kind of harassment (Sample study).

Political Factor is highlighted to be one of the major push factors for the marginalized Hindu group from Bangladesh. Political instability, fear of

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riots, inhuman attitude of political leaders, no democratic rights to minority group, hostile attitude of majority community forced people to leave their home land.

Law & Order needs a special mention when it is connected to illegal migration. Deterioration and discriminating law and order in Bangladesh had pushed the Hindus to West Bengal. Intra - religion and Inter religion conflicts and violence are very common in Bangladesh creating law Due to such a and order problem. situation, human freedom is at state forcing the Hindus to leave Bangladesh. Police force backs Muslim community more than the Hindus making them feel insecure and unwanted in their homeland.

B. Pull Factors in West Bengal

The pull factors in West Bengal have been stronger for the illegal migrants from Bangladesh. The centripetal force have been strengthened due to low level of development, insecurity at the center of possibly causing the illegal marginalized migrants to move from Bangladesh (Push) to West Bengal (Pull). The various pull factors are as follows:-

Economic Pull Factor

unrest in the time of During Bangladesh, lot of migrants looked for opportunities especially economic ones (Thomas, 1975). Jobs attracted the migrants to West Bengal which were not possible in Bangladesh. The generosity of the inhabitants of West Bengal gave the marginalized class to be absorbed in agricultural, small scale & industries. Poor Bangladeshis could easily obtain job and settle in West Bengal.

Social and Geographic Factors

West Bengal and Bangladesh has many similarities in terms of language, culture, food habits, ethnic - climate, belief, etc. which has attracted migrants especially

Hindus from Bangladesh to flee to West Bengal.

Political Factor

West Bengal is definitely politically conscious but it follows democratic form of government. It is a peaceful state and communal harmony remains unaltered inspite of external instigations. The only drawback seen in West Bengal are the political parties which try to woo the migrants seeing their poor living condition. For filling up their vote banks the political leaders help them to avail illegal proofs of citizenships like, ration card, voter cards, etc. thereby become eligible for government jobs or settle permanently in the country (Seshan, 1998).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The issue of the undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal has always been a burning debate and a herculean task to accomplish. West Bengal in the long run emerged as a huge melting pot, a bursting state nestling people from different regions, religions where there is constant interaction between various languages, cultures and customs. Problems arise when the migration is illegal and poses multi-layered threats to the Indian state. Commonsense dictates that firstly, India's borders with Bangladesh must be regulated; and secondly, that resident migrants need to be strategically dealt with to reduce, if not eliminate, the level of "threats" they pose. The Bangladeshis who have migrated to India has found work as rag pickers, agricultural laborers, rickshaw pullers, construction workers, domestic help, etc. The minorities in the name of migrants have been marginalized economically, socially, politically even in a democratic country like India. This reestablishes the truth and reality behind the history of the two countries Policy as measures from the Indian government have opy

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ions ocu nted lest Bengal bate and a Vest Bengal uge melting people from ere there is various n s. Problems illegal and the Indian that firstly, sh must be at resident y dealt with the level of langladeshis found work ul laborers, rkers, rities in the marginalized ly even in a India. This ality behind ries. Policy rnment have stemmed up from time and again. The magnitude of the issue is such that solutions have to be short term and long term measures. Based on these problems involved some broad policy recommendations may be made, keeping in mind the age-old relationship between the countries and, more importantly, the very nature and construct of our geography. These are listed below:

- A separate Department of Border Management needs to be created and made responsible for effective border management; border fencing and effective utilization of border guarding will check illegal migration from Bangladesh.
- 2. There is no treaty or agreement to make the border between the two countries open and transparent. The existing state of affairs at the Indo-Bangladesh border needs to be changed, keeping in mind the recommendations of the Ministers from both countries.
- Bangladeshi migration to India has not been securitized. They even exist today, particularly in the context of the growing Maoist threat to India and their cross-border links. India needs to monitor and regulate such infiltrations.
- 4. The fact remains that migrants from Bangladesh to India, continues to nurture their original national identity. This makes them attached to their motherland. For this reason India should not have any problem and the government has to take adequate preventive as well as curative measures, so that it should not go against India's national interests
- 5. India should contribute to the economic development of Bangladesh in order to check

- migration. India should assist in the economic development of that country. An enlarged aid package to Bangladesh is required urgently.
- 6. Finally, in order to control illegal migration that brings with it other problems like smuggling of arms and weapons and cross-border terrorism. there should compulsory registration a11 citizens and non-citizens living in India. All citizens should be given a multi-purpose national identity card and that non-citizens should be issued identity cards of a different color and design. The I cards given by the state will bear photographs, name, age, address, educational qualification, and a caste of bonafide resident blood group and a national number to avail the government benefits. The government has already started the process of issuing a unique identification number to its citizens which is a step in the right direction.

The full study of migration process requires more than one discipline of social science, to work as a team. Undocumented migration, a complex and dynamic process, should be studied as an interdisciplinary approach. Extensive research will majorly contribute to the advancing qualitative research in the field of undocumented migration.

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