

Illegal Migrants a Reality: A Case of West Bengal

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Abstract

Economic well being of a country depends on the overall growth of each and every segment and each and every groups of population living in various segments of a country. But hardly any country can achieve simultaneous growth from each and every region as there exist the problem of inequality and imbalance growth in some regions. This may be the basic crucial point which raises the concept of human movement from one place to another. In theoretical term this is known as migration. The concept of migration become illegal when a person or a group of persons crossways a country's border, in a way that violates the immigration laws of the destination country, with the purpose to stay in the country. India, particularly West Bengal has been tackling a large scale of influx from Bangladesh since a very long time. This mass influx is changing not only the demographic pattern but also the social, economic and political conditions of the entire state.

Keywords: *Economic Growth, Illegal Migration, Human Movement, Mass Influx*

I. Introduction:

Illegal cross-border migration is regarded as a vital issue for India's national security. The reasons for migration may vary country wise or region wise but the existing socio economic condition in migrant's place plays a crucial role regarding decision to migrate from one place to another. Various migration literatures indicate that people migrate for better living conditions, better job opportunities or to live in a better environment. Sometimes, migrants move individually or they intend to move along with their family members. Thus, migration is a selective process which involves role of the family members also. Side by side decision to migrate also depends on prevailing socio-economical and demographic characteristics of that place. But the overall impact of migration creates a mixed situation towards the life of migrants and their family members. Although migration may have satisfactory impact on individuals, still most of the migration is in the nature of forced movement, where people compelled to move due to various push factors. This may have a negative impact on the lives of migrants. Thus, the main fundamental question remains is that, when people decided to move – does it help them to make their livelihood better compared to non migration situation?

Since household member's decision plays a crucial role in case of migration and it has a socio economic dimensions on their households. Policymakers try to determine the policy decisions which can create a cumulative effect nationally. Normally, it is assumed that migration brings economic prosperity in both the sending areas as well as receiving areas but its real impact is debatable as we often find a conflicting version on the same in various literatures. As far as positive impact is concerned it is to be believed that the benefits of migration can be trickle down from individual migrants to households to communities and ultimately to different countries in the world through sharing of knowledge and expertise. In some countries or in some regions within a specific state, the so called benefits of migration started showing its influence where free mobility becomes much easier than earlier times.

Decision to migrate is not free from any negative impacts also. Since, people moving from one place to another for better income opportunities it could harm the overall prosperity in place of origin as it may create manpower shortages, which ultimately stalls the growth of that place. Thus the real success of migration can be seen if the movement can bring prosperity in both the sectors. Theoretically, the most ideal situation would be that the movement will show positive impact when there is labour shortages in place of destination as well as the migrants are able to learn technical knowledge during their stay, which they are able to implement once, when they are coming back to their own place. If this condition violates, chances are there that the movement may not give desired result. An individual's decision to migrate may be influenced by a range of factors:

Economic Factor: The difference between two places in terms of standard of living and wages, influence people to migrate from place of scarcity to place of prosperity. This is often termed as the pull factor of migration.

Governance & Public Services: Lack of govt. control in implementing various infrastructural projects which otherwise may increase income opportunities in backward states, corruption, lack of good educational and healthcare facilities acted as a push factors for people who failed to access these facilities in their own area, hence opted to migrate to those areas where these facilities are available in an adequate manner.

Demographic Patterns: Difference in fertility rates and life expectancy rates in different regions create imbalances in supply and demand for labour. Availability of Surplus labours in backward regions and higher growth in developed regions create a flow of labour from surplus areas to labour shortage areas. Positive demographic dividend is another reason which creating tremendous pressure on workforce. If adequate job opportunities can't be created, then this will definitely create pressure.

Environmental Factors: Movement of people due to environmental factors is another major concern. The major environmental factor mainly related to climate change. Earthquakes, major industrial accidents,

floods, soil erosion and droughts are some of the reasons which force people to move from one place to another. But most of the time it is observed that these kind of movements tend to be internal in nature.

Transnational Networks: This type of networks normally works as a pull factor where family members living abroad can initiate a legal process to shift the base of the people from one place to another. This is the most legal form of international migration.

II. Migratory Movement from Bangladesh:

Even though India has been at the receiving end of human migration from various quarters but the rush from Bangladesh into India has great depth. Before going into the details of socio economic impact of illegal migrants on West Bengal's economy, it is important to understand the reasons for movement of people from Bangladesh to India. Economic and environmental causes are most responsible for that.

India share the largest border area spread over 4,096 km with Bangladesh. On the Bangladesh's side it covers six out of seven divisions viz. Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet and on the Indian side it covers five states, viz. West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Assam.¹ Among the states, West Bengal has the highest percentage of border area. It covers almost 2217 kms out of the total 4096 kms.²

States	Border Length (In Kms)
West Bengal	2217
Assam	262
Meghalaya	443
Tripura	856
Mizoram	318
Total	4096

¹Annual Report 2007, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, pp. 35-41.

²Annual Report 2007, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, pp. 35-41.

The vast spread of the border which covered by plane lands, rivers, mountains often makes it difficult for the border security forces of both the countries to restrict the flow of illegal movements of Bangladeshi people to India. But lack of control from border security forces is not the main reasons for the flow of migratory people. The socio economic conditions of the people of Bangladesh, the political instability and violence, communal riots, attack on minority Hindu communities and lack of governance may be the primary reason which often forces the people of Bangladesh to search for some better alternatives in other places. Since, most of the places of Bangladesh have same kind of problems; this often led them to take the illegal routes to move to India. The issue of movement is not new in case of India.

Illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India, which includes both refugees and economic migrants, continues unabated. There is no reliable figure on the exact number of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in India. An analysis of population growth and demographic statistics for Bangladesh and India in the last four censuses of 2011, 2001, 1991, and 1981, however, suggests with reasonable certainty that their number exceeds 15 million. Most of them have settled in states along the border with Bangladesh, and some subsequently moved to other parts of India, including its remote corners. A large number are engaged in menial jobs in metropolitan cities in different parts of India. The flow which was started just after partition of India during the year 1947 still continues. The attack from military force during the liberation war 1971, forced almost 10 million people took refuge in India.³ Some of them returned back after the end of the war, but the terror attack on the minority population continued to play a dominant role. As a result of the same the Hindu population which was 30% of the entire population during the year 1947 was reduced to 10% by the year 2001.⁴ Most of the Hindu population thus, shifted to India for a better livelihood. As Foreigners' Act, 1946 allowed people to get the Indian citizenships, if they are staying in India before 1947; this has surely termed the people as illegal migrants who entered India after 1971 onwards.

The bias policy of political parties also created huge pressure on Hindu minority communities as well. The BNP government issued notice to provide restricted credit flow and withdrawal facilities for Hindu community people staying in Indo – Bangladesh border areas during the year 1990s. During the year 1993 the BNP government was conducted a survey to identify the vested property and during that time district level officers had attached properties of minority communities as vested property and left them penny less.⁵ This inhuman attitude of the government also forced the people to move out of the country for better living conditions.

Bangladesh being mostly dependent on agriculture is not able to generate sufficient income generating opportunities as per the need of the population. As the country is 7th populous country in the World, some of

³Kumar Chirantan (2009); Migration & Refuge Issue between India & Bangladesh, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp 65

⁴Kumar Chirantan (2009); Migration & Refuge Issue between India & Bangladesh, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp 66

⁵Bhardwaj Sanjay (2014); Illegal Bangladeshi Migration, CLAWS Journal, pp 68

the researchers do believe that the huge population density often led to create uneven economic development in various parts of the country. Lack of income generating opportunities, nearly 40% of the population living below the poverty line and lack of industrial sector's growth transformed the country as underdeveloped country. This has led to increase in terrorism activities as unemployed youth became the soft target for these terrorist groups.

III. Climate Change and its impact on Migration:

Climate change is the major driver of migration in these regions and movement of people to other areas is a prime indicator of that. India and Bangladesh have always been in conflicting situations with regard to water sharing issues. Climate change induced migration will fuel these conflicts further. Apart from the socio economic issues, climatic conditions of the country of displace people from one place to other. Losses which come as a result of natural disaster often leads to loss of land and subsequent loss of income generating opportunities. Along with the existing causes, illegal migration is happening from Bangladesh towards the neighboring countries due to ill impact of severe climatic conditions. Some of the severe climatic conditions like floods, sea level rise, cyclone and storm, river and coastal erosion etc. affecting the lives of people living in Bangladesh. The flood of 1988 and 1998 led to death of 4000 and 1100 deaths respectively and displaced around 75 million people.⁶The rising sea level is another area of concern for the people of Bangladesh living in coastal areas. The Bangladesh government has estimated that the sea level will raise upto 34.7 inches by 2100.⁷The government also estimated that a 1 meter raise in sea level may lead to displace around 13 to 40 million people.⁸Cyclonic storm and periodic river erosion which are quite frequent also displace a huge number of populations every year.

The coastlines of India and Bangladesh are highly vulnerable to sea rise. It has already been observed that the sea level along the Indian coast has risen by 2.5 mm per year since the 1950s. This will rise further. A report by Greenpeace states that in South Asia, large coastal cities such as Dhaka, Mumbai, and Kolkata are at an average elevation of 2–10 meters; overall some 47 million people live in urban areas in the LECZ, half of whom reside in cities with population in excess of five million.⁹If these predictions hold true, its most likely that large cities like Delhi, Pune, Ahmadabad, and Hyderabad will be the next destination for migration of people from the currently densely populated coastal cities. Delhi and other such cities are already facing problems to accommodate the current population and have consumed more resources and energy than what they should have ideally. Given the proximity of Bangladesh to India and the large land

⁶ Bhattacharya Arpita & Werz Michael (2012); Climate Change, Migration & Conflict in South Asia; Report of Center for American Progress, pp 24

⁷ Bhattacharya Arpita & Werz Michael (2012); Climate Change, Migration & Conflict in South Asia; Report of Center for American Progress, pp 24

⁸ Bhattacharya Arpita & Werz Michael (2012); Climate Change, Migration & Conflict in South Asia; Report of Center for American Progress, pp 24

⁹ TG_August, 2011.pdf, Climate Refugees-A sad Reality-TerraGreen Cover story

area that will be inundated, it is also likely that the bulk of these people will land up as migrants in India. Population pressure has caused degradation of land. Shifting cultivation without adequate fallow period, absence of soil conservation measures, unbalanced fertilizer use has damaged land productivity in large areas.¹⁰

Combining these factors, it can be said that a huge flow of people can be seen in India from Bangladesh and this has created a significant impact on the socio economic conditions of the people belong to this country. The inflows of people are mostly happening in the district of West Bengal as the state covers a significant part of entire border. But all the districts of West Bengal are not equally hampered. Only 5 border districts like, Murshidabad, Malda, North 24 Parganas, Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur are having more inflow of illegal migrants.

IV. Case of West Bengal:

The state of West Bengal was formed during the year 1947 with 14 districts. The state is now divided into 20 districts. The border of the West Bengal is covered by three countries, viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. The state is one of the most populous states of India. The population density which was 903 persons per sq. km. during the year 2001; stands at 1028 persons per sq.km during the year 2011. The state is mainly dependent on agricultural sector and has seen very less growth in industries and service sectors. The main concentration of service sector in the form of IT sector can be seen in the state capital Kolkata. The district wise uneven growth is a major growth bottleneck for the state. Lack of infrastructure facilities may be the primary reasons for this uneven growth. There is a wide disparity among district wise growth of population. The district wise decennial growth of the population can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: District wise Population Decennial Growth Rate

District	Decennial Growth (%) (2001 – 2011)
West Bengal	13.84
Burdwan	11.92
Birbhum	16.15

¹⁰Alain Marcoux "Population change- natural resources. Environmental linkages in Central and South Asia" 1996

Bankura	12.65
Purba Medinipur	15.36
Paschim Medinipur	13.86
Hooghly	9.46
Purulia	15.42
North 24 Parganas	12.04
South 24 Parganas	18.17
Kolkata	-1.67
Howrah	13.50
Nadia	12.22
Murshidabad	21.09
Uttar Dinajpur	23.15
Dakshin Dinajpur	11.52
Malda	21.22
Jalpaiguri	13.87
Darjeeling	14.77
Cooch Behar	13.71

Source: Census India Report, 2011

The table suggests that apart from districts Malda, Murshidabad and Uttar Dinajpur, rest of the districts are more or less seen a decennial growth rate between two census years, similar to the state average. These three districts are border districts of West Bengal where the growth of population is mainly attributed towards

inflow of migrants from Bangladesh. The rapid growth of population is bound to create an impact on socio economic conditions of these districts and subsequently on the state as a whole.

The economy of West Bengal has seen tremendous change in favour of non - farm activities as too much dependency on agricultural sector alone is not able to provide much needed growth which the state is looking for. But the miss match still there between amount of job needed and the amount of job created by various sectors including informal sectors. The excessive increase of population may create pressure on the land and other available natural resources. If we look at the population density of three districts where decennial growth is high we can get a clear picture about the population pressure on available land.

Table 2: Specific District wise Population Density

State/District	Population Density
Malda	1071
Murshidabad	1334
North Dinajpur	956
West Bengal	1029

Source: Census India Report, 2011

It can be seen that except in case of North Dinajpur district, rest of districts' population density is much higher than the state average. In case of Malda the population density stands at 1334 persons and in case of Murshidabad district the figure stands at 1071 persons. In rest of the district the density of population is lower. The growth in population density is mainly responsible because of movement of migratory people from the neighboring country is much higher in these districts.

Table 3: District wise Hindu and Muslim Population during the Census Year 2011

District	Rise in Hindu Population (In Numbers)	Rise in Muslim Population (Rise in Numbers)
Malda	19 Lakhs	20 Lakhs
Murshidabad	23 Lakhs	47 Lakhs

North Dinajpur	14 Lakhs	15 Lakhs
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Source: Census Report, 2011

The incremental growth of Muslim population of these three border districts is significantly higher. In absence of proper migration data on illegal migration, these figures may give some insight about the population influx.

V. The Socio Economic Impact:

The cross country illegal movement may create a positive as well as negative impact in place of destination. In West Bengal agricultural sector is a labour intensive sector where adequate manpower is not available due to internal migration. Most of the people working in agricultural sectors in rural West Bengal moved to other parts of the country where earning opportunities are much higher. These sorts of internal migration created an impact on the agricultural sector. The illegal migrants from Bangladesh thus absorbed in this sector. On the other hand it has a negative side as well. Due to excessive movement of the people from neighboring country, the left over local labour forces are not able to keep the bargaining power related to wage settlement. As the migrants are being absorbed at lower wages, this has led to create social imbalance.

The movement has also led to create the problem of deforestation, land grab, trade grab and excessive pressure on basic civic amenities. Lack of infrastructure is also another major reason which is failed to absorb the excess population.

As these illegal migrants are able to absorb the voter cards, BPL cards and other important citizenship documents with the help of political parties, they often become the member of lower income group categories and thus become entitled for all types of government subsidies like, 100 days job guarantee programmes, National Rural Health Mission Scheme etc. This trend ultimately creates a differential impact on the local people as sometimes they are not able to grab the opportunities provided by the government. This is an area of concern which needs to be addressed so as to reduce the tension among these two diversified group of population. The tendency of movement sometimes goes beyond the rural areas and some of the illegal migrants are able to land up in some kind of income generating opportunities in the urban set up as well. Most of them are taking jobs in informal sectors. Real estate sector is another area which is able to absorb a large amount of labour force at a cheaper rate. Easy accessibility and availability of jobs attract these illegal migrants to these sectors as well. Some of them are started working on their own, may be in the form of street vendors or rickshaw pullers, porters etc. The flow also created havoc pressure on basic civic amenities. The problem of urbanization is another area of concern for the government. Excessive pressure of population in one particular region surely not good and as a result of that growth of

urban sector may be sacrificed. So, the problem may be percolated to other areas as well and ultimately will affect the entire economy as a whole.

Conclusion & Recommendations:

The problem of illegal migration often comes into play as a result of improper policy measures of the host countries. In this present case, most of the migrants are coming from Bangladesh and this need to think in a different way as it is affecting the socio economic conditions of both countries. The Bangladesh government can't avoid the responsibilities. Due to poor economic growth of the country, most of the people do not able to secure proper income generating opportunities. This has a serious implication. Rural employment opportunities should be given focus as the country has the potential. The most important thing is improvement in skills. Lack of skills may hamper the growth and prospective job opportunities. Differential approach for minority communities should be abolished as this may lead to more inflow of minority communities, especially Hindu in other countries. As the government has the idea about various adverse climatic conditions of the country, it should take proper precautionary measures so that displaced people can be rehabilitated in some other income generating opportunities. The country should nurture the other income generating opportunities rather than focusing on agriculture alone. As almost 32% of the people still living below poverty line,¹¹ focusing on agriculture alone may not help the country and the people of the country. To improve the socio economic conditions and reduce the flow of migration it is very much important to generate alternative sources of revenue and income generating opportunities which may help the country in the long run and it will also able to bring the much needed desire growth it looks for. There are some recommendations mentioned below:

1. Govt. must introduce a comprehensive policy to deal with the problem of illegal migration. This policy should be hammered out after nationwide consultations and consensus building involving all political parties, state governments, communities and NGOs.
2. Though we all know that it is difficult to detect all the estimated 1.50 crores illegal migrants, however, it is necessary to conduct a survey to be followed by a thorough investigation into each individual case to ascertain the citizenship status. Some Kolkata based nongovernmental organizations dealing with Bangladeshis living in India, such as Bangladesh Udbastu Kalyan Parishad, Bangladesh Udbastu Unnayan Sangsad, Nikhil Banga Nagarik Sangha, and Bangladesh Mohajir Sangha, might be able to assist in the identification and verification process.
3. India must forthwith adopt the system of compulsory registration of births and deaths.

¹¹Bhattacharya Arpita & Werz Michael (2012); Climate Change, Migration & Conflict in South Asia; Report of Center for American Progress, pp 23

4. Vote bank politics should be stopped with immediate effects. This may be the main cause which has led to the problem of excessive absorption of illegal migrants. Names of all those who are found to be illegal migrants, should be deleted from electoral rolls so that there is no fear in the minds of citizens about being dominated politically by illegal aliens.

5. Frequency of bilateral talks with the Bangladesh government should be increased so as to check the flow of illegal migrants. It has been observed that the Bangladesh government is taking pro Hindu policies which led to displacement of the people from their own land. It is also being observed that every year the government simply struck out the names from voter's list as they are migrated illegally in other countries, mostly in India. Instead of that the government should understand the problem and try to solve the issues in the ground level.

6. Instead of creating mechanism to send back the people who are already migrated, policy measures should be created so as to check the flow of new illegal migrants.

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