

# MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN ASSAM

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## ABSTRACT

Along with the fertility and mortality migration is the third component of the population change. The importance of in affecting the growth and decline of population and in modifying the demographic characteristics of the areas of origin and destination had long been recognized. Migration effects not only the size of population but also the composition in age, sex, language etc. of the population. There fore, the study of migration is one of the major branches of Demography.

It is seen that the entire demography of the state has been changed in Assam during the last four decades. During 1891 – 1901, the influx of settlers in to Assam was rather slow. The 1991 Census reported a wave of settlers modifying the densities and distribution of population in few districts of Assam. The growth of population in Assam rose from 1881 to 1931 was more than 100%. This has extensively affected the distribution pattern of population. Comparing the rate of population in Assam with that of India as a whole during 1901 to 1921 was very slow, where as during the same period the population of Assam increased more than 39%. Since 1921 Indian population increased by 44% and population of Assam by 70%. Large scale migration from Bangladesh over several decades has been altering the demographic complexion of the state. It poses a grave threat both to the identity of the Assamese people and national security. Assamese people being largely converted and we are losing our ethnic culture and identity. It threatens to reduce the Assamese people to a minority in their own state. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the migration problem of Assam and its impact on the demographic changes, more especially demographic structure of Assam.

## INTRODUCTION:

The state of Assam is the homeland for the Assamese, Bodo, Karbis, Rabha, Kachari, Moran, Motok etc.. The people of Assam in general have unique feature of their own. They belong to different cast groups and tribes. Each of them has their own culture and custom, which is different from others. But today, Assam in particular, faces lots of problems and has become the battlefield between the militants and army, local and non locals, the immigrants from Bangladesh, Nepal, Bihar and other states of the country.

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It is seen that the entire demography of the state has been changed in Assam during the last four decades. During 1891 – 1901, the influx of settlers in to Assam was rather slow. The 1991 Census reported a wave of settlers modifying the densities and distribution of population in few districts of Assam. The growth of population in Assam rose from 1881 to 1931 was more than 100%. This has extensively affected the distribution pattern of population. Comparing the rate of population in Assam with that of India as a whole during 1901 to 1921 was very slow, where as during the same period the population of Assam increased more than 39%. Since 1921 Indian population increased by 44% and population of Assam by 70%. Large scale migration from Bangladesh over several decades has been altering the demographic complexion of the state. It poses a grave threat both to the identity of the Assamese people and national security. Assamese people being largely converted and we are losing our ethnic culture and identity. It threatens to reduce the Assamese people to a minority in their own state. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the migration problem of Assam and its impact on the demographic changes, more especially demographic structure of Assam.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:** The main objectives of this study are –

- 1) To study the population structure of Assam,
- 2) to study the impacts of migration on population structure of Assam and
- 3) to study how immigrants created a crisis of identity among the indigenous people of Assam.

**DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY:** The proposed work is based on secondary source of data, which have been collected from various secondary sources like District Gazetteers, District at Glance, Statistical Hand Books, Report of government, semi government agencies as well as the bulletin and journals published by the various departments in time to time and various published and unpublished other records related to the subject.

**DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS:** The collected data has been processed and analyzed with the help of various statistical techniques. The results obtained are presented with the help of various cartographic techniques. Table, diagrams, graph has been prepared for the purpose.

**STUDY AREA:** The study area Assam is the North-east corner of India with an area of 78,438 sq. km. representing 2.39% of the Indian landmass and population of 31169272 (2011) which is 2.58% of Indian population. It is connected with the rest of India by a narrow strip of land lying in the Himalayas.

Geographically, Assam is spread beneath the foothills of Eastern Himalayas, sharing the boundaries with all the North Eastern States. The state is bounded by Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.

**ANALYSIS:** The present population of Assam is a mix of both immigrants and indigenous population. The earliest notable stream of migration in to Assam took place in 1228 A.D. when a group of Mongoloid people entered in Assam. They defeated the local tribes of Brahmaputra valley, settled and ruled over the Brahmaputra valley region for long Six hundred years till it was taken over by the East India Company on 1826 by the treaty of Yandabu. The descendent of these migrants are known as *Ahom* and they constituted one of the major population groups of Assam.

From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century Assam experienced a few major streams of migration –

- Tea Garden Labourers
- The Muslim Peasants
- The Bengali Hindu Migrants
- Nepalese migrants and
- Migrants from different parts of India.

The first stream of migration to modern Assam was the labourers who were brought to work in tea gardens in Assam during 1840 to 1931 from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand etc. The total population of tea garden labourers and ex-tea garden labour along with their descendent is now about 30 Lakhs, nearly 11% of the states total population. They have completely identified themselves with the indigenous population of the state. A large proportion of the present population in Assam especially in Lakhimpur, Sivasagar, Darrang and Cachar districts belong to the tea garden labourers.

The British government brought Bengali Hindu to work office and industries of Assam. But the most conspicuous mass migration of this stream took place at the time of partition and immediately thereafter.

There are also large numbers of immigrants from Nepal in to Assam. Most of them depend on livestock farming. As many amongst the Nepalis have adopted Assamese and given it as their spoken language for the Census enumerations. The number of Nepalis population living in Assam grew in the following manner:

The stream of migrants which created the highest controversy of Assam was the Muslim Peasant from Bangladesh. This migration began as a result of the interplay of focuses in Bengal Vis-à-vis Assam. The population pressure in East Bengal was 202 per square km. while it was on 41 in Assam in the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The economic and agrarian conditions of East Bengal became unbearable for the depressed and landless class from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The extra ordinary rise the price of food grains, pressure of population on land etc. acted as a strong push factors.

**DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES:**

**CHANGES IN POPULATION GROWTH:** Recently Assam has crossed the three corers of population. According to 2011 Census the population of Assam is 31,169,272 which is 2.58% of India's population out of which 15954927 is male and 15214345 is female. According to the available statistics Assam ranked 14<sup>th</sup> position in India. Regarding the natural growth of population during the period 1971 - 1981, the state has registered higher growth rate. The same trend stands irreversed during the period 1981 – 1991. In this period, average annual exponential growth rate for the state has been 2.12% against the national rate of only 2.1%. Included among the contributing factors for such high growth rate of population in the region are low level of development of family planning facility, minority status of tribal communities, and other socio-cultural factors. The region has also received large influx of people from neighboring countries is still taking place. Following table shows the percentage decadal variation in population since 1901 – 2011.

**Table – 1: DECADEAL GROWTH OF POPULATION**

Year	Percentage of variation	
	Assam	India
1901 - 1911	16.99	5.75
1911 - 1921	20.48	-0.31
1921 - 1931	19.91	11.00
1931 - 1941	20.40	14.22
1941 - 1951	19.93	13.31
1951 - 1961	34.98	21.51
1961 - 1971	34.95	24.80
1971 – 1981	23.36	24.66
1981 – 1991	24.24	23.50
1991 - 2001	18.92	21.34
2001 - 2011	16.93	17.64

Source: Census Report for respective years. For 1981 estimated population.

Inter district variation in the growth of population indicate the influence of migration in to the growth of population in Assam during 2001 - 2011 decade as well. For example districts of Dhubri and Goalpara have experienced decadal growth rate are (2001 – 2011) as high as 24.40% and 22.74% respectively against the state average of 16.93%.

**Table- 2: District Wise Percentage of Decadal Variation in Population Since 1971-2001**

Districts	1971-1991	1991-2001	Average Decadal Growth
Dhubri	56.57	23.42	26.66
Kokrajhar	76.78	12.05	29.61
Bongaigaon	64.64	12.23	25.62
Goalpara	54.12	23.07	25.73
Barpeta	43.02	18.53	20.51

Nalbari	49.27	11.98	20.41
Kamrup	65.72	25.75	30.49
Darrang	55.63	15.79	23.80
Sonitpur	57.14	17.80	21.64
Lakhimpur	56.29	18.34	24.87
Dhemaji	107.50	18.93	42.14
Morigaon	50.90	21.29	24.06
Nagaon	51.26	22.30	24.52
Golaghat	58.12	14.21	24.00
Jorhat	33.10	15.84	16.13
Sivasagar	38.76	15.95	18.23
Dibrugarh	37.78	12.43	16.60
Tinsukia	47.03	19.52	22.18
Karbi Anglong	74.72	22.57	32.30
N.C. Hills	98.30	23.47	37.30
Karimganj	42.08	21.35	21.14
Hailakandi	45.94	20.92	22.28
Cachar	47.59	18.66	22..00

Source: Census Report 2001

From the table it is observed that the percentages of population during 1991-2001 decade were found increased among the districts like Dhubri, Goalpara, Morigaon, Nagaon, Barpeta, Karimganj and Hailakandi except the two hilly districts namely Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills and Kamrup (city).

#### CHANGE IN POPULATION COMPOSITION:

**Table: 3 - Community Wise Growth of Population(in %)**

Year	1971		1991		2001		2011	
	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim
India	82.70	11.20	82.00	12.10	80.50	13.40	79.00	14.20
Assam	72.51	24.56	67.13	28.43	64.90	30.90	61.41	34.22

Source: Census Report 20011

The Table shows that during the period 1971-91 Hindu growth rate in Assam was much less than the All India figures. Possibly, this was due to large scale population movement of non-Assamese Hindus out of Assam during the Students movement and subsequent militancy in the State. In the case of Muslims the Assam growth rate was much higher than the All India rate. This suggests continued large scale Muslim illegal migration into Assam. Muslim population of Assam has shown a rise of 77.42% in 1991 from what it was in 1971. Hindu population has risen by nearly 41.89% in this period. Muslim population in Assam has risen from 24.68% in 1951 to 28.42% in 1991. As per 1991 census, four districts (Dhubri, Goalpara, Borpeta and Hailakandi) have become Muslim majority districts. Two more districts (Nowgaon and Karimganj) should have become so by 1998 and one district

(Morigaon) is fast approaching this population. The growth of Muslim population has been emphasized in the previous paragraph to indicate the extent of illegal migration from Bangladesh to Assam because as stated earlier, the illegal migrants coming into India after 1971 have been almost exclusively Muslims.

**Table-4: Growth Rate of population of three major religious communities, their growth rates and percentages to total population during 1971-2001.**

Religious community	Total Population			Percentage to total population			Growth Rate	
	1971	1991	2001	1971	1991	2001	'71-91	'91-2001
Hindu	10,604,618	15,047,293	17,296,455	72.51	67.13	64.89	41.89	14.94
Muslim	3,592,124	6,373,204	8,240,611	24.56	18.43	30.92	77.42	29.30
Christian	381,010	744,367	986,589	2.61	3.32	3.70	95.37	32.54
Others	47,400	247,458	97,505	0.32	1.12	0.36	426.28	-60.91
Assam	14,625,152	22,414,322	26,655,528	100	100	100	53.26	18.92

The data presented in the above table shows the high growth rate among the Christians during the periods of 1971-1991 (95.37%) and 1991-2001 (32.54%), which was largely due to conversion from other religions, mostly from Hindus. On the other hand, if we compare the growth rates between the two major religious communities of Assam i.e., Hindu and Muslim, we see that their growth rates were decreased in the period of 1991-2001 i.e., 14.94% and 29.30% respectively as compared to the periods of 1971-1991 (41.89% and 77.42% respectively). But, it is observed that the growth rates were found greater among Muslim community than that of the Hindu community in all the periods. Here, a question may be aroused as where is the illegal immigrants? For answering this, let us take the data from 1971 to 1991 and analyze it:-

If the figures of all the non-Muslim communities are combined together, the growth rate comes to 45.39 per cent for the twenty year period. The decadal growth rate is, therefore, calculated at about 20.38 percent. The natural growth rate of Assam in 1991 for all the religious groups combined is estimated as 19.4 per thousand. If the natural growth rate for the non-Muslims is slightly lower than 19.4, say 19 per thousand, then the excess of about four lakhs non-Muslims may be due to migration for the entire twenty years from 1971 to 1991. If the decadal natural growth rate for the Muslims during this period is considered to be 20.5 per cent, then the growth rate for this period is calculated at 45.2 per cent. In that case, the excess of about 11.5 lakhs may be considered as illegal immigrants of Muslims, mostly from Bangladesh. It may be mentioned that only a few entered Assam with passport during this period.(Bhuyan, 2001).

From the statistics it is clear that during 1991-2001 periods, the percentages of Hindu population were decreased in each and every district of Assam whereas the population percentages of Muslim community were increased in every district. This picture indicates that Assam is going to become a Muslim dominated state near future.

**Table-5: Growth of Muslim population (%) in some of the Border Districts of Assam during 1971-2001.**

Sl No	Districts	1971-1991		1991--2001		2011(Total in %)	
		Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim
01	Dhubri	-6.07	+6.0	-4.0	+3.84	19.92	79.67
02	Goalpara	-11.0	+8.6	-1.68	+3.61	34.51	57.52
03	Barpeta	-9.4	+7.3	-.10	+8.9	29.11	70.74
04	Karimganj	-4.9	+5.0	-5.5	+3.1	42.48	56.36
05	Marigaon	-4.85	+4.90	-2.34	+2.29	47.20	52.56
06	Nagaon	-7.87	+7.3	-3.93	+3.90	43.39	55.36
07	Hailakandi	-	-	-	-	38.10	60.31
08	Bongaigaon	-	-	-	-	48.61	50.22
09	Darrang	-	-	-	-	35.25	64.34

It is clear from the above Table-IV that in some border districts of Assam the percentages of Hindu population have been decreasing decade to decade whereas it is increasing in case of the Muslim population. Various studies of renowned thinkers of the state have already proved it with data that Muslim migrants have entered to these border districts in large numbers along with the Hindu migrants (Bhuyan, 2002). With the help of analysis of data, they have also showed that the natural growth rate of Muslims should not have much difference between Bangladesh and Assam; but the difference in actual rate clearly confirms the migration of Muslims to Assam during 1971-2001 (Kumar, 2002).

**Change in Population Composition:** Presence of illegal Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants in India is nothing new. In almost every district of states like Assam, Tripura or West Bengal one can easily identify Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants by their Urdu-mixed Bengali and typical accent. However over last fifteen years or so this problem of illegal immigration has taken a new alarming shape. Recent statistics clearly show that North Eastern states, especially Assam have become the victims of demographic invasion due to illegal Muslim migration from Bangladesh. Now it has changed the demographic pattern of the state. Illegal migrants from Bangladesh in to Assam are now almost Muslims. It is clear from the following table – 3.

If we looked at the demographic pattern of the state (Table- 3, Community wise growth of population), Hindu growth rate in Assam are much less than the all India figure. Possibly, this was due to the large scale Muslim illegal migration in to Assam.

**Table – 6: DISTRICT WISE POPULATION IN PERCENTAGES**

District	1971		1991		2001		2011(Muslim majority districts)
	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim	
Goalpara	50.17	41.46	39.89	50.18	38.11	53.71	57.52
Dhubri	34.80	64.46	28.73	70.46	24.73	74.29	79.67
Kokrajhar	76.18	17.02	66.68	19.33	65.59	20.36	
Bongaigaon	69.61	27.96	64.01	32.74	59.17	38.52	50.22
Kamrup	77.45	20.60	74.32	23.38	72.79	24.77	
Nolbari	83.71	15.39	77.48	19.94	76.05	22.09	
Borpeta	51.19	48.58	40.26	56.07	40.19	59.36	70.74
Darang	70.31	23.91	60.54	31.98	57.73	35.54	64.34
Sonitpur	86.00	9.04	80.20	13.33	76.57	15.94	
Nagaon	59.64	39.24	51.73	47.19	47.79	50.99	55.36
Marigaon	59.57	40.16	54.56	45.31	52.21	47.58	52.56
Sivasagar	91.08	6.65	89.63	7.63	88.20	8.15	
Jorhat	94.80	3.68	93.59	4.32	92.85	4.76	
Golaghat	90.95	5.89	86.11	7.11	85.94	7.90	
Lakhimpur	85.01	10.97	79.70	14.51	79.06	16.14	
Dibrugarh	92.92	3.64	91.30	4.49	90.14	4.49	
Tinsukia	91.81	2.47	90.18	3.13	89.48	3.47	
Dhemaji	99.07	0.39	93.87	1.49	95.94	1.84	
KarbiAnglong	90.27	1.30	84.82	1.57	82.39	2.22	
North Cachar	77.03	0.86	72.92	2.21	69.91	2.47	
Cachar	65.44	32.51	63.42	34.49	61.37	36.13	
Karimganj	55.14	44.24	50.15	49.17	46.69	52.30	56.36
Hailakandi	47.48	51.40	43.70	54.79	41.11	57.62	60.31

Source: Census of India



It is noticed that Assam's population doubled in the 40 years between 1901 and 1941, and more than doubled in the 30 years between 1941 and 1971. In the 70 years between 1901 and 1971, Assam's population increased from 3.29 million to 14.6 million.

As a result of population Movement from Bangladesh, the indigenous people of Assam are being reduced to a minority in their own state. Muslim population has risen. As per 1991 census, four districts (Dhuburi, Goalpara, Barpeta and Hailakandi) have become Muslim majority districts. Two more districts (Nagaon nad Karimganj) have become again Muslim majority districts in 2001 and now, Morigaon is fast approaching this population. It will be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made.

Influx of immigrants created a crisis of identity among the indigenous Assamese. If the pressure is allowed to continue, they feared as in the case of Tripura, their economic, political and cultural life would be endangered. It is observed that Assamese speaking population is decreasing gradually due to immigration. Though immigrants Muslims identified themselves linguistically and culturally as Assamese, they continued to speak their own languages in their home.

During last 20 years (1983 – 2011) number of voters has increased in the state. The election department is not able to give any final conclusion about this high rate of increase of voters in Assam. In a period of one and half years the number of voters have increased more than 1.6 million (13.38%) in Assam. This abnormal increase in voter's numbers cannot be contributed only by the natural growth of population.

**CONCLUSION:** Although Bangladeshi illegal migrants have come into several states of India they are more numerous than in Assam. They pose a much greater threat in Assam. If not effectively checked, they may swamp the people and may sever the North-East land mass from the rest of India. There is an imperative need to evolve a National Consensus on this all important threat facing the Nation. Awareness should be promoted about illegal migration in to Assam being not only a threat to the identity of the Assamese people but what is more, being a grave threat to our National Security.

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