A Study on Politics of Migration in Assam, North East, India

Supriya Dey
Program – P46F (M.A Public Administration)

Dr. Manvendra Singh
Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

Abstract

Migration has been an extremely problematic issue in North East, Assam. The whole region has been suffering for the illegal immigrants in term of its ethnicity, identity, language etc since ages. The region has gone through many autonomous movements based on ethnicity, separate state, sixth schedule, Foreign National, etc. And at present, the repercussion of the demand for separate state is the dissociation of the state of Assam into 4 different autonomous states in the region. This region for ages had been the destination of various Sperm of Migrants from different parts of the Subcontinent. Therefore, this paper lays prominent emphasis on the politics of migration, its impact, its implication on politics and suggestions for solving the problem of Migration.

Keywords: Migration, illegal immigration, language, ethnicity.

Introduction

The issue of migration in North East is not a new one; the region has been facing it since before British rule in India. Initially the migrants were from South-East Asia, North, North East, East, Southwest China and Upper Burma. And latter on during the rule of East India Company the process continued gradually with due reasons. The East India Company, during their rule took initiatives to bring people such as tea garden labourers, Muslim peasant immigrants from East Bengal in the late nineteenth century and it continued till 1940. Moreover, huge number of population of Bengalis, Nepalese and tribes migrated to North East. These peoples were brought only for the purpose of handling the works of British Administration as officers, lawyers, clerks etc and latter on settled there. Meanwhile, to work at the tea plantations sectors many labourers were imported from Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal and Andhra Pradesh by Colonizers.

Not only within the country’s territory people migrated, but there was huge influx of outsiders during both pre & post independence period. And, they were termed as foreigners if they are not Indians and vice versa. Soon after the partition of East Bengal (Bangladesh) and India in the year 1947, huge number of refuges gathered in some part of west Bengal and also in Tripura & Assam. The people that migrated to Assam are grouped into five classes, namely 1. L and hungry peasants, 2. Nepali as live stock farmer, 3. Refugees from Bangladesh, 4. Traders from Bengal & Rajasthan, 5. Tea garden laborers from Orissa & Bihar.

Since ages, the indigenous inhabitants of the region have been facing many difficulties due to these phenomena till date and it had witnessed many movements against foreigners. This is because of possessing a threat to lose their ethnic identity, languages and also of becoming minority. The continuous influx of foreigners from neighboring countries has endangered the political sovereignty of the people of the state and threatened the security of this part of nation.
Literature Review

Though there is large volume of literature available on the issue of illegal immigrants in North East India. Here are some of the works accessible on ‘Politics of migration in Assam’.

1. **Das J, Talukdar D (2016)** in their research paper titled ‘Socio-Economic and Political Consequence of Illegal Migration into Assam from Bangladesh’ found out the reason behind the social and ethnic violence in Assam due to flow of immigration & has forwarded few suggestions to meet the problem.

2. **Devi T (2018)** in her research paper titled ‘Political Impact of Migration in Assam Politics’ looked after the political impact of migration in Assam particularly. Emphasizes issues related to migration like NRC, D-voter, vote bank etc and along with these she has given some suggestions regarding the politicization of immigrants issue.

3. **Sharma C.K (2012)** in his paper titled ‘The immigration issue in Assam and conflicts around it’ discussed about the politico-economic dynamics of immigration issue, the social tension and conflicts in Assam. He also suggested that a multi-pronged model backed by strong political party will negotiate the challenges of immigration.

4. **Singha K (2018)** in his article ‘Migration, Ethnicity based Movements and State’s Response: A Study of Assam’ found out the reason behind the ever growing Bengali migrants from Bangladesh and the demands for ethnic-based autonomy movements.

5. **Dutta N (2015)** in article ‘Immigration in Assam: A Historical Perspective’ mentioned about the history of illegal immigration process faced by Assam. He laid importance on the judgment passed by Supreme Court regarding updating of NRC, proper solving of border issue and protection of Assamese people.


Research Methodology and Objectives

The paper explains with qualitative nature. It is based on the secondary data derived from books, journals, articles and websites. Observational method is also used for analyzing the data. The main objectives of this research are:

1. To find out the reason of immigration of outsiders in North East, Assam.
2. To know about the problems faced by the inhabitants in Assam.
3. To find out the solution of solving the issue of migration in Assam.

Discussion

Migration has impacted in both effective and affective way in the region. The occupation of the unused areas & lands became possible due to migration for agricultural and agroindustrial production. Moreover, the introduction of new crop & new method of cultivation came into existence. The influx of migration is also responsible for urbanization in the state though large areas of Assam still remain rural and agricultural in character. Initially, the ethnic & linguistic clash occurred between Bengali and Assamese speaking communities, and meanwhile politics on language and riot came into emergence. Later on the riot resulted to huge loss of life & property as well as conflictual relation among them. Since, the pre-British era the inhabitants have been facing severe threat regarding their political, social and economic security due to immigrants. The region has gone through many movements in terms of language, foreign nationals, illegal outsiders,
autonomy, Assam student movement etc. One of the outcomes of their action is Assam Accord 1985, the negotiation between the Central Government and leaders of Assam movements. But after the Accord also the problem was not solved and therefore, the then Governor of Assam in 1998 submitted a report on illegal migration to the President of India in a request to take effective actions and measures in order to avert the danger that has been building up since ages.

India and Bangladesh shares a very foraminous border which is one of a reason of heavy influx of population from East Pakistan to the region. There are many reasons for which infiltrations are being possible so far, among which the most popular factor is the encouragement provided by the political parties to the migrants to come into India which will result to build their vote banks. It has never been found that outsiders are in any higher post or in any government organization but they are mostly into hard & cheap work in the form of daily wages laborers than the local people. This makes them admissible. But they are actually a kind of problem & threat creatures for Assam, because of their bad impact in social, political, economical, demographical and cultural sector. The entire region is going through population explosion, environmental degradation, excessive illegally land occupation etc and creating a threat in the mind set of the indigenous people that they would become minority in their native place.

Not only for the foreigners the region has also faced lots of problem regarding Indian migrators whosoever were Bengali, Marwari, Nepali, Bihari, Rajasthani and Punjabi came from different states of India to Assam seeking for job opportunities. They find one or the other means of earning as: 1. Bengalis & Rajasthani got engaged in the professions of teaching, Petty trading, clerical, medicines etc. 2. Marwaris got engaged in business of Assam and indeed they economically exploited Assamese. But the inhabitants did not feel that much from the Marwari’s instead of that they felt the deprivation from the Bengalis, as because they were not ready to accept the culture & language of Assam and following their own culture. Therefore, the Assamese elite had been in constant fear and anxiety of being gradually dominated by groups from outside the province. 3. Nepalese occupation was live stock farmer. 4. Bihari got them occupied as tea garden labourers. “One of the most difficult problems which arose out of this migration was that, with little exception, other Assamese communities to remain separate and aloof. In a sense, a certain distance continued to exist between the Assamese and the Non-Assamese”. At present era, the region is facing insecurity related to their cultural & political aspects.

As it’s already mentioned above regarding the political reason of allowing immigrants in the region, and it already carries huge controversies where it was being assumed that due to get more seats in Parliament or Assembly the political parties encouraged and helped those foreigners to settle in Assam, which means that the migration process will increase the population. The politicians were so much self-seeking that they somehow through fraudulently enrolled the name of foreigners under the voter list and it was possible due to negligence of Government in the administration. This way gradually the populace went on increasing with the time, where it is already known that the phenomenon was not natural indeed it was motivated. Centre has taken measures like mandating and updating National Registration Certificate for Assam in order to identify illegal influx and put them in detention. But till date, it still cannot be said that the inhabitants of the region are free from their threat and are secure regarding their selfidentity. Therefore, this problem needs to be under severe consideration of Government and more steps need to be taken by the Government.

Some well founded actions can be taken by the Government in order to resolve the issue of migration, which is mentioned below:

1. If the Government of India consult, negotiate and mutually co-operate with the Government of Bangladesh, then it may be resolved as because it’s an international conflict.
2. The migration is generally done from lower economic status nation to higher status nation. So, if Indian Government helps East Pakistan in terms of economic developing sector then a bit of the issue of illegal immigrants shall reduce.
3. Politically it can be suggested that the borders among Bangladesh, India and West Bengal need to be strengthen in order to avoid immigration.
Conclusion

The North East region is full of diversity, even the whole nation India is a diverse nation but the NER possess heterogeneous character among the inhabitants within the territory. Which makes them conscious regarding their ethnic identity including languages, cultures, traditions etc and hence, each and every groups & communities that belongs from different hilly tribes & plain tribes in Assam wants to preserve their unique identity. In order to safeguard their interest huge contrasting protest & inter-state dispute were done by the population among themselves to gain political autonomy and independent statehood before independence. These were only done due to non willingness of Assamese people becoming minority in its own land. But even after going through all those several revolution still the problem is not yet resolve. The region is suffering a lot for the illegal immigrants, unwanted population in their land. Their national interests are compromised in term of bringing people from outside. There is a lack of National consensus key issue for which the management principles are responsible. We cannot say that the Management is doing different things or performing what is illegal but it can be said that they are doing things differently which may be not the efficient manner to resolve the issue of the nation. The public service delivery mechanism is not proper in the NER this is the reason why the migration issue is still a burning one.

References