Volume: 5 Issue: 11 Pages: 01-05



Migration and its Socio-economic Effects on Assam

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24213912

Article Info.
E-ISSN: 2583-6528
Impact Factor (QJIF): 8.4
Peer Reviewed Journal
Available online:
www.alladvancejournal.com

Received: 05/Oct/2026
Accepted: 10/Nov/2026

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Abstract
Migration is the movement of people from one place to another, often involving a change in residence or country, driven by factors like economic opportunities, education, conflict, or environmental changes. Migration is when people move from one place to another like moving to a new city or country, often for work, education or a better life. Immigration is when people move to a new country to live, often for permanent residence. It is like moving to a new place with the intention of setting up a new life. Immigration has significantly impacted in Assam's socio-economic landscape, particularly with the influx of migrants from Bangladesh. On the one hand, migrants have contributed to agricultural productivity, labor markets, and economic growth. They have also introduced new skills and diversified croping patterns, boosting food security. However, the large-scale immigration has risen concerned about demographic changes, cultural dilution, and economic marginalization of indigenous communities. The native population has felt threatened by job competition and pressure on resources, leading to ethnic anexities and movements like Assam Movement (1979-1985).

Keywords: Migration, Socio-economic impact, Tea Industry, Agriculture, Indigenous Communities.

Introduction

Migration is one of the more controversial issues in the currrent debate on economic and social policies in many countries of destination. On the one hand migration is blamed in some quarters for unemployment and increasing inequality in the host countries. On the other hand, it is hoped that international migration can at least alleviate the burden of the rapidly aging population in some crowd societies.

Migration is the movement of people between regions or countries. It is the process of changing one's place of residence and permanently living in a region or country. According to Demographic Dictionary of United Nations, "Migration is such an event in which people move from one geographical area to another geographical area. When people living their place of residence go to live permanently in another area then this is called migration. Migration may be permanent or temporary with the intention of returning to the place of origin in future.

Migration in a broad term which is applicable, not only in case of human beings, but also in case of other living beings, such as, moving from one place to another for a limited period. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines migration as "the movement of people from one place in order to settle permanently in another". Migration is a very important characteristic of every species. It is a human necessity.

The Dictionary meaning of the term migration is "a change of residence from one to another". There are some other scholars who put their views over the migration differently. A Weinberg view is that human migration is the changing of the place of abode permanently or when temporarily, for an appreciable duration.

Migration has been defined as the crossing of the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period of time. It includes the movement of refugees, displaced persons as well as economic migrants. Internal migration however refers to a move from one area to another with one country. It is rational decision made by an individual to move from a less advantageous situation to a more advantageous one after weighing the various pros and cons.

Objectives of the Study

The present paper aims to trace out the contribution of the people migrated from the then East Bengal towards the agricultural economy of Assam. The study also aims to find out the role of immigrant people in the labor market of the state.

1. To study the impact of migration on the local people.
2. To show the problems those are created by the different migrants.
3. To study the migration of the different types and their impact and implication in the politics of Assam.
4. To explore the concept of migration.
5. To study the beneficial economic effect of migration in Assam.
6. To study the harmful economic effect of migration in Assam.

Methodology

The study is based on the analytical research which has to use available facts and information. The research has relied upon the secondary data which have been collected from the different research works, Journals, Magazines and internet sources. This paper has been prepared on the basis of historical and observational method of investigation. Historical method in the sense that some facts and information are collected from books and works published earlier and observation method used in the sense that some knowledge and facts acquired by personal observation of the society are included in the present study.

Types of Migration

Assam is experiencing three different types of migration. These are intra –state migration, interstate migration, and inter-country migration.

Intra-state Migration

In our state Assam, there is huge extent of intr-state migration of population from rural to urban areas of the state in search of better employment opportunities and better social services related to education, health etc. Such type of migration becomes acute in Assam since 1980's of the last century. Such type of intra-state migration does not increase the size of population rather it simply changes the rural- urban composition of the population structure of the state.

Inter-state Migration

The second important type of migration, which has been being experienced by the state, is the inter-state migration where people from different states of the country are migrating to Assam on various socio-economic grounds. As we know that the trade and commerce in our state growing and expanding day by day especially in the urban and semi-urban areas of our state of Assam and this is one of the reason that a huge number of population has migrated to the urban areas of the state from the other states of India.

Inter-country Migration

The third and the most important type of migration that the state is being faced is the inter-country migration of which can also be called immigration of population from the neighbouring countries. Large scale immigration of population from the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal etc. causes a high rate of growth of population in Assam. Such migration was very high in Assam during 1961-1971 and even in recent times. Such immigration is still continuing in a low off.

Besides these, Migration may be divided into Following Categories

Forced Migration

When the administration forces an outsized group of people out of an area, generally based on ethnicity or religious conviction, it is known as population transfer or involuntary or forced migration.

Imposed Migration

When individuals are moving their country not of forced, but leaves of inauspicious environments such as riot, political troubles, or devoute harassment is known as reluctant or impelled or imposed migration.

Chain Migration

It is a chain migrations contained by a family or distinct group of people. This type of movement results in movement fields the clustering of people from a definite place or constituency into definite relatives or neighborhoods or tiny municipality.

Return Migration

It is the voluntary or intended movements of immigrants back to their place of foundation, and

Seasonal Migration

It is the process of migration for a period of time in response to work or typical weather conditions otherwise an example, farm labourers following crop harvests or working in cities offseason. Briefly speaking, people who migrate from one earth surface to another earth surface must be immigrant or refugee. It has been held by many thinkers of the present century that migration should be concerned simply with such and such ideas already mentioned.

Reasons of Migration

Assam with its favourable climate for tea plantation and land attracted the Britishers to invest their capital for the production of this important item of consumption. Inspite of the availability of abundant land and capital, they had to face the severe shortage of labor supply. So migrants from foreign countries had been attracted by these employment opportunities. Besides, the immigrations of cultivators from erstwhile East Bengal came to Assam for using wastelands for cultivation. So, the basic reason of the migratory movement was the availability of abundant cultivable land.

A large number of evacuees from Burma (now Myanmar) during the Second World War and the Hindu Refugees from East pakisthan was the main constituent of the foreign migrants during the decade 1941-1951.

In addition to this, from the study it is found that many Nepali Migrants came to Assam and most of them were originally soldiers of Gurkha regiments. The rising demand for milk and milk products and fire wood in urban centres encouraged the Nepali to settle in the hill slopes.

On the other hand, tea plantation in Assam attracted not only the foreign migrants but also the migrants from the non-adjacent states especially from Bihar and Uttarpradesh. Marwari merchants of Rajasthan also migrated to Assam to capture the trade and commerce. Moreover, the migrants from Punjab were mostly contractors, skill mechanics, carpenters, and motor drivers. The migrants from Bihar have monopolized the laborious jobs like pottering, rickshaw pulling, brick -making, cobbler, barber etc. it is clear that 16.39 percent of migrants from other states of India to Assam encouraged to move for employment opportunities, 18.31

percent for business, 24.27 percent for family moved and 22.69 percent for marriage purposes.

The increase in migration is essentially due to regional differences in the population pressure on land, inequality of infra-structure, industrial development and modernization of agriculture.

Impact of Migration

Migration has significantly impacted Assam's socio-economic landscape. The influx of migrants, particularly from Bangladesh has contributed to:

Economic Growth: Boosted agriculture, tea industry, and labor market.

Cultural Changes: Concerns demographic shifts and indigenous identity.

Resource Competition: Pressure on land, jobs, and resources.

Tea Industry Reliance: Migrant labor is crucial but often faces poor conditions.

Identity Politics: Movements like the Assam movement highlight native concerns.

Policy Debates: NRC and CAA spark discussion on citizenship and inclusion.

Economic Contributions: Migrants boost agriculture, Tea production, and labor markets.

Cultural Tensions: Influx raises concerns about demographic change and indigenous indentity.

Resource Strain: Pressure on land, jobs, and resources sparks debates.

Social Impact of Migration

The social impact of immigrants on the host population is of course determined partly by how different the immigrants are from the population of the receiving area. As the migrants in Assam are heterogeneous and diverse in caste, religion, language, and culture, there may be profound socio-cultural implications. The different migrant groups have brought significant change in the socio-cultural profile of the state, especially in respect of ethnic diversity. However, the impacts of the immigrants from Bangladesh are different from other parts of the country. Language and religion are two important manifestations of culture, the difference of which could be the source of social tensions, when exodus takes place in large waves and the situation does not permit spontaneous assimilation with the host population, conflict may begin. Although the earlier migrants have already assimilated with the local culture, new migrants pose slightly different situation. Assam had already faced a serious language problem in 1960's and the undercurrent of language conflict still prevails in the immigrant dominated areas. Because of the heavy concentrations of immigrants, ethno-religious, composition in some districts of Assam like Dhubri, Barpeta, Goalpara, Nagaon, Hailakandi etc. has also under gone drastic change.

Economic Impact of Migration

Among the economic consequences, the most important one is related to the capacity of the prevailing economy of the state to absorb huge immigrant population. The simple man-land ratio indicates that the notion of land plenty of Assam as conceived by the immigrants is now a myth only and the ground realities are quite staggering. The arithmetic density of population in the state is 286 persons/sq km (1991 census) as against the countries 266.

The psychological density (700/per sq km) and agricultural density (172 per sq km) of the state are much higher than those psychological density. The population density of Assam which was only 42 persons/sq km in 1921 increased to 102 in 1951 and then to 286 in 1991. "It was estimated by Mr. Mullan that the plains of Assam could support 500 persons and the Hills only 60 persons per sq mile. The optimum population of the state as a whole could be about 12 million. But in 1961 her total population was 11.87 million and the annual growth rate has been places at 2.3 percent." According to this estimate it is now difficult to say that population of Assam is below the optimum rather than the state is now carrying an additional local of million populations. The intensity of population pressure on the agricultural economy of the state can be better understood from the fact that everage land holding size in the state has declined from 1.46 hectares in 1970-1971to 1.36 hectares in 1980-1981. Assam's per capita land is 0.35 hectare (1991) as against the countries average of 0.39 hectares. Since the reversal of the emerging demographic pattern is not possible now, intensity of population pressure will increase for year by year. Whatever, economic development is achieved so far, particularly in the agricultural sector, has been neutralized by the abnormal population growth in the state.

Impact of Migration on Assam's Economy

Migration has socio-economic impact on the Assam's economy. Both foreign and inter-state migrations have its direct impact on the social, economic, cultural and political sphere of Assam. In the initial stage, the migration of the East Bengal cultivators was beneficial to Assam because they helped the growth of Assam's agriculture. The migrant cultivators diversified the pattern of land use. They began the production of jute for the first time in Assam. This cash crop occupied an important place in Assam's agricultural economy. But in the later stage, migration to Assam change the ethnic composition of the population and rouse the feeling of threatening cultural identity among the people of Assam. As a result, a section of youth has embarked on a violent struggle. Thus the large-scale ethnic violence and insurgency grew in Assam.

Moreover, the large –scale migration of population has created food problem in Assam. Increasing size of population has increased the demand for food but the area under cultivation and the production of food did not increase simultenously. As a result, price of food articles has increased in Assam. In addition to this, migration has direct economic impact on the per capita income of the state of Assam. The per capita income in Assam could not achieve its expected growth due to slow pace of its state income and high growth rate of migration.

High growth rate of migration has resulted unemployment problem in Assam. The educated youths are facing competition from the inter-state migrants for employment. For example, in the face of intense competition for the semi-skilled "D" category of jobs in the Indian Railways in Assam in November-2003, a mere 2750 vacancies had attracted 20,000 prospective applicants from Bihar.

Moreover, another adverse impact of migration on social aspects includes housing, education, health, water supply etc. The overcrowding due to migration has led to many evils, diseases, degradation, crime and cruelties. From the study it is observed that quality of human life in Assam has been deteriorated.

Different New Social Groups in Colonial Assam

The Britishers

The Britishers were the dominant and the influential new social group in colonial Assam. They came to Assam to rescue Assamese people from the Burmese was just a clue and therefore, after overthrowing the Burmese, the Britishers did not leave Assam. Rather they gradually consolidated their regime in this land. As far the professions of the Britishers were concerned they were the top administrators both in civil and military administration. Some of them indulged themselves as the tea planters while some others were working as the members of Christian Missionaries.

The Americans

Another new social group of European origin was the Americans. The Americans were the members of Christian Missionary. Although their basic task was to expand Christianity, yet they greatly contributed towards the promotions of Assamese language and literature. It was basically under the auspicious of Americans Baptist Missionary that the first Assam Magazine "orunudoi" came into existence in 1846.

The Hindu Bengalis

The Hindu Bengalis, who were known as "Baboos" to the local people were imported from West Bengal. They were imported to serve the middle class a job in colonial administration. The number of imported Bengali Hindu was such that, "By the early part of 20th century, they were. "Prepondant in the medical, lagal and teaching profession as well as many other middle class position in the Railways and in the post office."

The Britishers not only imported the Hindu Bengalis but also imposed Bengali language for more than three decades (1837-1873) as the court language and newly established Government schools.

The Marwaris

Another numerically small and business class came to Assam along with the British and they are known as Marwaris. The term "Marwaris' was basicallyused to indicate a commercial race from Rajasthan. In Assam, however, the term "Marwari" is used somewhat loosely to include members of some other ethnic groups, such as Sindhi, who along with marwaris have been associated with the trade and commerce in the region.

The major task of the Marwaris was to act as bankers and commercial agent for the tea–planters and also for the peasant. Under this credit, the Marwaris, along with providing financial loan also provided essential commodities for the tea-garden workers and the peasant as well. As the time passed, some Marwaris began to identify themselves with Assamese culture and greatly contributed towards Assamese society. The name of Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Ananda Chandra Agarwala and Jyoti Prashad Agarwala deserved to be mentioned. Prof. S.L. Barua has rightly observed "some of the Marwaris belonging to the landed gentry had identified themselves with the Assamese culture and a few even got themselves.

The Nepalis

The Nepalis were another small laboring community who has migrated to Assam during the period of colonialization of Assam. The migration of the Nepalis was pursued by Britishers as because the Nepalis served as British army which was known as Gurkha Regiment and also as because the Nepalis indulged themselves in the business of milk supply by rearing cattle in the grazing areas. Throughout the ages the Nepalis intrigated themselves with the Assamese culture and perhaps because of this when Assam movement took place the Nepalis were excluded from the list of foreigners.

The Biharis

The Biharis were migrated from undivided Bihar. Numerically, the Biharis were a small group of economically poor class. The Biharis were wed in some of the ardous activities such as construction of roads, houses, and buildings. Besides, some of the Biharis engaged themselves as rikshaw puller, thela puller, barber, washmen etc.

The Tea-garden Laborers

The tea-garden workers, which were mostly imported from Bihar and Orissa, were another new social group of colonial Assam. Racially the tea garden labour were tribals belonging to some sub-tribes such as santhals, mundas, Braons, Kharias, Gonds, Kisan etc. In the initial period, the migration of tea garden labour was carried out under the effort of individual planters or companies. The tea garden labours not only remained as tea garden labour forever. Most of them left the work after or even before the contact was over and settle themselves in the agricultural lands near the gardens.

The Muslim Peasants

The massive flow of Muslim peasants, mostly from the Mymonsing district of East Bengal, led to the emergence of another new social group in colonial Assam. Migration of such Muslim peasants was even patronized by the colonial ruler as the Muslim peasants settled themselves in the char areas. Settlement of Muslim peasants in such areas fulfilled the economic interest of the colonial ruler. Because once uncultivated land if was cultivated and it provided revenue to the colonial ruler. Thus, the British policy of Migration of Muslim peasants was basically the product of the British policy of "grow more food" which ultimately intended to generate revenue in colonial Assam. Sometimes, however, opinions are given in differen way regarding the motivation of the colonial riler. It is, therefore, said, "the motivation of colonial officials was partly political balancing the Hindu and Muslim population of Assam was undoubted an attractive tool of political control.

Finding of the Study

1. The people migrated from Bangladesh are generally hard working skilled labour. Their wage rate is also comparatively less than the local labour. That is why the migrated people prefer to engaged in agricultural and hose hold activities. It is only the cause of the traditional cultural attachment of the community.
2. The most important finding of the study is that still now the field of piggery farming, hunting, and sericulture are dominated by migrated people.
3. In the field of rice-beer preparation and its business activities the migrated labour are not interested to enter.
4. The butchery of the pig is also remaining out of reach of the migrated labours. It is because of the religious prohibition of the migrated people.
5. In the field of production of vegetables, fishing, wage earning, construction activities the migration of labour is increasing in a faster manner.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of migration is an urgent crisis for the state of Assam. The problem of unemployment is an urgent need of redressal in Assam. The implications of its unchecked fury were evident in the ethnic violence in Assam. The phenomenon of low productivity due to overcrowding and cyclical unemployment have important implications for future generations in terms of education as it affects their labour market options to improve their skills and vertical mobility. Therefore, it is an imperative necessity to protect the right to work in Assam. Hence, it is an alarming call to political parties and concerned authorities to curb migration by adopting some short- term and long-term measures.

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