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Cross-Border Migration beyond Borderlands: Perceived Societal Transformation in Lakhimpur District, Assam

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Abstract

Migration from Bangladesh has remained a significant socio-economic and political issue in Assam, particularly in relation to labour competition, livelihood demographic change, pressure on local resources and questions of identity and political belonging. Existing literature on migration in Assam has predominantly focused on districts situated along the Indo-Bangladesh border, while comparatively limited attention has been paid to migration-related transformations within interior regions of the state. Against this backdrop, the present study examines perceived societal transformation in Lakhimpur district, a non-border region of Assam that has experienced notable migration-related changes over time. Drawing upon Lee's Push-Pull Theory and insights from Social Identity Theory, the study adopts a mixed-method research. The findings suggest that migration related perceptions in Lakhimpur are shaped through interconnected experiences of economic insecurity, demographic transformation, and political anxiety. Respondents frequently associated migration from Bangladesh with increasing labour market competition, declining wage opportunities, pressure on land and local resources, and changing social and political relations. These concerns were often linked to broader anxieties surrounding identity, belonging and the perceived transformation of local social structure. The study further argues that migration-related anxieties in Assam are no longer confined to districts directly bordering Bangladesh but have increasingly extended into inland regions, where migration is understood through everyday experiences of economic and social change. By shifting attention from border districts to an interior non-boarder setting, the paper contributes to broader discussions on migration, identity and societal transformation in South-East Asia. It also highlights the importance of examining local experiences of migration beyond conventional borderland frameworks.

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Introduction

Migration has emerged as one of the defining features of contemporary societies, shaping economic structures, political processes, social relations and questions of identity across different regions of the world (Castles & Miller, 2009). In South-East Asia, cross-border migration has acquired particular significance due to colonial legacies, uneven development, environmental pressures and historically porous borders (Samaddar, 1999). Beyond demographic movement, migration frequently becomes embedded within wider public concerns surrounding livelihood insecurity, access to

resources, citizenship, political representation and cultural belonging. Consequently, migration is often understood not merely as population mobility across territorial boundaries but as a process associated with broader social and economic transformation. Within India, Assam occupies a distinctive position in debates surrounding migration and identity. Migration from present-day Bangladesh has historically influenced the socio-political landscape of the state and continues to remain a subject of political and public concern (Weiner, 1978; Hazarika, 2000). Existing discussions on migration in Assam have frequently centred on demographic

shifts, land pressure, labour competition, ethnic assertion and electoral politics (Baruah, 1999; Hussain, 2000). Over time, these concerns have become closely linked with wider debates on indigeneity, cultural continuity and political belonging in Assam (Misra, 2011). As a result, migration in the state has increasingly been interpreted through anxieties surrounding identity, access to resources and changing social relations.

A considerable body of literature on migration in Assam has focused on districts located along the Indo-Bangladesh border, where questions of citizenship, border governance and demographic change are more directly visible (Samaddar, 1999; van Schendel, 2005). Such studies have significantly contributed to understanding borderland dynamics, ethnic mobilisation and political contestation in frontier regions (Baruah, 1999; Hazarika, 2000). However, comparatively less attention has been paid to inland districts that do not share direct geographical proximity with Bangladesh but nonetheless experience concerns associated with migration and social change. Consequently, the ways in which migration is perceived and interpreted within non-border regions of Assam remain relatively underexplored in existing literature. It is within this context that Lakhimpur district located on the north-east corner of Assam emerges as an important site of inquiry. Although the district does not share a direct border with Bangladesh, local discussions surrounding economy, identity and political change continue to be shaped by concerns associated with migration. Residents frequently associate migration with changing labour relations, pressure on land and local resources, demographic shifts and transformations in social structure. Such concerns are not necessarily rooted in immediate experiences of border proximity; rather, they are expressed through everyday negotiations over livelihood, social change and belonging. Examining these perceptions within a non-border setting therefore provides an opportunity to extend migration debates beyond conventional borderland frameworks and explore how migration-related anxieties diffuse into inland regions.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines perceived societal transformation in Lakhimpur district in the context of migration from Bangladesh. Drawing upon *Lee's Push-Pull Theory* (Lee, 1966) and insights from *Social Identity Theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the paper explores how migration is interpreted through interconnected experiences of economic change, demographic anxiety and political uncertainty among native residents of the district. Based on quantitative data alongside qualitative insights gathered through interviews and field interactions, the study argues that anxieties surrounding migration in Assam have increasingly moved beyond immediate border geographies and are now embedded within inland social contexts. In Lakhimpur, migration is understood not through direct experiences of border proximity, but through everyday concerns surrounding livelihood, resource pressure, identity and political uncertainty. The paper therefore extends existing migration debates by demonstrating how perceptions of societal transformation associated with cross-border migration continue to shape social, economic and political life even within non-border regions of Assam.

Objectives

1. To examine the social, economic and political changes perceived by native residents of Lakhimpur district in relation to migration from Bangladesh.
2. To understand how migration-related concerns and perceptions of social change are experienced in a non-border region of Assam.

Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-method research design to examine perceived social, economic and political transformations associated with migration from Bangladesh in Lakhimpur district, Assam. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to capture broader patterns as well as local experiences and perceptions surrounding migration-related change.

Primary data were collected from 250 native respondents through purposive sampling across selected rural and urban areas of Lakhimpur district. Quantitative data were gathered using a semi-structured questionnaire, while qualitative insights were obtained through interviews, field observations, case studies, informal interactions, and discussion with local residents and stakeholders including social activists, journalists, academicians, student union members and legal practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws upon Lee's Push-Pull Theory of Migration (Lee, 1966) and Social Identity Theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) to examine perceptions surrounding migration from Bangladesh within the context of Lakhimpur district, Assam. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding both the structural dimensions of migration and the social responses that emerge within receiving societies.

Lee's Push-Pull Theory explains migration through the interaction of conditions operating at the place of origin and destination. According to Lee (1966), migration is shaped by various push factors including poverty, unemployment, environmental stress and insecurity, alongside pull factors such as economic opportunity, access to land, livelihood prospects and relative social stability. In the context of Assam, migration from Bangladesh has often been associated with agrarian pressure, economic disparities and livelihood-related mobility across a historically porous border (Hazarika, 2000; Samaddar, 1999).

The relevance of Lee's framework to the present study extends beyond explaining migration flows alone. The theory also helps situate local perceptions of economic and demographic change within receiving regions. In Lakhimpur district, respondents frequently associated migration with labour competition, pressure on land and local resources, declining wage opportunities and changing demographic patterns and so on and so forth. Although Lakhimpur does not share a direct border with Bangladesh, migration-related concerns continue to be interpreted through everyday experiences of economic insecurity and social change. The study therefore examines how the perceived effects of migration extend beyond immediate border districts into inland regions of Assam.

At the same time, migration in Assam has historically been linked with questions of identity, belonging and political representation (Baruah, 1999; Misra, 2011). To interpret these dimensions, the study also draws upon Social Identity Theory. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that social groups play an important role in shaping collective identity and distinctions between "*in-groups*" and "*out-groups*." In contexts marked by demographic change and competition over resources, such distinctions often become socially and politically significant. Within Assam, migration-related concerns have frequently been articulated through debates surrounding demographic change, cultural continuity and political representation (Weiner, 1978; Baruah, 1999). In Lakhimpur district,

respondents often associated migration not only with economic concerns but also with changing social relations, identity and local political dynamics. Social Identity Theory therefore provides a useful framework for understanding how migration becomes linked with perceptions of social change and uncertainty regarding belonging and community boundaries.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a basis for analysing migration as both a socio-economic and political process. While Lee's Push-Pull Theory helps explain the structural conditions associated with migration, Social Identity Theory helps interpret how migration is perceived within local social and political contexts.

Socio-Cultural Transformations and Community Perceptions in Lakhimpur district

The socio-cultural dimension of migration emerged as one of the most significant findings of the study. Respondents across rural and urban areas of Lakhimpur district associated migration from Bangladesh with visible changes in settlement patterns, cultural practices, religious composition, land relations and inter-community interactions. Although these perceptions varied across localities, the findings indicate that migration is experienced not merely as demographic movement but as a process linked with broader transformations in everyday social life.

Table 1: Perceived Socio-Cultural Impacts of Bangladeshi Migration in Lakhimpur District

Socio-Cultural Impact Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Does not Arise (%)
Migrant settlement expansion	92.0	6.0	2.0
Native-migrant interaction	76.0	18.0	6.0
Expansion of mosques	80.0	16.0	4.0
Expansion of Arabic and madrasa education	56.0	36.0	8.0
Increase in interfaith marriages	66.0	24.0	10.0
Changes in agricultural practices	78.0	16.0	6.0
Pressure on native land rights and land use	56.0	36.0	8.0
Emergence of inter-community tensions	72.0	22.0	6.0

Source: Field Survey Conducted by the Researcher, Lakhimpur District, 2025.

The findings reveal that *migrant settlement* has become socially visible across many parts of Lakhimpur district. 92 per cent respondents reported the presence of migrant-origin households in their locality or nearby areas. 76 per cent respondents also described regular interaction with migrant populations, particularly in labour-intensive sectors such as construction work, transportation, small trade and agricultural activities. However, these interactions were largely described as functional and economic rather than socially integrated. In several localities, respondents stated that migrant households remained socially distinct despite long-term settlement. These findings correspond with Lee's Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966), which explains migration through structural conditions operating at both the origin and destination. The settlement of migrant populations in Lakhimpur reflects broader livelihood-oriented mobility shaped by economic opportunities, access to cultivable land and labour demand within receiving regions. Respondents also associated migration with *changing cultural and religious patterns*. More than half of the respondents reported observing an increase in mosques (80 per cent respondents), madrasa-based education and Arabic teaching (56 per cent respondents) in localities where migrant-origin populations had settled. Case studies such as *Bongalmora* (a village situated in Lakhimpur district) and *Ahmedpur Gaon* (a village located in Lakhimpur district) indicated the emergence of small mosque structures and informal religious learning centres over the past two decades. Native respondents frequently interpreted these developments as indicators of changing community composition and evolving local cultural practices.

Interfaith marriages and religious conversion also emerged as important impact. 66 per cent respondents reported observing marriages between migrant-origin Muslim men and women from tribal, Hindu, Christian or economically vulnerable communities. Case studies from *Urang Basti*, a village situated in Lakhimpur district suggests that such relationships were often perceived as contributing to gradual demographic and religious transformation within the locality. Respondents further linked these developments with changes in kinship relations, inheritance practices and patterns of land transfer.

The findings additionally indicate that migration has *influenced traditional agricultural practices* in several areas of Lakhimpur district. 78 per cent respondents reported a gradual shift from seasonal paddy cultivation toward intensive multi-cropping and commercially oriented vegetable production associated with migrant farming practices. While some respondents acknowledged increased agricultural productivity, others expressed concern regarding the decline of traditional Assamese agrarian systems historically connected with collective labour practices and seasonal cultural traditions. These perceptions reflect broader anxieties regarding the erosion of local cultural identity and agrarian continuity.

Questions surrounding land ownership emerged as another major concern. More than half of the respondents perceived that migrant settlement had contributed to *violations of native land rights*. 56 per cent respondents referred to multiple forms of land transfer, including informal occupation, economically pressured sales, lease arrangements and encroachment on riverbank or institutional land. Field observations around *Adi Elengi Satra* (a religious institution located near Bongalmora Road, Dhunabari Gaon, Adhakhana Gaon No.2 in Lakhimpur district) and villages such as *Badhakara* and *Chauldhuwa* located in Lakhimpur district indicated that land-related tensions are closely connected with demographic change and weak land governance mechanisms.

The findings further reveal that migration-related concerns are closely linked with perceptions of *social tension between communities*. 72 per cent respondents reported tensions involving Assamese Hindus, Assamese Muslims and migrant-origin Muslim populations. These tensions were most frequently associated with land disputes, demographic anxieties, cultural change and competition over economy and local resources.

Such perceptions can be interpreted through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which argues that social groups construct collective identities through distinctions between "in-groups" and "out-groups." In the context of Lakhimpur district, migration is often interpreted through concerns surrounding identity, belonging and socio-cultural

continuity. The findings suggest that demographic change acquires political and cultural significance when communities perceive shifts in access to land, resources or social influence. Overall, the socio-cultural findings indicate that migration in Lakhimpur district is perceived not solely as an economic process but also as a transformation affecting local identity, community relations, religious practices and land relations. The study therefore argues that migration-related anxieties in Assam are increasingly shaped by inland experiences of demographic and socio-cultural change rather than by border proximity alone.

Economic Restructuring, Labour Competition and Resource Insecurity in Lakhimpur District

The economic dimension of migration emerged as one of the most significant findings of the study. Respondents across rural and semi-urban areas of Lakhimpur district associated migration from Bangladesh with visible transformations in labour markets, informal trade networks, resource utilisation, wage structures and access to public welfare systems. The findings indicate that migration is not perceived merely as demographic movement but as a process that has increasingly reshaped local economic relations and patterns of livelihood within the district.

Table 2: Economic Perceptions Related to Migration in Lakhimpur District

Economic Impact Indicators	Yes (%)	No (%)	Does not Arise (%)
Purchases goods from migrant vendors	83.2	12.0	4.8
Migrant participation in manual labour	90.0	7.2	2.8
Migrants in domestic or household work	84.8	11.2	4.0
Cheap labour impact on local employment	92.0	6.0	2.0
Perceived benefits of cheap labour	80.8	14.0	5.2
Wage reduction and labour market competition	88.0	8.0	4.0
Extensive utilisation of local natural resources by migrants	86.0	10.0	4.0
Difficulties in accessing government schemes	82.0	12.8	5.2

Source: Field Survey Conducted by the Researcher, Lakhimpur District, 2025.

The findings demonstrate that migrant populations have become deeply integrated into the informal and labour-intensive sectors of the local economy. 83.2 per cent respondents reported *purchasing goods from migrant vendors*, particularly vegetables, fish, poultry and other low-cost household commodities sold in weekly markets and roadside commercial spaces. The data indicate that migrant participation in local trade is no longer peripheral but constitutes a normalised component of everyday economic exchange within the district. Respondents frequently associated migrant traders with lower pricing structures and greater affordability, factors which have increased consumer dependence on migrant-led market systems.

The study further reveals that migrant labour has become extensively embedded within the occupational structure of Lakhimpur district. 90 per cent respondents overwhelmingly identified *migrant involvement in manual works* such as construction work, agriculture, domestic labour, transportation, street vending, fishing, brick kiln work, daily wage employment and so on and so forth. Construction labour and general manual work emerged as the sectors with the highest concentration of migrant workers, followed closely by agriculture and informal urban occupations such as hawking and street vending.

Field observations and case study from *North Lakhimpur*, the head-quarter of Lakhimpur district indicate that migrant workers are widely preferred because they accept lower wages and longer working hours than local labourers. Respondents repeatedly associated migrant labour with affordability, flexibility and continuous labour availability, particularly during peak agricultural and construction seasons. 84.8 per cent respondents stated that migrant women were frequently employed as domestic workers in Assamese households, while male migrants were concentrated in physically demanding wage labour. These findings suggest that migrant labour has become functionally indispensable to several sectors of the district economy despite the anxieties expressed by local communities.

The findings correspond closely with Lee's Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966), which explains migration as a consequence of economic disparities operating between regions of origin and

destination. The concentration of migrant workers in labour-intensive occupations reflects the operation of pull factors such as employment availability, access to cultivable land, low barriers to informal employment and sustained demand for inexpensive labour within receiving regions such as Lakhimpur district. The findings further suggest that migration flows are emphasised not solely by geographical proximity to the border but by structural labour demand within rural and semi-urban economies that increasingly rely upon low-cost and flexible labour systems.

The study additionally reveals strong perceptions of *labour displacement and economic insecurity among native respondents*. 92 per cent respondents believed that the availability of cheap migrant labour has adversely affected local employment opportunities. Respondents frequently associated migration with declining wage rates, reduced bargaining power of Assamese labourers and intensified competition in agricultural and manual occupations. The findings indicate that labour competition is experienced most strongly among economically vulnerable groups engaged in unskilled and seasonal work.

88 per cent respondents further identified *wage reduction, declining access to manual employment, competition for native Assamese traders and changes in local market structures* as major consequences of migrant labour participation. 80.8 per cent respondents stated the increasing preference among employers for low-wage migrant workers was widely perceived as contributing to the marginalisation of local labourers. Such perceptions reflect broader transformations within informal labour economies where employers seek labour flexibility and reduced production costs at the expense of wage stability and employment security for native populations (Harris & Todaro, 1970).

Another major finding concerns the *utilisation of natural resources by migrant populations*. 86 per cent respondents overwhelmingly reported that migrants are extensively engaged in fishing, extraction of forest products, collection of firewood, and utilisation of rivers and common property resources. In several localities, respondents perceived that increased dependence on local ecological resources has intensified pressure on already limited environmental

systems. Competition over access to fisheries, wetlands, forests and grazing spaces was frequently described as an emerging source of economic tension between migrants and indigenous communities.

The findings also indicate that migration-related economic anxieties extend beyond labour markets into perceptions surrounding *access to public welfare schemes*. 82 per cent respondents believed that legal Indian citizens face increasing difficulty in accessing government welfare provisions because of the growing presence of migrants. Concerns were particularly associated with programmes such as the *Public Distribution System (PDS)*, *MGNREGA*, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)*, and healthcare schemes including *Ayushman Bharat*. Respondents frequently linked these concerns with perceived irregularities in documentation and beneficiary identification processes.

Although the study does not independently verify all claims regarding welfare access, these perceptions remain socially significant because they shape local understandings of entitlement, citizenship and resource distribution. Migration therefore becomes interpreted not only through economic competition but also through concerns surrounding institutional fairness and state resource allocation.

These findings may be analytically interpreted through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which explains how economic competition becomes interconnected with collective identity formation and group boundaries. In the context of Lakhimpur district, economic anxieties surrounding labour, welfare access and natural resources are frequently articulated through distinctions between native populations and migrant-origin communities. Similarly, the extensive utilisation of rivers, forests, fisheries and other common property resources by migrant populations is interpreted by many respondents as increasing competition over resources traditionally associated with local livelihoods, thereby emphasising perceptions of group-based boundaries. Concerns regarding access to welfare schemes further strengthen these distinctions, as

sections of the native population perceive migrants as competing for limited state resources and benefits that they regard as belong primarily to legitimate members of the local community.

Overall, the findings suggest that migration has generated a complex economic environment characterised simultaneously by labour dependence and economic insecurity. Migrant workers contribute significantly to agriculture, construction, domestic labour, transportation and informal trade, thereby becoming structurally integrated into the local economy. At the same time, their extensive participation in low-wage sectors has intensified perceptions of labour displacement, wage depression, resource competition and unequal access to welfare systems among native communities.

The study therefore argues that the economic impact of migration in Assam cannot be understood solely through macroeconomic indicators or labour demand frameworks. Rather, it must also be examined through local experiences of labour restructuring, informal market transformation, resource insecurity and identity-based perceptions of economic competition operating within receiving societies.

Political Incorporation, Electoral Contestation and Identity-Based Governance in Lakhimpur District

The political dimension of migration emerged as one of the most contested aspects of the study in Lakhimpur district. Respondents frequently associated Bangladeshi migration not only with demographic change but also with transformations in electoral politics, political mobilisation, governance practices and public policy priorities. The findings indicate that migration is increasingly interpreted through political narratives relating to representation, citizenship, vote-bank politics and access to state resources. These perceptions reflect broader anxieties regarding political legitimacy and the changing balance of influence within local governance structures.

Table 3: Political Perceptions Related to Bangladeshi Migration in Lakhimpur District

Political Impact Indicators	Yes (%)	No (%)	Does not arise (%)
Migrants' role in district politics	72.0	20.0	8.0
Political parties rely on migrant votes	70.0	22.0	8.0
Weakening political representation of the native population	56.0	36.0	8.0
Doubtful-vote challenges during elections	68.0	24.0	8.0
Political organisations safeguarding migrants.	52.0	38.0	10.0
Migrants are considered in policy formation.	56.0	36.0	8.0

Source: Field Survey Conducted by the Researcher, Lakhimpur District, 2025.

The findings reveal that 72 per cent respondents perceive Bangladeshi migrants as politically significant actors within Lakhimpur district. More than two-thirds of respondents stated that *migrants play an active role in district politics* and are viewed by political parties as an important electoral constituency. Respondents repeatedly associated migrant settlements with organised voting patterns, targeted political campaigning and electoral mobilisation during local and state elections. These perceptions suggest that migration is increasingly understood not merely as a demographic issue but as a factor influencing political strategies and electoral calculations.

The findings further indicate that migrants are widely perceived as functioning within a "*vote-bank*" framework. 70 per cent respondents argued that political parties rely on migrant votes and often engage directly with migrant-dominated settlements through welfare promises, local political networks and administrative support in exchange for

electoral loyalty. Similar patterns of migrant political incorporation have been discussed in studies on electoral politics in Assam, where demographic change and migration are frequently linked with debates surrounding citizenship and political representation (Baruah, 1999; Hussain, 2000). In the present study, respondents viewed such political engagement as contributing to shifts in local power structures and influencing the broader political discourse of the district.

These perceptions can be analytically connected to Lee's Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966). While the theory primarily explains migration through economic and environmental push and pull factors, the findings suggest that long-term settlement also creates secondary political consequences within receiving regions. Migrants who initially move due to livelihood opportunities gradually become integrated into local political systems, particularly when settlement stabilises over time. The findings therefore demonstrate that migration produces not only demographic and economic transformations

but also new forms of political incorporation and electoral negotiation. At the same time, the study reveals that political perceptions surrounding migration are deeply shaped by identity-based anxieties. 56 per cent respondents expressed concern that the growing electoral relevance of migrant populations could *weaken the political representation of native Assamese communities*. Respondents frequently associated migrant political participation with fears of demographic imbalance, declining native influence and changes in governance priorities. Such perceptions correspond closely with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which argues that communities construct political and social identities through distinctions between “in-groups” and “out-groups.” In the context of Lakhimpur district, migration is often interpreted through the lens of political belonging, legitimacy and competition over representation.

The issue of “*doubtful-voters*” emerged as another important political concern. 68 per cent respondents reported awareness of electoral disputes related to citizenship verification and voter eligibility. Respondents associated doubtful-voter identification with electoral tension, administrative uncertainty and political polarisation during election periods. Several respondents argued that citizenship verification processes have intensified mistrust between communities and shifted political debates away from governance and development toward questions of legitimacy and identity. Existing literatures on migration related to Assam has similarly highlighted how citizenship verification and electoral categorisation have become central to contemporary political discourse in the state (Weiner, 1983; Barbora, 2008). The findings additionally indicate that many respondents perceive *political organisations as actively safeguarding migrant communities*. 52 per cent respondents identified multiple political parties including the Indian National Congress (INC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and others as engaging with migrant populations through welfare access, electoral outreach or local administrative support. Importantly, respondents did not associate such support exclusively with a single political party; rather, migrant populations were perceived as electorally significant groups within a competitive political environment. This suggests that migration has become embedded within broader structures of electoral bargaining and political patronage.

Perceptions regarding public policy formulation further strengthen this argument. 56 per cent believed that *migrant populations are increasingly considered within welfare distribution, development planning and local governance processes*. Respondents referred to schemes such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), MGNREGA, housing schemes and rural infrastructure projects as areas where migrant settlements are perceived to receive administrative attention. While some respondents viewed this as a practical response to demographic realities, others interpreted it as politically motivated inclusion aimed at securing electoral support. These perceptions contribute to broader anxieties regarding fairness, resource allocation and political representation.

Overall, the findings indicate that the political impact of migration in Lakhimpur district extends far beyond electoral participation alone. Migration is widely perceived as reshaping local political alignments, influencing governance structures, altering electoral discourse and intensifying debates surrounding citizenship and representation. The study

therefore argues that migration in Assam must be understood not only as a demographic or economic process but also as a politically transformative phenomenon that interacts with identity, governance and electoral competition in complex ways.

Conclusion

This study examined the perceived social, economic and political transformations associated with migration from Bangladesh in Lakhimpur district, Assam. By focusing on a non-border district, the study extends existing migration literatures in Assam, which has largely concentrated on frontier regions, and demonstrates that migration-related concerns have increasingly permeated inland social contexts. The findings indicate that migration is widely interpreted by native residents through interconnected experiences of demographic change, labour market restructuring, resource competition, cultural transformation and political contestation. These perceptions reveal that migration has become an important framework through which broader processes of social change and uncertainty are understood at the local level.

The study further highlights the usefulness of combining Lee’s Push-Pull Theory and Social Identity Theory for understanding migration-related perceptions. While Lee’s Push-Pull Theory explains the structural conditions that facilitate migration and settlement through the interaction of push and pull factors (Lee, 1966), Social Identity Theory provides insight into how social, economic and political changes associated with migration become interpreted through perceptions of group identity, belonging and competition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The findings suggest that concerns regarding employment, land, natural resources, welfare access, demographic change and political representation are frequently articulated through distinctions between native and migrant-origin communities, thereby emphasising perceptions of social boundaries and collective identity.

An important contribution of the study lies in demonstrating that migration-related anxieties in Assam are not confined to districts directly adjoining the international border. Rather, they have increasingly diffused into interior regions where migration is experienced through everyday interactions, local economic relations, governance processes and changing social landscapes. The case of Lakhimpur district illustrates how migration becomes embedded within local narratives of societal transformation, even in areas geographically removed from the border itself. In this respect, the study contributes to broader discussions on migration, identity and regional transformation in South-East Asia (Baruah, 1999; Hazarika, 2000; Samaddar, 1999).

At the same time, certain limitations of the study must be acknowledged. The findings are based primarily on the perceptions of native residents and therefore reflect locally experienced and interpreted realities rather than independently verified demographic, economic or administrative outcomes. The study also does not incorporate the perspectives of migrant communities, which may offer alternative understandings of migration and social change. Furthermore, the purposive sampling design and focus on a single district limit the broader generalisability of the findings. Future research may address these limitations through comparative studies involving both native and migrant populations across multiple districts of Assam.

Overall, the study argues that migration in contemporary Assam must be understood not solely as a demographic phenomenon or border-management issue, but as a complex social process that shapes local experiences of identity, resource distribution, political participation and community relations. By drawing attention to a non-border setting, the study contributes to the growing body of literatures that examine migration beyond conventional borderland frameworks and highlights the importance of understanding how migration-related transformations are perceived and negotiated within receiving societies.

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