

# Illegal migration from Bangladesh in assam and Its consequences

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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The biggest problem faced by Assam and the North-Eastern states of India is the large scale illegal migration from Bangladesh. Invasion from Bangladesh isn't a recent phenomenon. This silent invasion had started in the colonial time itself. From then onwards, continuous migration in such large numbers has become a threat to the ethnic states. This paper tries to address the issue of migration in Assam and factors contributing to it. It will also address its impact on the socio-economic condition of the state and its ethnicity. It is an important issue today upon considering the intensity of the problem and its adverse consequences in the state.

### **Migration into Assam: A Background**

Migration is not new to Assam; it has been going on for centuries. Assam has been mentioned in religious epics like the Puranas and also in the Mahabharata. In the epic Mahabharata, it was referred to as the land of Kirat with Pragjyotishpur as its capital (Bordoloi, 1991). It is said that Narakasura, one of the earliest mythological kings of Kamrup, brought a large number of people from Northern India for the promotion of Aryan culture in the region. According to historians, the Aryan migration to Assam perhaps started during the first or second century A.D (Bhuyan, 1977). Huen Tsang, the great Chinese traveller visited this region in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (640 AD) when the kingdom of Kamrup was under reign of the powerful king Bhaskarvarmana. After his demise, there was a gradual decline of this region in terms of its political clout due to internal over power, until the advent of the Ahoms in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1228 AD).

The earliest inhabitants of Assam were Australoids or the pre-Dravidians. The Mongoloids then entered the land through the eastern mountain passes. Migration to Assam was also seen from the north-east route, Western China and also from the South-East Asia (Bordoloi, 1991). The Buddhists from upper Burma belonging to what is known as Khamyang, Khamti, Phakialand and Asitonia communities also settled in upper Assam (Bhuyan, 1977). The first round of recorded historical migration to Assam occurred in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1228 AD) when the Ahoms from Myanmar, came to Assam. During the Ahom rule, at around 17<sup>th</sup> century, the region was also subjected to Muslim invasion and many of the Muslims stayed back and later became an integral part of the states' indigenous population (Das, June, 2005).

**Population trend in Assam:**

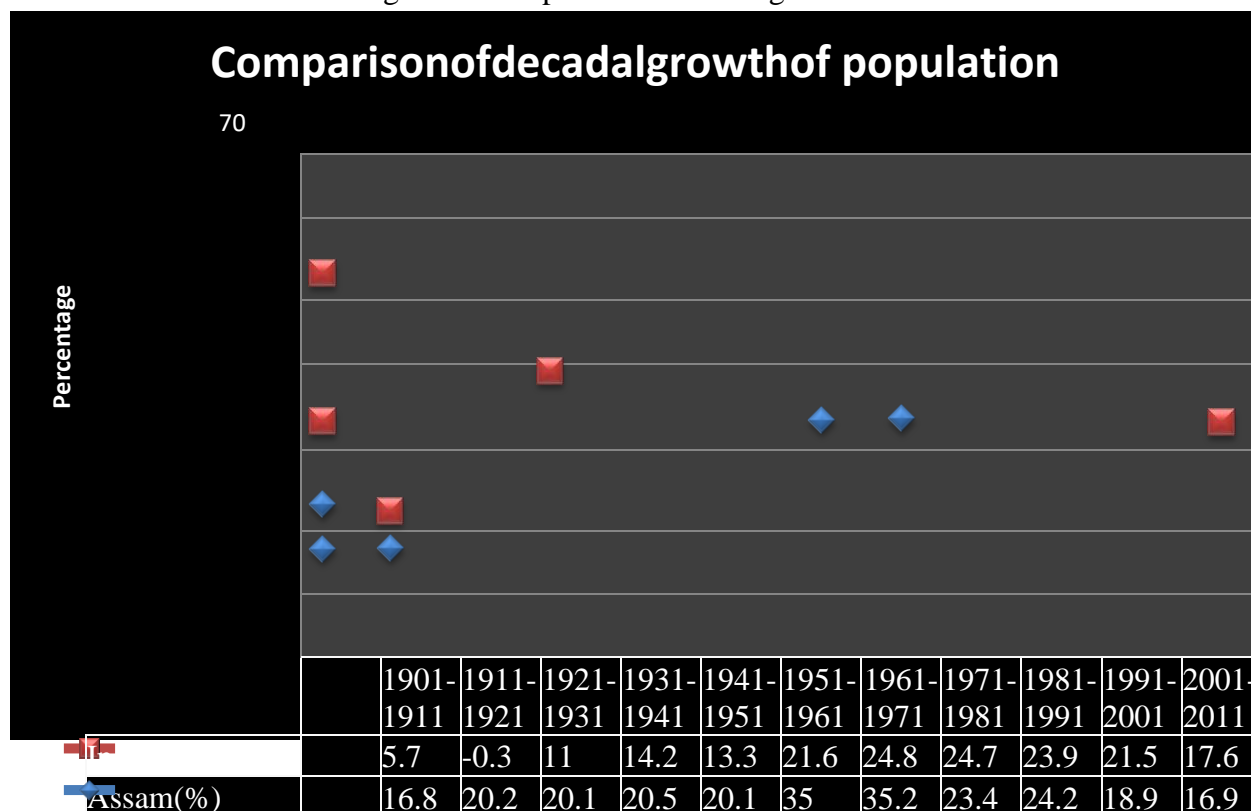
Considering the large scale migration to Assam, we see a very unstable yet interesting population trend in Assam, which explains everything itself. We have compared the decadal population growth of Assam from 1901-2011 with the national average to look into the differences.

Table 1.1 Population trend in Assam compared to that of India (1901-2011)

Year	Population (into 100,000)		Percentage of decadal variation		Density	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
1901	33	2384	-	-	42	77
1911	38	2521	17.0	5.8	49	82
1921	46	2513	20.5	0.3	59	81
1931	56	2789	19.9	11.0	71	90
1941	67	3186	20.4	14.2	85	103
1951	80	3611	19.9	13.3	102	117
1961	108	4392	35.0	21.5	138	142
1971	146	5481	35.0	24.8	186	177
1981	180	6833	23.4	24.7	230	230
1991	224	8463	24.2	23.9	286	267
2001	266	10270	18.9	21.5	340	325
2011	312	12102	17.07	17.7	397	382

Source: Census of India of the years mentioned in the table.

Figure 2.1 Comparison of decadal growth.



The table 1.1 and figure 2.1 shows that since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, population growth in Assam is much higher than the rate of increase in India. In the decade of 1901-1911, the growth of population in Assam is by 16.8%, while the growth of population of India is only 5.7. Similarly, in 1911-1921, the growth of India's population is -0.3, while population of Assam is astonishingly growing at 20.2% decadal rate. In the post-independence period, particularly during 1951-2011, Assam's population increased by 290% while India's population increased by 235%. Such growth rate cannot be attributed to fertility rate alone. Interestingly, Assam's fertility rate did not rise significantly during that period. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for Assam for 1971 was slightly higher than India, it was 5.7 compared to 5.2 for India. The general fertility rate for rural Assam for 1978 was 12.5 (all India rural rate was 137.50. The rate of urban Assam was 94.3 opposed to national figure of 102. The TFR of Assam in 1981 was 4.1 when it was 4.5 for India, in 1991 it was 3.5 against 3.6 for India. In the year 2001, it was 3.0 for Assam while the all India figure was 3.4. While we see the population of Assam got doubled in the 40 years between 1901-1941. It became more than doubled in the 30 years between 1941-1971. Similarly, in the 20 years between 1961-1981, it almost got doubled. In the 70 years between 1901-1971, Assam's population increased from 3.29 million to 14.6 million – a 343.77% increase over a period when the population of India had increased only by 150%. Therefore, it's evident that the high population growth in Assam compared to that of India was due to huge amount of migration from neighbouring countries.

Although Assam is suffering from the migration from its neighboring countries, as this paper deals with the migration from Bangladesh, let's look into the history of migration

from Bangladesh in brief.

**History of Migration from Bangladesh into Assam:**

Modern migration started in Assam with the annexation by the British in 1826. The migration under British rule was of six major types:

1. Migration of tea garden labourers from the states of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh etc.
2. The East Bengal (now Bangladesh) Muslim peasants.
3. The Nepalese who came to this region for agriculture and also to work as soldiers and office attendants.
4. Bengali Hindu office clerks and professionals.
5. Marwaris from the Marwar district of Rajasthan as traders.
6. Hindustanis from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh as artisans, porters, office clerks. (Das, 1980).

These six types of migration are mainly contributing to the rapid population growth of Assam. Especially, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of migrant population is observed in Assam in the Census of India findings. Table 1.2 shows the migrant population in Assam and their percentage in the total population of Assam from 1901-2001.

Table 1.2 Total number of Migrant Population in Assam compared to Total Population.

Year	Population of Assam	Migrant Population (*1000)	Migrant population in total population of Assam (%)
1901	3289000	600	18.2
1911	3848000	900	23.4
1921	4630000	1400	30.2
1931	5560000	1800	32.4
1941	6694000	2300	34.4
1951	8028000	3000	37.4
1961	10837000	4200	38.8
1971	14625000	6000	41.1
1991	22414000	8761	39.1
2001	266555000	7065	26.5

Source: Census of India, D series, Assam of the years.

A huge number among this migrant population is shared by the immigrant population from Bangladesh. The share of other countries is much lower than the Bangladeshi immigrants in the total migration population of the state. If we keep aside the migration from other states of India, Bangladesh is the main source of migration across the border. It is an alarming situation for the state to check such huge immigration from a foreign country.

In support of my argument, let's look into the origins of the immigrants population of Assam and compare the contributions of different neighbouring countries. Table 1.3 shows the share of

different neighbouring countries to the total immigrant population of Assam.

Table 1.3 Origins of Immigrants in Assam by birth (2001).

Birth Country or State	Immigrant Population	Percentage of Immigrant population
<b>From Countries</b>		
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>164,144</b>	<b>23.2</b>
Nepal	10,608	1.5
Pakistan	7,097	1.0
Other Countries	8,709	1.2
<b>From Indian States</b>		
Bihar and Jharkhand	190,708	27.0
Rajasthan	30,478	4.3
Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal	52,188	7.4
West Bengal	99,034	14.0
Orissa	8,106	1.2
Other States	135,410	19.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>706,482</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Census of India, 2001, D-Series, Assam.

Table 1.3 reveals that Bangladesh is the biggest source of immigration to Assam across the border. There has been a continuous migration to Assam from the country. However, migration from Assam is not a recent phenomenon. Migration from Bangladesh to Assam started soon after its annexation to India by the British in 1826, through the treaty of Yandaboo with Burmese government (Das, June, 2005). As well, Assam's location as a neighbour to Bangladesh has also contributed significantly to the inflow of migrants into Assam.

In colonial India, both East Bengal and Assam were administered as one single unit for administrative purpose. The first wave of migration in Assam started during the British rule and it was due to meet the demand for labour to cater for the developmental initiatives that the British govt. undertook after Assam's annexation to British India and the introduction of tea industry in Mid 1800 (Weiner, 1983). As the local population were reluctant to work as manual labour, labour had to be recruited from outside the state, especially from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh to fill the vacuum (Das, June, 2005, p. 81).

Another strong impetus to migration was the introduction of new policies. To cater to the demand for the food supply, the then British Commissioner Sir Henry Cotton decided to convert fourth-fifth of cultivable 'waste land' in the state under cultivation. In order to achieve his goal, landless peasants from East Bengal/ Bangladesh were brought into Assam for cultivating the waste land for food production. These peasants were from East Bengal and they introduced the cultivation of jute in Assam. It is noteworthy that, the migration of the landless peasants from East Bengal/ Bangladesh which was triggered in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century still continues. In terms of religion, the landless peasants who migrated from Bangladesh were mostly Muslims (Bhuyan, 1977). The East Bengal Muslims were hardy and hard-working, and once they found a piece of land, they would go back to East Bengal and bring with them another 10-20 workers to work with them. In addition to agricultural workers,

During 1874-1905, a large no. Of workers were brought in from East Bengal to Assam by British govt. to work as labourers in establishing the railway and other developmental projects. All these resulted in large scale chain migration through networks (M Taher, 2011).

The largest influx, however, took place after 1900 when migrants from East Bengal moved further east of the Goalpara district in the Brahmaputra valley. They spread into the Barpeta sub-division of Kamrup district, Nagaon district and to the Mangaldoi sub-division of Darrang district. The Bengali Muslims reclaimed thousands of acres of land, cleared jungles along the south bank of the river Brahmaputra and occupied flooded low lands along the river. Among these migrants, the largest group hailed from the Mymensingh district of East Bengal (Weiner, 1983).

In 1905, the British viceroy of India Lord Curzon divided Bengal into two provinces, East and West Bengal. Assam was amalgamated with the Muslim majority state of East Bengal. This move further encouraged the Muslim peasants to move to Assam from East Bengal.

With the increasing population and economic activity, there was demand for a simultaneous growth in administrative infrastructure. Bengal being the first entry-point for British in India, its inhabitants, the Bengalis, had the opportunity to get more acquainted with the British style administration process, and also to gain proficiency in English. These two factors made Bengalis the natural "first choice of British" to depute for various administrative positions. As a result, Assam witnessed a large-scale migration of Bengalis to help the British with administration. Unlike other migrants, this group of migrants were more educated and skilled and they enjoyed better standard of living and faced little hardship in Assam. They mostly represented Bengali Hindus from East Bengal. According to (Bhuyan, 1977), the Muslim dominated peasant group and the Hindu dominated administrative group from East Bengal together form the largest migrant group in Assam today.

R.P. Vaghaiwalla, Census superintendent of Assam in 1951, in his prefatory note to the report on the census of 1951, stated that the biggest migration into Assam that took place during the 1940s was the influx of Hindu refugees from Pakistan. Following the Noakhali riots in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in October 1946, and the Partition of India in 1947, there was a steady and continuous exodus of Hindus from Pakistan to Assam. The district which suffered the most was Cachar due to its proximity to Sylhet, from which majority of the refugees came. The Census of 1951 puts that the number of migrants in Cachar was 93,177. The next largest group of 44,967 came to Goalpara, followed by Kamrup (42,871), Nowgong (38,599), Darrang (18,853), Sibsagar (7,514) and Lakhimpur (13,965). In the hilla division too, there was an influx of migrants from East Pakistan. United Khasi and Jaintia Hills (5,990) followed by Garo hills (5,072) and United Mikir and North Cachar Hills (1943). (Vaghaiwalla, 1951). According to him, there were several incidents that contributed to the exodus of a sizeable no. Of Hindu and other communities from East Bengal. The 1949 incidents in Sonowar and Habibganj, the oppression of the Hajongs in North Mymensingh and the atrocities committed on the Santhals in Rajshahi and East Dinajpur in February and March, 1950 are some examples. (Vaghaiwalla, 1951). Due to some gruesome incidents

reported on sporadic violence across East Pakistan, including the capital city of Dacca, led 300,000 Hindus to leave their homes to seek shelter and security in either West Bengal or Assam. According to Vaghaiwalla, more than half of the total refugees in Assam came in 1950 alone. Table 1.4 shows the total number of refugees arrived in Assam during the

timeframe between 1946-1951. It shows that refugees in huge number, 2,72,075 came to Assam during that period. Considering the magnitude of migration from East Pakistan, it clarifies that Assam was their immediate choice to migrate.

Table 1.4 Record of refugee arrivals in Assam, 1946-1951

Refugees from East Pakistan		No. Of refugees from West Pakistan	No. of refugees from unidentified districts	Total no of refugees from 1946-1951
Year	Number	647	1,733	274,455
1946	6,860			
1947	42,346			
1948	41,740			
1949	33,138			
1950	144,512			
1951	3,479			
Total	2,72,075	647	1,733	274,455

Source Census of India 1951, Table D-V (1) Assam.

During the sixties, the pogrom of the Pakistan govt and also the Indo-Pak war of 1965, one million people from East Pakistan migrated to India. According to Hazarika (2000) that their numbers stood around 9,20,000 and most of them were Hindus (hazarika, 2000, 30). However, the largest single movement of East Pakistan nationals took place during the 1971 war, which led to the liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. This period around the 1971 war is considered the peak period of migration from Bangladesh. By June 1971, as reported to the parliament by the govt., 4.7 million people took shelter in India. By the middle of July that year, there were 1,000 camps with 6.9 million refugees. (Lok Sabha debate, govt, 1971). Table 1.5 presents the number of migrated population in 1971.

Table 1.5 Distribution of Migrated Population in Assam (1971). Source: Bhuyan, 1977.

Districts	Immigrant Population	% of total population	Total Population
Goalpara	1,100,000	50	2,200,000
Kamrup	950,000	33	2,878,788
Darrang	850,000	49	1,734,694
Nowgong	900,000	54	1,666,667
Sibsagar	550,000	30	1,833,333
Lakhimpur	130,000	18	722,222
Dibrugarh	800,000	57	1,403,509
Cachar	650,000	38	1,710,526
Karbiangling	50,000	13	384,615
North Cachar Hills	10,000	13	76,923

1971 was the peak time of migration in Assam. After that the magnitude of the migration decreased to an extent due to Assam Agitation and growing consciousness among the people. However, all these couldn't bring an end to it. Even after that migration from Bangladesh has continued to Assam due to ignorance of the govt. All the political parties has considered the migration issue as an instrument to play the 'vote bank' politics. Here is the total number of migrant population in the state according to 2001 Census of India.

**Migrant population as per 2001 Census District wise 1.6**

Districts	No. of Immigrants	Immigrants from Bangladesh	% of Total Immigrant Population of Assam
Kokrajhar	26637	8183	30.7
Dhubri	29680	7320	24.7
Goalpara	16671	7222	43.3
Bongaigaon	33022	12155	36.8
Barpeta	15503	8758	56.5
Kamrup	124386	12261	9.9
Nalbari	12002	4278	35.6
Darrang	28009	8349	29.8
Morigaon	8359	3561	42.6
Ngaon	51922	24258	46.7
Sonitpur	45505	8595	18.9
Lakhimpur	15911	2064	13
Dhemaji	12498	2184	17.5
Tinsukia	58917	4415	7.5
Dibrugarh	37747	2185	5.8
Sibsagar	21908	622	2.8
Jorhat	24960	854	3.4
Golaghat	21266	979	4.6
Karbiangling	35342	3504	9.9
Dima Hasao	6632	444	6.7
Cachar	42616	22868	53.7
Karimganj	28616	15964	55.8
Hailakandi	8373	3121	37.3
Assam	706482	164144	23.2

Source: Census of India, D1, Assam, 2001.



### **Causes of Migration:**

Main causes of Migration from Bangladesh to Assam:

1. Pull factors ----- Presence of friends and relatives  
Demand for labour
2. Push factors ----- Economic hardship  
Social and Political Environmental
3. Other factors ----- Illegal trade  
Porous border Proximity to Bangladesh  
Assam's physical geography

Pull factors include demand for labour and more importantly, the existing network in Assam. On the other hand, economic hardship, unemployment and excess labour force, together with social, political and environmental factors in Bangladesh have led to the movement of people from Bangladesh to Assam. In addition, illegal border trade, the physical geography of Assam, porous border and also its proximity to Bangladesh among other causes.

The most notable cause of migration is networking among the migrants that seemingly have linkages between their points of origin in Bangladesh and their current location of settlement in Assam. Many of the migrants decide to move to Assam because of "kinship and familiarity" in their intended residence in Assam in future. This is because they already knew certain family members or close friends who had migrated from Bangladesh earlier and settled there.

This is a good example of network theory.

### **Economic causes:**

Economic reasons play a huge part in migration from Bangladesh to Assam. There exists a vast disparity between the per capita Gross National Income (GNI) as reported by World Bank between India and Bangladesh. The reported per capita GNI by UNFPA in 2011 stood at \$770 for Bangladesh whereas for India it averaged to almost double that at \$1420. Therefore, the per capita GNI difference of \$ 650 itself may act as one of the pull factors for migration to India as it promises much better economic prosperity across the border.

According to data from 2011 Population and Housing census of Bangladesh, the population of Bangladesh is 152.5 million within its total area of 147,570 sq. km. It recorded population density increase from 285 persons per sq. Km in 1951 to 1,015 persons per sq. Km in 2011, an increase of over 256%.

The agricultural census of Bangladesh conducted in 2008 found that there are 4.5 million landless households in the country of which 1.22 million are in the rural area. 21% of the GDP of the country came from the agriculture sector, while it is also providing employment to 50% of the total labour force and feeding its 140 million people. Out of these, 15.6% are

absolutely landless, among these households, 4.4% are in urban and 11.4% are in rural. According to World Bank, 50.5% of its population are below poverty line.

**Political Causes:** Migration is generally of two types – forced and voluntary. “Bangladesh is an extraordinary example of a nation that has seen both trends (Hazarika, 2000, p. 7).

Forced migration is attributed to some of the events that took place like the partition of India in 1947, when Hindus chose to move to India leaving everything behind due to fear of religious persecution and atrocities. During the 1971 war, millions of people moved to take shelter in India to escape the inevitable, and also the 1965 Indo-Pak War.

**Social Causes:** Looking at the history of both the countries, it is clear that there is bound to have connections or contact with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen, who live across the border and are willing to assist the migrants initially. Haque (2005, p-41) argues that the historical ties between the populations and the intricate interplay of various external and internal factors have shaped the migration pattern between Bangladesh and India.

The second reason is social acceptance and freedom. The migrants are socially accepted by people as workers, labours etc. Freedom to own land was easier as there was no Zamindari system. Freedom to practice their religion, freedom of speech and expression are also important causes. The prospect for a better future for the children, because a stable and secular India offered them equality in social and political life.

**Environmental Causes:** In the ‘Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit’ held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar during March 1-4, 2014, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina in her address warned of the potential 30 million Bangladeshis becoming “climate migrants” due to global warming because a rise of 1 degree Celsius would submerge one-fifth of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is prone to natural calamities. Every year, many people are killed or displaced due to natural disasters. Bangladesh due to natural calamities in terms of its GDP stood at 2% in 1991-1995, 2.4% in 1996-2000, 1.0% in 2001-05 and 0.8% in 2006-10 (Environment, Statistical Year Book for Asia Pacific, 2011, p-208).

Moreover, man-made disasters like the Farakka Barrage, the Kaptai Dam which displaced around 100,000 people and inundated 54,000 acres of plough land are some reasons.

The other factors for migration are proximity to Bangladesh, illegal trade, physiographic similarity with Assam, porous border etc.

### **Religious dimension of the migration:**

It's interesting to look at the religious dimension of the immigration from Bangladesh to Assam. Having known the continuous expansion of Muslim population in Assam, the religious aspect of this migration always comes into discussion. A question arises, whether this migration is primarily Muslim migration? Unlike other Indian states of West Bengal and

Tripura, where Hindu migrants from Bangladesh far outnumber the Muslim migrants in Assam the Muslim migrants far outnumber the Hindu migrants. In an interview with the commandant of the unit of the Border Security Force (BSF) of India stationed in Assam in 2009; he had estimated that 85% of migrants from Bangladesh to Assam were Muslims. His statements support the trend observed through the 2001 Indian Census where the six administrative districts bordering with Bangladesh or in close proximity to Bangladesh (Dhubri, Goalpara, Nagaon, Barpeta, Karimganj and Hailakandi) the Muslim population formed the majority and exhibited significant decadal growth. Let's make an analysis of the religious aspect of the Bangladesh migration with the help of the available census data.

Table 1.7 Population by Religion. (Census 2001) (Muslim majority districts are shown in dark font)

Districts	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains	District Total
<b>Dhubri</b>	<b>405,065</b>	<b>1,216,455</b>	<b>12,477</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>2,119</b>	<b>1,636,567</b>
	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>74.3%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.01%</b>	<b>0.02%</b>	<b>0.13%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Kokrajhar	594,168	184,441	124,270	133	1574	639	905,225
	65.6%	20.4%	13.7%	0.01%	0.2%	0.1%	100.00%
Bongaigaon	535,464	348,573	18,728	512	330	882	904,489
	59.2%	38.5%	2.1%	0.1%	0.4%	0.1%	100.00%
<b>Goalpara</b>	<b>314,157</b>	<b>441,516</b>	<b>64,662</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>821,055</b>
	<b>38.3%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>0.01%</b>	<b>0.02%</b>	<b>0.05%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Barpeta</b>	<b>662,066</b>	<b>977,943</b>	<b>5,267</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>1,646,418</b>
	<b>40.2%</b>	<b>59.4%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>0.02%</b>	<b>0.01%</b>	<b>0.04%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Nalbari	873,749	253,842	18,495	117	899	907	1,148,009
	76.1%	22.1%	1.6%	0.01%	0.1%	0.01%	100.00%
Kamrup	1836153	625,002	44,257	4,797	1709	8,897	2520815
	72.8%	24.8%	1.8%	0.2%	0.1%	0.4%	100.00%
Darrang	868532	534658	97306	520	1871	888	1503775
	57.8	35.6	6.5	0.03	0.1	0.1	100.00
Sonitpur	1287646	68078	115623	1457	3864	1210	166787
	76.7	16.0	6.9	0.1	0.2	0.1	100.00
Lakhimpur	702881	143505	36667	680	1362	148	885243
	79.4	16.2	4.1	0.1	0.2	0.02	100.00
Dhemaji	548750	10533	6390	142	1199	203	567247
	96.7	1.9	1.1	0.03	0.2	0.04	100

Morigaon	405302	369398	759	69	84	308	775920
	52.2	47.6	0.1	0.01	0.01	0.04	100
<b>Nagaon</b>	<b>1106354</b>	<b>1180267</b>	<b>21473</b>	<b>3055</b>	<b>1058</b>	<b>1246</b>	<b>313453</b>
	<b>47.8</b>	<b>51.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Golaghat	813263	74808	5277	1063	3230	403	945044
	86.1	7.9	8.5	10.1	0.3	0.04	100
Jorhat	927,858	47658	18610	1562	2385	675	998,748
	92.9%	4.8%	1.9%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	100
Sibsagar	927,706	85,761	28,488	1563	4020	267	1,047,805
	88.5%	8.2%	2.7%	0.2%	0.4%	0.03%	100.00%
Dibrugarh	1075878	53,306	45,040	2638	4152	877	1181891
	91%	4.5%	3.8%	0.2%	0.4%	0.1%	100%
Tinsukia	1029142	40,000	62,403	2328	13692	953	1148518
	89.6%	3.5%	5.4%	0.2%	1.2%	0.1%	100.00%
KarbiAnglong	170139	18091	117,738	379	6402	226	812,975
	82.4%	2.2%	14.5%	0.1%	0.8%	0.035	100.00%
N.C. Hills	131,492	4662	50,183	220	857	15	187,429
	70.2%	2.5%	26.8%	0.1%	0.5%	0.01%	100.00%
<b>Karimganj</b>	<b>470,708</b>	<b>527,214</b>	<b>8746</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>1,007,645</b>
	<b>46.7%</b>	<b>52.3%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>0.01%</b>	<b>0.035%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Hailakandi</b>	<b>223,191</b>	<b>312,849</b>	<b>5,424</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>542,144</b>
	<b>41.2%</b>	<b>57.7%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>0.01%</b>	<b>0.02%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
Cachar	886,761	522,051	31,306	628	742	1385	1442873
	61.5%	36.2%	2.2%	0.04%	0.05%	0.1%	100%
<b>Assam</b>	<b>17296455</b>	<b>8240611</b>	<b>986589</b>	<b>22519</b>	<b>51029</b>	<b>23957</b>	<b>26621160</b>
	<b>65%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Statistical Handbook, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam.

It is clear from the table 1.6 that in six districts bordering with Bangladesh, Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nagaon, Karimganj and Hailakandi, the decadal population growth is very high and also have above 50% Muslim population. If we compared to the population data of 1991, we would see that the Muslim population of Nagaon saw a high growth from 47.2% of 1991 to 51% in 2001. Similarly, the Muslim populations of Goalpara has increased from 50.2% to 53.8%. In Barpeta district, the Muslim population increased from 56.1% to 59.4%, in Karimganj 49.2% to 52.3% and in the district of Hailakandi the Muslim population increased from 54.8% to 57.7% in the decade of 1991-2001.

The census results of 1991 and 2001 show a low population growth in Assam compared to that of India. Although the population increase was lower in Assam, the increase of Muslim population in nine districts in Assam, however, was far higher than non-

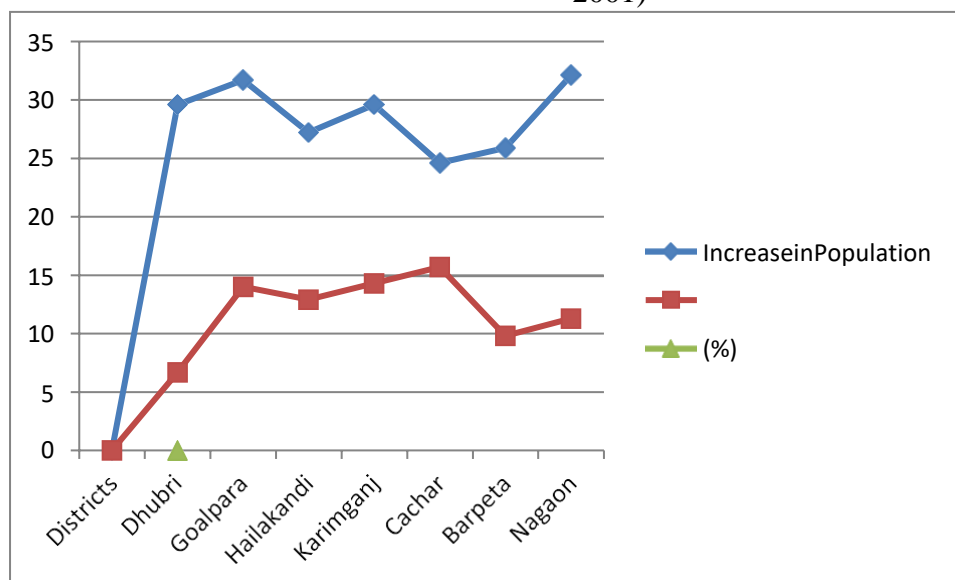
Muslim population.

### 1.8 Increase of Muslim population in the Border and their adjacent districts in Assam(1991-2001)

Districts	Increase in Population(in%)		
	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Total
Dhubri	29.6	6.7	22.8
Goalpara	31.7	14.0	22.9
Hailakandi	27.2	12.9	20.7
Karimganj	29.6	14.3	21.8
Cachar	24.6	15.7	18.7
Barpeta	25.9	9.8	18.8
Nagaon	32.1	11.3	22.2

Source:Censusdata, 1991,2001.

Figure 2.2 Increase in Muslim and Non-Muslim population in the Border districts(1991-2001)



The districts with the high number of migrants were also the districts with higher population increase when compared to the average growth of population of Assam and also were the host to the larger migrants. If we look at, as we have already showed in the table 1.6 the migrant population of these districts are highest in the state. The number of immigrants in Dhubri is 29,680 out of which 7,320 are Bangladeshi immigrants. In Goalpara, out of 16,671 immigrants, 7,222 are Bangladeshi. Similarly, 8,758, 3561, 22,868, 15,964 and 3,121 Bangladeshi immigrants are there in the districts of Barpeta, Marigaon, Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi respectively.

So from the above discussion, we can come to the conclusion that there is a religious dimension in the migration from Bangladesh. Most of the people migrating from Bangladesh to Assam are Muslim.

**Impact of migration:**

Migration from Bangladesh has led to a demographic transition in Assam. In respect to religion, there is a decrease in the percentage of Hindu population in almost all the districts of Assam during 1991-2001 and a corresponding rise of Muslim population during the same decade.

Table 1.9 Distribution of Hindus, Muslims and others in Districts of Assam, 1991-2001

Districts	1991			2001		
	Hindu	Muslim	Others	Hindu	Muslim	Others
Dhubri	28.7	70.5	0.8	24.7	74.3	1.0
Kokrajhar	66.4	19.3	14.3	65.6	20.4	14
Bongaigaon	64.4	32.7	3.3	59.2	38.5	2.3
Goalpara	39.9	50.2	9.9	38.2	53.7	8.1
Barpeta	40.	56.1	3.7	40.2	59.3	0.4
Nalbari	77.5	20.0	2.6	76.1	22.1	1.9
Kamrup	74.3	23.4	2.3	72.8	24.8	2.4
Darrang	60.5	32	7.5	57.7	35.5	6.7
Sonitpur	80.2	13.3	6.5	76.6	15.9	7.5
Lakhimpur	79.7	14.5	5.8	79.1	16.1	4.8
Dhemaji	93.9	1.5	4.6	96.0	1.8	2.2
Morigaon	54.6	45.3	0.1	52.2	47.6	0.2
Nagaon	51.7	47.2	1.1	47.8	51	1.2
Golaghat	86.1	7.1	6.8	85.9	7.9	6.2
Jorhat	93.6	4.3	2.1	92.9	4.8	2.4
Sibsagar	89.3	7.6	3.1	88.2	8.2	3.6
Dibrugarh	91.3	4.5	4.2	9.08	4.5	4.7
Tinsukia	90.2	3.1	6.7	89.5	3.5	8.3
Karbi Anglong	84.8	1.6	13.6	82.4	2.2	15.4
N.C.Hills	72.9	2.2	24.9	69.9	2.5	27.6
Karimganj	50.2	49.2	0.7	46.7	52.3	1.0
Hailakandi	43.7	54.8	1.5	41.1	57.6	1.3
Cachar	63.4	34.5	2.1	61.4	36.1	2.5

Census of India, 1991, 2001.

The table below 1.10 presents the population increase of three major religious communities in Assam from 1971 to 2001 and in respect to the percentage they make up of the total population of Assam.

1.10 Increase in population of Religious Communities (1971-2001)

Religious Communities	1971	1991	2001	Percent Change

	Population	Percent of Total	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total	1971-1991	'91-'01
Hindu	10604618	72.5	15042365	67.1	17296455	65	41.8	15
Muslim	3592124	24.6	6373204	28.4	8240611	31.0	77.4	29.3
Christian	381010	2.6	746226	3.3	986589	3.7	95.9	32.2

Others	47400	0.3	247458	1.1	97505	0.4	422.1	-60.6
Assam	14625152	100.00	22409253	100	26621160	100	53.2	18.8

Source: Census of India, Assam, 1971, 1991, 2001. There was no census in Assam in 1981 due to student agitation.

If we look at the two tables presented above and compare the increase in population of the Hindus and Muslims, we can easily understand that there is a sharp decrease in Hindu population during the 1991-2001 decade. The increase in Muslim population is far higher than the Hindu. The Muslim population recorded a significant increase from 24.6% in 1971 to 31% in 2001. Muslims now constitute more than one third of the population of Assam, as according to 2011 census, among 27 districts in Assam, the Muslim population is about 60% in six districts and 40% in another six districts. As the increase in Muslim population is higher than the Hindus, it can be inferred that the religious composition of the state will continue to change and like Kashmir, Assam may become another Muslim dominated state.

**Economic Impact:** The migration from Bangladesh has a tremendous impact on the economy of Assam. Initially the agriculture sector greatly benefited as migrants introduced new techniques for cultivation and also multiple cropping on the same land, as well as new varieties of crops like jute, lentils, vegetables and pulses, previously unknown to Assam.

The centre of the migrants' economy still remains agriculture-based although the next generation is moving away to different occupations in urban areas. However, the migrants remain the source of cheaper labour and it has a positive impact as the cost of products and services to consumers is lowered.

Such a huge migration is a huge burden, unbearable for a underdeveloped state like Assam. Moreover, a huge amount of lands occupied by the migrants is also a matter of great concern. The anti-foreigners' movement from 1979-'85, converted the state into lawlessness. Incidents of violent activities and frequent strikes have continued and it created an unfriendly environment for economic activities. The movement and the corresponding incidents did a huge damage of the economy of Assam. The law and order situation also was too poor to attract major direct investment into the state.

On the other hand, the migrants are mainly settled in the Char areas. They are taking the benefits of the government schemes. Due to flood, they frequently change their locations and so it is not possible to collect revenue from them. But a huge expense is incurred on them to pay for development and benefits such as flood relief, support to education etc.

**Political Impact:** Migration from Bangladesh has created enormous political problems in Assam. The issue has remained as a political issue for the politicians who welcome

migrants to gain their votes in the elections. The foreigners from the East Pakistan and new Bangladesh have been allowed to decide the political destiny of Assam in violation of all the laws of the country. This is the root of all political problems. A union govt. document on the problem of influx from East Pakistan published in 1963, observed that politically interested persons and parties patronized the illegal stay of the foreigners to ensure their interest in the elections.

The migrants are promised security as well as other facilities for votes by the political leaders representing their areas of settlement as well as the govt. They follow the advice of their leaders and cast their votes en masse for the candidate that the leader supports. Such a group of voters who cast their votes as a block is referred to as the 'Vote Bank'.

This is the main reason of the anti-foreigners' movement in Assam from 1979-1985. It was a big political consequence of this migration. The movement saw huge participation of the native Assamese and ended in 1985 with the signing of the Assam Accord between the Govt. of India and the leaders of All Assam Students Union (AASU). In 1978 Lok Sabha elections a large no of illegal migrants' names were discovered in the voters list in the Mangaldo constituency of lower Assam. This was the immediate cause of the movement. This was a tough period in the history of Assam, which brought the state into a stagnant position for almost a decade.

The migrants who have migrated illegally deciding the political destiny of a state is a issue of great concern. Even a party to represent these Bangladeshis is active in Assam's politics as AIUDF. The rise of AIUDF and the problem of unchecked migration has created a political impasse in Assam. However, looking at the sensitivity of the problem, the Supreme Court directed the preparation of a NRC (National Register of Citizens) in the state of which the first and second list have been published.

**Socio-Cultural Concern:** Assam has a very complex demographic and social structure. It is the home to many tribes, ethnic communities which together has formed the greater Assamese culture. Migration from Bangladesh has always created a threat to Assamese society. Due to the migration of large scale Bengalis in the Colonial times, in 1837 Bengali was declared as the official language of Assam. The multi-lingual composition of the Assamese society was on the one hand and the quest for unilingual identity was on the other, it was a great contradiction the state had to suffer. Similarly, due to the contradiction with the ethnic Assamese society, there was a sporadic violence in the state in the years of 1948, 1950, 1960, 1968, 1972 and 1980. For the Assamese society it was a dark time to save their own languages and cultures. Even in the post-independence time, if we see, in a complex ethnic society like the Assamese, such a huge migration of people who are completely different in terms of languages and cultures, is always a threat. Moreover, the lands occupied by the migrants and transformation of them as voters to determine the destiny of the state is very alarming for the ethnic indigenous communities residing there for a very long time. Such migration of radical Hindus or Muslims would pollute the ethnic composition of the state and if it's considered as a political issue, it seems to destroy the rich Assamese civilization. One thing to note that, very soon Assamese would become minority in Assam like the Tripuris in Tripura. Even now, only 44% people in Assam, speak Assamese who are mainly in the upper Assam. In the lower Assam, the migrants are the majority. Out of 27 districts in Assamese, in nine districts there is migrated Muslim majority. 92 Legislative Assembly constituencies in Assam, out of 126, there is migrated Hindu and Muslim majority. It clears the horrible picture of migration. They have occupied land in every district of the state. It is a big threat.



Moreover, in the recent times it has been seen that a lot of illegal migrants are involved in the crimes in the states. Very recently, rapes happened in Assam where most of the convicts were migrated Muslims.

Moreover there are huge environmental problems in Assam due to large scale influx. They have occupied lands in the national parks and wild life sanctuaries, as allegedly sponsored by the govt for votes. A huge amount of lands of the World Heritage Site Kaziranga National Park are occupied by the Bangladeshis. It is a great threat to the wild life. Moreover, a large number of them are associated with the killing of One-horned Rhino in the Park. Not only in Kaziranga, almost in every district of Assam illegal migrants have occupied lands and it's a big threat for the indigenous people.

## 2. CONCLUSION:

The problem that Assam has been facing since the Colonial times, yet to be resolved even after seventy long years of independence. It seems that both the state and the central governments have also ignored the concerns of the problem. Migrants detected in various districts is the evidence that the migration has continued. Porous border, corruption of the BSF are some of the main reasons of this unchecked migration. The role of the government is also sceptical as most of the time the issue has given them the chance to play the 'vote bank' card.

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