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ILLEGAL MIGRATION AND CHANGING SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF PEOPLE IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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Abstract:

Human migration refers to the relocation of individuals from one area or country to another for reasons such as long-term or short-term residency or job opportunities. Generally, migration can be categorized into internal and international movements. In recent times, international migration has emerged as a widespread global trend. The human migration process alters the residential structure of a population as they move from one location to another. Assam boasts some of the most fertile land and abundant natural resources. It is also well-known for its eco-friendly surroundings. These qualities of Assam draw a significant number of migrants from both domestic and foreign regions. The migration process plays a role in increasing the population growth in Assam, leading to a decline in the land-to-person ratio, as well as issues of high unemployment and underemployment in the state. A significant number of tea laborers are brought to Assam from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhotanagar (now Jharkhand) due to a labor shortage in Assam's tea industry. In the agricultural sector, laborers have historically migrated to Assam from East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh), predominantly from the Muslim community during colonial times, and from Nepal seeking better farming opportunities. Economic activities are another reason for migration to Assam, with people arriving from Punjab and Rajasthan. Presently, a large influx of internal migrant workers from Bihar engages in the brick industry and various other jobs such as barbers, shoemakers, washers, and rickshaw or cart pullers.

The present paper tries to highlight the changing economic life of people in North East India due to illegal migration from different places. The study is mainly based on secondary information from various sources.

Keywords: Unemployment, Migration, Socio-Economic life, Labourers, Growth.

Introduction

The process of migration contributes to the increase of population growth of Assam as a result of decreasing land-man ratio, high unemployment and under employment problem in Assam. The large volume of tea labourers are brought to Assam from Bihar, Uttarpradesh, Chhotanagar (now, Jharkhand) due to shortage of labourer in the tea industry of Assam. In agricultural sector also labourers came to Assam from East Bengal (now, Bangladesh) mainly Muslim community during the British period and from Nepal for better farming in Assam. Business purpose is also another factor for migration to Assam from Punjab and Rajasthan. Nowadays, huge amount of internal migrant workers from Bihar in the brick industry and in some other works such as barber, shoemaker, washer man, rickshaw and thela puller etc. are engaged.

Objectives of the Study

The present study has been undertaken to fulfill the following objectives:

- i). To find out the changing population scenario in Assam due to migration.
- ii). To find out and understand the causes of migration to Assam.
- iii). To point out the impact of migration on the economy of Assam.

Methodology

Descriptive Survey research methodology has been followed for the collection of data and thereby completing the process of analysis and interpretation for the solution of the researcher problem. Thus the study is mainly based on secondary information collected from various publications of state Govt. of Assam, various journals, books, Statistical hand book of Assam, various reports of census, Govt. of India, etc.



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Causes of Migration

There are many factors responsible for the movement of human resources from one place to another. These factors are basically social, cultural, political, employment, business, education, marriage, family movement etc. Humans move from one place to another for the fulfillment of their needs and to enjoy better facilities. The areas adjoining with poverty, unemployment, low and uncertain wages, uneconomic land holding etc. push people to move to another place where available facilities prevail.

Discussions

The Globalization not only increases the international trade in goods and services but also causes rapid change in international financial and labour markets. The growth of international trade and investments has reduced cross border barriers. As a result, cross border movement of labour has become so easy. Rapid growth rate of population cannot be subsisted by the rural area for which excess labourers move from rural area to urban area in search of their livelihood. The large volume of influx of migrants have changed the demographic structure of Assam in respect of religious composition, literacy and pattern of education, language, cultural composition, occupational structure and technique of agricultural production etc. It may change socio economic condition and socio political instabilities like ethnic clashes etc.

Migration of Labourers to the Tea Industry of Assam

In Assam, the British planters found a problem of scarcity of tea garden workers because only the tribal people belonging to Bodo, Sonowal Kachari and Mech Kachari were engaged as plantation workers. Initially, the workers of Chinese origin were brought to Assam from Kolkata and gradually recruited thousands of labourers from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, U.P., M.P., Tamil Nadu, Chotanagar and now Jharkhand. They migrated to Assam because they were poor, illiterate and exploited by landlords and zamindars. For that reason, huge bulk of people migrated to Assam in search of their livelihood in various tea gardens.

Migration of Labourers in Agricultural Sector of Assam

During the Ahom era, there was a shortage of agricultural laborers in Assam. Consequently, the Ahom King allocated agricultural land to individuals through the paik system. In the British era, Sir Charles Elliot, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, along with the Government of India, decided to bring in farm workers from East Bengal and Bihar, primarily targeting Muslim populations. Migrant farmers from the districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, and Rangpur in Bengal continued to arrive in Assam, leading to a socio-economic issue that became a highly complex controversy. The increase in the percentage of the Muslim population in Assam from 1901 to 1931 is illustrated in Table No- 1.

Table No-1 (the proportion of Muslim population in Assam during 1901-1931)

Districts	1901	1911	1921	1931
Goalpara	27.76	35.19	41.48	43.92
Kamrup	9.10	9.66	14.61	24.61
Nowgaon	4.83	5.20	17.73	31.60
Darrang	5.16	5.39	7.61	11.54
Sibsagar	4.16	4.30	4.25	4.70



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Lakhimpur	3.22	3.05	2.56	3.58
Cachar	33.06	37.60	37.61	40.06

(Source: Census of India & various reports)

Freedom Movement of Bangladesh and Migration to Assam

The freedom movement for Bangladesh began in early 1971, receiving strong backing from Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Indian government. Bangladesh achieved its independence on March 25, 1971. During the conflict in 1971, many individuals, both Hindus and Muslims, sought refuge in the neighboring states of Tripura, Assam, and West Bengal due to the actions of the Pakistani military. These Bangladeshi refugees were housed in camps under the supervision of the Indian government. According to reports from the Indian government, approximately 900,000 Bengali Hindus and 27,000 Muslims crossed into Assam between 1961 and 1971. After the establishment of a secular government in Bangladesh led by Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman, the majority of these individuals were repatriated to Bangladesh. A table (Table No-2) illustrates the changing demographics of the Muslim population in Assam over the decades.

Table No-2 (Changing structure of Muslim people of Assam with decadal variation)

Year	Total population of Muslim	Decadal variation
1901	5,03,670	
1911	6,34,101	1,30,431
1921	8,80,426	2,46,325
1931	12,79,388	3,98,962
1941	16,96,978	4,17,590
1951	19,95,936	2,98,958
1961	27,42,287	7,69,573
1971	35,92,124	8,26,015

Source- Census of India 1961-71, Assam, vol-III part 1A pp. 248

Volume of Cross Border Migration to Assam

International migration to Assam is not a recent phenomenon. It is an old age phenomenon since the British colonial period. The percentage of migrants to Assam was 3.91 per cent in 1991 and 2.65 percent in 2001 of the total population out of which about 1.51% in 1991 and 0.71% in 2001 were international migrants.



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Table No-3(Volume of Cross Border Migration to Assam)

Countries	1991		2001	
	Total migrants	% of migrants	Total migrants	% of migrants
Bangladesh	2,88,109	84.85	164,144	86.14
Nepal	22,433	6.61	17,896	9.39
Pakistan	15,110	4.45	7,097	3.72
Others	13,903	4.09	1,421	0.75
Total	3,39,555	100	190,558	100

Source: Census reports

Volume of Regional Migration to Assam

Regional migration to Assam is a significant factor contributing to the continuously growing population in the state. The availability of jobs and a thriving labor market entice a large number of migrants from various Indian states. The diverse backgrounds, cultures, customs, castes, and religions of these migrants from different regions of the country alter and reshape the original demographic makeup of Assam. Among all migrants, internal migrants accounted for 2.39 percent and 1.93 percent in 1991 and 2001, respectively. Between 1991 and 2001, the highest contribution to migration came from Bihar, representing 36.31% and 33.50% of the total in those years, respectively. The overall extent of internal migration can be represented in the following table:

Table No-4 (Volume of Regional Migration to Assam)

States	1991		2001	
	Total nos of migrants	Percentage of total migrants	Total nos of migrants	Percentage of total migrants
Bihar	1,94,864	36.31	1,72,825	33.50
West Bengal	94,548	17.62	99,034	19.19
Uttar Pradesh	54,557	10.17	50,142	9.72
Tripura	37,101	6.91	33,504	6.49
Meghalaya	31,749	5.92	30,478	5.91
Rajasthan	29,599	5.52	28,118	5.45
Others	94,161	17.55	1,01,823	19.74
Total	5,36,579	100	5,15,924	100

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables by place of birth 1991, 2001



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Conclusion

The study reveals the clear picture of migration from internal and international sources. From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that migration is one of the main causes of changing population scenario of Assam. It also changes the socio-economic condition, cultural composition, customs, religion, education, production technique etc. It may also create ethnic clash. Thus, it is essential on the part of the authorities concerned to take up appropriate measures to stop the influx of excessive migration to Assam and give more emphasis on socio-economic development of Assam.

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