

**Immigration from Bangladesh to West Bengal**  
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India has a long and complicated history of migration across eastern border particularly large scale flows from Bangladesh to India. After India's independence it has taken political dimension, documented and undocumented immigration posing threat to India's national security

Bangladesh, the place of origin of Bangladeshis, is center of Bengali culture and heritage. India shares 4095 kilometer border with Bangladesh, the longest among all its neighbours. West Bengal, an Indian state, place of destination of poor Bangladeshis, is bounded by Bangladesh in the eastern side with 9 border districts e.g Kolkata, 24parganas (north and South), Nadia, Murshidabad, Maldah, WestDinaj Pur(North and south), Darjiling, Kooch Behar and Jalpaiguri.

### **Objective**

This paper is devoted to provide basic feature of documented Bangladeshi migration to West Bengal, a state in India, relating to volume, trend, sex ratio, spatial distribution, using census records. An effort has been made to estimate fresh migration rate to study the impact of migration on population of West Bengal. Issue of undocumented migration and contributory factors to migration have been explained. Lastly some policy issues are taken into consideration to tackle undocumented migration.

### **Documented Migration**

The trend of recorded Bangladeshi migration since 1951 reflects that the volume of migration has increased from 26.18 lakh in 1951 to 30.68 lakhs in 1961. There is gradual increase in the volume up to 1981 census. Then it has decreased to 30.31 lakhs in 2001. Sex ratios of Bangladeshi migrants point out that male migrants are predominating female migrants in West Bengal and its districts. Concentration of migrants are observed mainly in North 24 Parganas, Kolkata and Nadia districts of West Bengal. It is observed that geographic proximity plays a positive role to pull the migrants(Ravenstein,1885, 1889)

### **Fresh Migration Rate**

In this section we would like to focus attention on the impact of Bangladeshi migration on the population growth of West Bengal. Population growth between two census dates for any geographical area can be decomposed into two parts.

(a) Natural increase (birth in excess of death) and (b) increase or decrease in population growth due to migratory movement. If any geographic area is closed one it will experience no impact of migration. But in real world such area is never found in practice. So where population is not closed problem arises in measuring the impact of migration. The proportion of migrants to total population at any point of time is the cumulative effect of past migration. If the proportions of migrants to total population are known at two successive census years their difference could indicate fresh migration rate ( Guha Roy and Datta,1995). This can be formulated in the following way :

Let  $P_{i-1}, P_i$  = population (observed) of West Bengal at (i-1)th and (i)th census.

$M_{i-1}, M_i$  = Bangladeshi immigration at (i-1)th and ith census respectively.

$m_{i-1}, m_i$  =  $M_{i-1}/P_{i-1}, M_i/P_i$  i.e proportion of migrants to the population in the (i-1)th and ith census

$r$  = natural increase (exponential) of population

$r'$  =  $r + R$ ,

$R$  = fresh migration rate

We have,

$$e^r = \frac{P_i - M_i}{P_{i-1} - M_{i-1}}$$

$$= \frac{P_i \left(1 - \frac{M_i}{P_i}\right)}{P_{i-1} \left(1 - \frac{M_{i-1}}{P_{i-1}}\right)} = \frac{P_i}{P_{i-1}} \cdot \left(\frac{1 - m_i}{1 - m_{i-1}}\right)$$

$$r = \log_e \frac{P_i}{P_{i-1}} + \log_e \frac{1 - m_i}{1 - m_{i-1}} = r' + \log_e \frac{1 - m_i}{1 - m_{i-1}}$$

$$r' - r = \log_e \frac{1 - m_{i-1}}{1 - m_i}$$

$$R = \log_e \frac{1 - m_{i-1}}{1 - m_i}$$

It follows that  $m_i$  and  $m_{i-1}$  approaches each other from one census to another, the fresh migration rate tends to become smaller.

Two conditions can be imposed for R to be positive and negative. This can be explained in the following way

If  $R > 0$ , then

$$(a) \quad +R \Leftrightarrow \log_e \frac{1-m_{i-1}}{1-m_i} > 0$$

$$\Leftrightarrow \frac{1-m_{i-1}}{1-m_i} > 1$$

$$\Leftrightarrow (1-m_{i-1}) > (1-m_i)$$

$$\Leftrightarrow -m_{i-1} > -m_i$$

$$\Leftrightarrow m_{i-1} < m_i$$

i.e. the proportion of immigrants to total population in the first census should be less than the proportion of immigrants to total population in the second census for R to be positive

In a similar way it can be shown that proportion of immigrants to total population in the first census should be greater than proportion of immigrants to total population in the second census for R to be negative.

Fresh Migration rates for Bangladeshi Migrants (Table :1) to West Bengal during 1991-2001 demonstrate that they are all negative and very negligible both for rural and urban migrants by sex. It is expected that it will have very negligible impact on population of West Bengal. It is observed that condition for R to be negative is satisfied here.

Proportion of migrants to total population i.e  $m_i$  for rural and urban migrants by sex is higher for 1991 compared to that in 2001. Hence negative and very negligible fresh migration rate from Bangladesh to India is observed. So it can be concluded that

documented Bangladeshi migrants may have very trifling impact on Population of West Bengal.

**Table 1: Fresh Migration Rate from Bangladesh to West Bengal : 1991-2001**

|  |         |         |         |
|--|---------|---------|---------|
|  |         |         |         |
| $M_{i-1} / P_{i-1}$ ( $m_{i-1}$ for 1991) :      | total   | rural   | Urban   |
| Person   | .045131 | .033199 | .076625 |
| Male   | .045738 | .034087 | .075179 |
| Female   | .044471 | .032254 | .078309 |
| $M_i / P_i$ ( $m_i$ for 2001):                   |         |         |         |
| Person   | .037805 | .027327 | .064786 |
| Male   | .038736 | .028376 | .064630 |
| Female   | .036808 | .026223 | .064961 |
| Fresh Bangladeshi Migration rate R (1991-2001) : |         |         |         |
| Person   | -.0076  | -.00605 | -.01290 |
| Male   | -.0073  | -.00589 | -.01134 |
| Female   | -.0079  | -.00621 | -.01437 |

### Undocumented Migration

Though documented Bangladeshi migration reflects declining trend and negligible impact on population of West Bengal, an Indian State, issue of undocumented migration is a burning problem in India. The unending flow of clandestine migration to India began with partition of Bengal in 1947. It is a tragic fact of history that partition of Bengal in 1947 brought in immeasurable suffering to millions of the countrymen who had been forced to leave their ancestral homes under compelling circumstances (Kar, 2003).

The Population Studies Unit of Indian Statistical Institute conducted a qualitative survey during 2002-03 on undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. A semi-structured schedule was canvassed to collect perception of professionals – political leaders, economists, demographers, journalists, health personnel and so on – to explore causes, consequences and policy issues regarding undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. In this study undocumented migrants are defined as those who have entered West Bengal without valid documents in post-1971 period. The study reveals that the underlying factors for Bangladeshi migration is economic, demographic and political.

a) Economic push factors that motivated people to leave Bangladesh have been 1) Instability and economic depression in Bangladesh, 2) Poverty, 3) Lack of employment opportunity, 4) Struggle for livelihood, 5) Forced grabbing of landed property from minority group in Bangladesh, 6) Economic insecurity. 7) Lack of industrialization

b) Another factor motivating migration to West Bengal is demographic disproportion especially for minorities (Hindus) in this densely populated country having roughly a density of 780 per sq km as against half that number on Indian side of the border.

e) Political instability, fear of riots and terrorism in Bangladesh inhuman attitude and activities of the political leaders, domination of religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh worked as push factor, whereas Indian political patronage to the illegal migrants for vote bank has worked as pull factor for Bangladeshi migration.

f) Being cheap labor the Bangladeshis find easy acceptance as “domestic helps” in Indian homes, which keeps proliferating by ever increasing demand for domestic helps

g) Geographic proximity, cultural similarity, homo-ethnic climate act as a pull factor for the migrants.

The study reveals that migrants contributed to fertility of West Bengal, and the reasons can be attributed to a) illiteracy of migrants b) migration by family, c) unawareness about family planning, d) lack of easy access to scientific family planning method, sexual abuse and unwanted children.

Illegal migrants are illegally enrolled in voter list and used as vote banks. Indian politicians have often encouraged Bangladeshi migration to garner their votes (Seshan, 1998 )

The political parties try to encash migrants’ wretched condition by providing patronage from their end (Seshan, 1998 )

Continuous inflow of migrants enhanced the pre-existing slum, increase the density of occupants in certain areas which influenced the water supply, health facility, education with utter inefficiency.

### **Migration Policy**

Migration policy should include, maintenance of national register of citizen, Multi-purpose photo identity card, complete border fencing, punishment of corrupt border security officer, creation of public awareness, bipartite agreement between India and Bangladesh for economic development of Bangladesh to solve the root of the problem.