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**FORCED MIGRATION: PLIGHT OF THE HINDU
MINORITY IN BANGLADESH AND PRESENT
CRISIS IN ASSAM**

Amulya Kalita



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Amulya Kalita



Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism

K-1/114, First Floor, C R Park, New Delhi-110019,

Email: contact@grfdt.org, Contact: +91-9818602718

Website- www.grfdt.org,

Facebook- www.facebook.com/diaspora.transnationalism

LinkedIn– www.in.linkedin.com/in/grfdt, Twitter- www.twitter.com/grfdt2012

Abstract:

The present study falls on the conflict induced forced migration. In this situation people are forced to leave their ancestral home for fear of life and property. Such people usually flee across the international borders in search of refuge or seek asylum under international law.

Various reports mention that the minorities especially the Hindus of Bangladesh are not safe in their country and forced them to leave Bangladesh due to continuous persecution of different forms. They generally entered into India and denied to go back again. To ameliorate the suffering of the minority groups like the Hindus, the Buddhist, Sikhs, etc. residing in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the National Democratic Alliance government of India introduced a bill in the Parliament in 2014 and again in July 2016 to grant them Indian citizenship status by bringing amendment into the Citizenship Act, 1955.

The proposed bill has been creating a great repercussion in the whole state of Assam. Because large number of Bengali Hindu immigrants are residing in Assam in clandestine manner. If amendment of Citizenship Act comes into force, it would enable over 1.5 lakhs undocumented Hindu illegal migrants to get Indian citizenship status. Therefore as many as 26 ethnic organizations and students bodies protested against it and claims that Assam wouldn't take the responsibility of post 25th March 1971 foreigners and the Central Government should accommodate such people in another state.

So this paper is an attempt to highlight the problem of forced migration in India with primary focus on how the Central Government's decision creating a conflict like situation in Assam.

Keywords: Forced migration, Bangladesh, reaction in Assam.

Author(s)

Amulya Kalita completed his post graduation from the University of Gauhati in Modern Indian History. Kalita's special thrust is in Modern Assam History particularly in peasant agitation and immigration problem in Assam. He had done M.Phil in Peasant Movement of Assam in colonial period from Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu. Presently Amulya Kalita is an Assistant Professor in Suren Das College, Hajo (Assam). He also pursuing Ph.D. in illegal Migration problem in Assam in Gauhati University and published some research articles in this field. Email Id. kalitaamulya1973@gmail.com

Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).

FORCED MIGRATION: PLIGHT OF THE HINDU MINORITY IN BANGLADESH AND PRESENT CRISIS IN ASSAM

Amulya Kalita

1. Introduction:

Assam is an important and prosperous province of the North East India. Since the early ages, Assam is a meeting place of different ethnic groups speaking different languages, possessing different religions and customs. But post-colonial history of Assam has been over loaded by the burden of international migration especially from the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh (before creating Bangladesh in 1971 it was known as East Pakistan, a province of Pakistan), Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The Muslim immigrants (being seen as economic migrants¹) and the Hindu immigrants (termed as refugees) are the two dominant migratory groups which swamped India in general and Assam in particular. Due to unabated immigration of two categories, Assam has witnessed rapid demographic and socio-religious change.

Both natural and manmade factors has contributed in the out migration of people from present day Bangladesh to India and abroad. While the Muslim migrants entered into Assam and other states of India to uplift their economic position, the enormous harassments on Hindus forced them to leave Bangladesh. Such type of phenomena can be explained under the framework of 'forced migration'. Forced migration, according to the International Organisation for Migration, occurs to escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endangered their lives, freedom

or livelihood. This definition rounded of both the refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).² The current study is aims to highlight the plight of a particular minority group (i.e., Hindus) in a religious-centric nation state like Bangladesh due to so called 'persecution' or 'fear of persecution' (adopted by the United Nations Refugee Convention, 1951) in the name of race, religion and nationality. So, the paper is limited only to the framework of refugee.³ Our motivating question is what characteristics of Bangladesh led large numbers of their citizens to leave their homeland or forced or pushed them out? This question arises as an important parameter due to the unprecedented growth of forced displacement of people worldwide. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the global forced displacement (including refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people) of people increased up to 65.3 million at the end of 2015 which was 59.5 million in the previous year (UNHCR:2015).

2. Position of Refugees in South Asia:

Asia hosts the largest number of refugees (41 percent of the world total) and numbers in South Asia was highest (Bose 2000: 12). South Asia hosts 14 percent of the total population of direct concern to the mandate of the UNHCR.⁴ Such flow of refugee movement in South Asia has been continued since 1947. Myron Weiner (1993: 1737-1746) categorised 12 important groups of population movement in South Asia under

three types—rejected peoples; political refugees; and unwanted migrants. For him majorities groups of population movement have touched India. For instance (i) India-Pakistan refugees flows, 1947, involving nearly 15,000,000 Hindus and Muslims; (ii) exodus of Burmese Indians numbering about 1,000,000 during 1948-65; (iii) exodus of Sri Lankan Indians and Tamils of about 1,000,000 from 1954 which is still continuing; (iv) flight of almost 10,000,000 Bangladeshis to India in 1971; (v) flight of about 100,00 Chakmas to India in 1981; (vi) flight of Tibetans to India from 1958 to 1963 numbering about 100,000; (vii) two way flow between India and Nepal (Samadar 1999: 29-30). Surprisingly none of the South Asian countries including India is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees or its 1967 Protocol. As a result refugees and asylum seekers in India are treated like any other foreigners and their entry, stay and departure are governed under the Foreigners Act, 1946. The lack of legal procedure to distinguish between illegal immigrants and refugees has resulted in increasing confusion and demands for the expulsion of refugees like illegal migrants arises frequently.

3. Displacement of Ethnic minorities from Bangladesh:

Population movement from present territory of Bangladesh has not recent origin which dates back to pre-partition of India in 1947. However, the magnitude and complexity of migration in terms of its nature increased since 1947. The communal agenda of partition resulted in the throat cut competition between the majority and minority in both India and Pakistan and resultant outbreak of communal riots in 1950's. Such communal animosities are primarily motivated by conflicts over power and economic resources.⁵ So the partition did not serve the aim of communal compromise between the Hindus and Muslims. In spite of willingness of the Hindus to stay back in East Pakistan

and later on in Bangladesh were forced to take shelter in Indian states like West Bengal, Assam and Tripura in destitute condition due to perpetuated violence. In an estimate the number of refugees took shelter in the refugee camps in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura following the communal riots of 1950 was 120,148.⁶ The data of Ministry of Home Affairs highlighted that between 1946 and March 1958, 41.17 lakh migrants had come to India, out of which 32.32 lakh were settled in West Bengal. ⁷ The Nehru-Liquate Pact, 1950 was an attempt to stem the refugee flow to both India and Pakistan. While the pact was successful to return the properties of Muslim refugees who had taken shelter in East Pakistan, the flow of Hindu refugees into West Bengal and Assam continued incessantly through the 1950s. The communal violence together with the army atrocities and persecution in East Pakistan in 1960s had displaced numbers of Hindus. However, the large scale molestation of the Hindu minorities including women was took place during the Indo-Pak war, 1965 and Bangladesh war for liberation in 1971. During liberation war of Bangladesh, the Pakistani army perpetrated all kinds of atrocities on the people which resulted in the entry of nearly 10 million minorities in India including 6.7 million Hindus. By highlighting the refugee problem, Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India told the parliament that about three and a half million people belonging to Hindus, Muslims, Buddhist and Christian have come to India from Bangladesh during the last eight weeks.⁸ By June, about 4.7 million refugees had entered into India and by July the figure reached to 6.9 million spread over 1000 camps.⁹ The following figure indicated the extent of the problem:

Total influx (as on April 31, 1971):	8,281,220
In Campus:	5,737,264
Outside the Campus:	2,543,956
Communal Composition:	

(As on August 16, 1971)

Hindus:	6.971 millions
Muslims:	541,000
Others:	44,000 ¹⁰

Similarly, the laws enacted during the Pakistani regime like the East Bengal Requisition of Property Act, 1948, the East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property) Act, 1951 and the East Pakistan Disturbed Persons Rehabilitation Ordinance, 1964 deprived the Hindus from their own land and other property.

4. Scapegoat Hindu in Bangladesh:

Emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971 is seldom improved the condition of the Hindu minority. Initially Bangladesh was declared as a secular state and to protect the different groups of minorities, the constitution of Bangladesh has introduced some provisions like Article 28(4)¹¹, Article 29(3)(a)¹² which is not mandatory for state to follow.¹³ In 1977, the principle of secularism from the preamble of the constitution of Bangladesh was replaced by the “absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah” (Articles like 8 (1)¹⁴, 8 (1A)¹⁵) by General Ziaur Rahman. The growing inclination of Bangladesh towards Islamism and predominance of Muslim population led to believed that it would usher second Islamic country in South Asia.¹⁶ It destroyed the aspiration of different minority groups to get adequate justice and equality in Bangladesh. Incidents like destruction of religious places of the Hindus, forcible land grabbing, looting and burning of houses, gang rape and other kind of dishonouring of women has been continued in Bangladesh. In sequel to the Babri Mosque incident in India in December 1992, hundreds of temples in Bangladesh were demolished, properties were looted, and Hindu women were raped and killed. Amnesty International (AI), in its annual report on human rights in the world during 2001, mentioned about violence against the minorities in Bangladesh before

and after the election in 2001. Between 15 September and 27 October 2001, about 330 incidents of violence against the Hindu community were reported in various leading newspapers in Bangladesh.

The Hindus comprised the second highest population in terms of size in Bangladesh. In 1901, the share of Hindu population was 33 per cent against the 66.1 percent Muslims (**Table I**), but the number of the Hindus decline continuously whether it was in East Pakistan or Bangladesh. As per 2011 Bangladesh census, the number of the Hindus in Bangladesh was only 8.6 percent of the total population or a dying religion. In 1951, share of Hindu population was 22 percent and in 1991 it was only 10.5 percent. As per 1991 Bangladesh Census, Khulna had highest Hindu populated district of Bangladesh, but during 1981-91, population growth rate of Khulna severely fell down to 1.62 percent against the national average of 2 percent which indicated the possibility of major Hindu migration from Khulna to India.¹⁷ In fact over 49 million Hindus were missing during the process of Islamisation in Bangladesh since 1947 (Dastidar 2008: 42).

Table: I

Major Religious Communities in Bangladesh since 1901-2011(in percentages):

Year	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian	Others	Total
1901	66.1	33.0	--	--	0.9	100
1911	67.2	31.5	--	--	1.3	100
1921	68.1	30.6	--	--	1.3	100
1931	69.5	29.4	--	0.2	1.0	100
1941	70.3	28.0	--	0.1	1.6	100
1951	76.9	22.0	0.7	0.3	0.1	100
1961	80.4	18.5	0.7	0.3	0.1	100
1974	85.4	13.5	0.6	0.3	0.2	100
1981	86.6	12.2	0.6	0.3	0.3	100
1991	88.3	10.5	0.6	0.3	0.3	100
2001	89.7	9.2	0.7	0.3	0.1	100
2011	90.4	8.6	0.6	0.4	0.1	100

***Others: Animists and non-religious.**

Source: Various Census Reports of Bangladesh.

The table indicated the gradual increase of Muslim population at the cost of the Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh. In 1901, the Muslim population was 66.1 percent and it sought up to 85.4 percent in 1974 and 89.7 percent in 2001. At the same time, Hindu population in Bangladesh is proportionally reducing in every census. Since 1901 the Hindus were reduced from 33.0 percent of the total population of Bangladesh to 8.6 percent in 2011.

Unlike others methods of pauperising the Hindus, the Vested Property Act (Order No. 28 of 1972) of the Bangladesh Government (new form of Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) Order II, 1965 of Pakistani Government) was unique. Abul Barkat and his associates in a study explain graphically the drastic impact of Vested Property on the Hindus in Bangladesh and subsequent out migration to India since 1947. They claimed that if there had been no out-migration, the Hindu population would have been 11.4 million in 1971 instead of the 9.6 million, 14.3 million in 1981 instead of 10.6 million, 16.5 million in 1991 instead of 11.2 million, 19.5 in 2001 instead of 11.4 million (Barkat2008: 29). Total missing Hindu population during 1964-2001 was 8.1 million, i.e., 218,919 Hindus were “missing” every year from 1964 to 2001 or 600 persons per day (Barkat 2008: 67). The Association of Land Reform and Development (ALRD), a Dhaka based NGO, estimated that total number of 196,296 Hindu populations were missing every year since 1964.¹⁸ The Bangladesh Statistical Bureau (BSB) and the National Population Research and Training Institute (NPRTI), two reputed institutions of Bangladesh, officially reported that over 9 (nine) lakh Bangladeshi Hindus vanished from the country during the past decade (Baruah 2013). In fact Bangladesh systematically ousted their ‘rejected people’¹⁹ to the neighbouring Indian states, but they have become ‘unwanted migrants’ (Weiner

1993: 1737-1746) in some states like Assam where the culture of the migrant is quite different and therefore they are ‘unwelcome and often asked or forced to leave’ (Weiner 1993).

5. Citizenship Amendment Bill and Assamese Reaction:

National sentiment of Assam is against further immigration from foreign countries. The common belief is that cross border migration through illegal means especially from Bangladesh jeopardised the socio-economic and cultural life of Assam. Now it is becoming a major challenge to country’s national security and well-being of the people of the state. However, the Assamese sentiment against the illegal immigrants has never been coloured on the basis of religion, language or race. They considers that all migrants entered into Assam after 25th March 1971 from neighbouring countries would be deported irrespective of their religion or language. So, the government of India’s initiative to grant citizenship to the groups of religious minorities migrated from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan by passing amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955 has been creating misgivings in Assam. By introducing the Citizenship Amendment Bill, (Bill No. 172 of 2016) on 15th July 2016 in the Lok Sabha, Rajnath Singh, the Union Home Minister, mentioned that: “Under the existing provisions of the Act, persons belonging to the minority communities, such as Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who have either entered into India without valid travel documents or the validity of their documents have expired are regarded as illegal migrants and hence ineligible to apply for Indian citizenship. It is proposed to make them eligible for applying for Indian citizenship...”²⁰

The proposed bill if come into force would render the historic Assam Accord, 1985 and subsequent amendment to the Citizenship Act in 1986 in which Article 6A²¹ inserted worthless. This Article granted

citizenship to all those who entered into Assam on or before 24th March 1971. In fact the bill is religiously motivated agenda to win the Hindu voters. Because the illegal Muslims immigrants from the said countries are exempted from the purview of the amendment and they would continue to be treated as illegal immigrants and would not be eligible for applying for citizenship. Justification is that the Muslims are not minority in these countries and therefore no question for persecution in the name of religion arises. In other words the Muslims immigrants are perceived as a political threat or a security risk to India. The present BJP led government perhaps believes that admitting Hindu immigrants into India's citizenship fold would entail no political risks. Similar religious intention is also found in two other amendments introduced in the last two years. In September 2015, the Passport (Entry into India) Rules, 1950 and the Orders under the Foreigners Act, 1946 were amended to exempt these same religious groups from requirement of holding valid passports and visas, and consequently exempt them from being prosecuted or deported. Both these amendments refer to "persons belonging to minority communities in Bangladesh and Pakistan", "who were compelled to seek shelter in India due to religious persecution or fear of religious persecution" (Jayal: 2016). In the amendment of Citizenship Rules, 2004, the term "illegal migrants" was dropped for those migrants who are the "minority Hindus with Pakistani citizenship". The double edge character of the Bharatiya Janata Party- pledged to "free" Assam from illegal Bangladeshi migrants (irrespective of their religious identity) and a bill to grant citizenship to the illegal Hindu migrants-exposed.

6. Justified Opposition of Assam:

Whatever the intentions of the Modi led government of India, it has creates mass turmoil in Assam. The people of Assam have best regards to the sacrifices of the 855 martyrs' of the historic Assam Movement (1979-1985) and honoured the Assam Accord "as an

official, legal instrument that ensures the protection of their land, language and culture, and therefore deem it inviolable" (Pisharoty 2016). The All Assam Student Union (ASSU), Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Satra Parishad (AJYCP) and other like-minded ethnic organisations are vehemently opposing the centre's decision and they think that if the amendment comes into force, it will enable over 1.5 lakh undocumented Hindu Bangladeshis residing in the state to get citizenship. AASU stated that "we will not accept any foreigner of post 1971, be it Hindu or Muslim".²² In a statement, Samujjal Bhattacharya, advisor of ASSU, stated that: "Assam can no longer be the dumping ground for Bangladeshi migrants. Assam took a lot of refugees during and after partition and during the 1971 [Bangladesh] war. It is after all a small state with a high unemployment rate. These people can be given space in some other state" (Pisharoty: 2016). In a memorandum submitted to Dr. Satya Pal Singh, Chairman, Joint Parliamentary Committee on Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016, the North East Student Organisation (NESO)²³ expressed their displeasure for bringing the proposed Bill by saying that it was as an attempt to impose the burden of the post-1971 Hindu Bangladeshis on the entire North East region.²⁴ Major political parties of Assam like the Congress (I), *Asom Gana Parisad*, and the Left Democratic Mancha, Assam — a joint platform of eleven political parties, namely the CPI (M), CPI, CPI (M-L), AAP, *Asom Sangrami Mancha*, LDP, NCP, *Samajbadi* Party, RCPI, AIFB and *Janata Dal* (S) also expressed similar apprehension that it would prove detrimental to the rights of indigenous communities. Assam's stand against the proposed bill is historically developed as the state has been paralysed by continuous migration from the neighbouring countries particularly from Bangladesh. Economy of Assam is jeopardized, demography underwent a change and problem of shortage of land for further expansion of indigenous people arise due to illegal undocumented migration.

C.S. Mullan, Census Superintendent of India, in 1931, mentioned the problem as more serious than the Burmese invasions. The Burmese invaders had depopulated Assam, but the continuous immigration from Bangladesh and neighbouring countries overpopulated Assam. Population of Assam in 1901 was 3.29 million which increased to 8.03 million in 1951, 26.65 million in 2001 and reached to 31.20 million in 2011. The average annual growth during 1901-2001 was 2.11 percent instead of national average of 1.47 percent. In certain parts of Assam, the immigrant population constituted more than 70 percent of the total population and in *char* (river islands) area 90 percent are immigrants.²⁵ The Bangladesh bordering districts of Assam including some immigrants inhabited places showing highest decadal population growth (**Table 2**)

Table: 2

Decadal Population Growth Rate and Density in Some Bordering Districts including Nagaon & Morigaon:

Districts	Decadal Population Growth Rate		Density per Sq. Km.	
	2001-11	1991-01	2011	2001
Dhubri	24.40	22.97	1171	585
Bongaigaon	19.58	22.09	425	420
Goalpara	22.74	23.03	553	451
Barpeta	21.40	19.62	632	508
Cachar	20.17	18.89	459	382
Karimganj	20.74	21.87	673	557
Nagaon	22.09	22.26	711	582
Morigaon	23.39	21.35	618	500
Hailakandi	21.44	20.89	497	409
India	17.64	21.15	382	325
Assam	16.93	18.9	397	340

Source: Statistical Handbook Assam. Government of Assam: Directorate of Economics and Statistics. 2012

7. Fear of Bengali Dominance:

History of anti-Hindu Bengali opposition in Assam has rooted in the colonial period. The establishment of the East India Company rule in Assam resulted in the flow of large scale Bengali bureaucrats into new

administrative setup that may be said to have marked the beginning of the language problem in Assam (Kar 1974, 2). In 1831, the government of Bengal made Bengali as the language in the court and medium of instruction in Assam (Assamese language reinstated in 1873). As a result, the services of the Bengalis became indispensable in the Anglo-vernacular and vernacular schools as well as in the offices of the Company and it resulted in the social dominance of the people from Bengal in Assam.²⁶ In the post-independence period, the state government tried to establish the hegemony of Assamese language in Assam so that it benefited the Assamese seeking government jobs (Weiner 1978: 112). Due to the fear psychosis of Bengali dominance the Assamese increasingly demanded that Bengalis should acknowledge the exclusive legitimacy of Assamese symbols of life. On the other hand, the Bengalis favoured bi-lingual status to compete with their Assamese counterpart. Thus, the polemic between Bengali and Assamese languages had been fairly continuous and symbolizes in many ways of their fight (Baruah 1978: 71).

The Official Language Movement of 1960's and the Medium of Instruction Movement of 1970's were two identical issues broke out known as "language riots" due to the establishment of Assamese as the sole language of Assam and counter attempt of the Bengalis to make Assam a bi-lingual state. The Official Language Bill was introduced in Assam Assembly on October 10, 1960 and declared Assamese as the official language in Assam. However provision was made for the use of Bengali in the district of Cachar. The Bill failed to get support from the Bengali speaking peoples and they demanded for recognition of Bengali as an additional state language in Assam.²⁷ The propaganda and counter propaganda over the language issue resulted in the conflict between the Assamese and the Bengalis which ultimately led to "Assamiya- Bengali riots" in Assam (Kunda 2007: 80).

Ranit Barpujari, a student of Cotton College, was died in police firing who was declared as the first martyr for the cause of Assamese language. Incidents of large scale arson, destruction of houses, looting of properties took place in Goreswar area of Kamrup district.²⁸ On the other hand, eleven persons were died as a result of police firing on a demonstration in support of Bengali in Silchar.²⁹ Again in 1972, Assam witnessed Assamese-Bengali rivalry over the issue of medium of instruction. The dispute began in June when the Academic Council of Gauhati University resolved to make Assamese as the medium of instruction and examination in undergraduate courses. The Bengali organisations opposed the decision. They consider Bengali to be language of college education not only in Cachar but in the rest of Assam also. Like the earlier disturbance, large scale incidents of arson and looting had taken place in Dhing, Doboka, Laharighat and Moirabari of Nagaon district. The death of Anil Bora, an Assamese student leader of Nagaon District and Mozamil Haque in Kharupetia in Mangaldoi sub-division of Darrang District had intensified the disturbances. Though the issue of medium of instruction came to an end with the intervention of D.K. Baruah, a member of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's cabinet, who suggested for the continuation of English and removed any compulsion on the matter of colleges switching to Assamese, mutual suspicion remained as earlier. In the language crisis the Bengali speaking Muslims supported the cause of the Assamese. So, the Assamese feared that if the Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims joined together, they could be outnumbered politically and linguistically. The decline of Assamese speaking population in 1961 and 1971, as shown in the 1971 population census, further heightened their suspicion. The All Assam Student Union (ASSU) and other nationalist groups of Assam are vehemently opposing the attempt of political parties to winning religious minorities for the sake of winning

over elections. Now polarisation of Assamese society on religious line or 'communal compartmentalisation'³⁰ is almost completed and tense situation gripped in Assam. While the RSS and BJP has begun to consider the Hindu migrants as refugees and think about their protection and granting Indian Citizenship, the CPI-M, the Congress and the All India United Democratic Front showing interest to protect Muslim migrants. Thus the political parties are "institutions which divide groups from each other at the same time as they encourage political competition and participation can only exacerbate communal conflict."³¹ The violence of Tiwa versus Muslims of Bengali descent; Bodo versus Bengali Hindus and Muslims; Bodo versus Assamese Hindus; Mishing versus Bengali Hindus and Muslims; Muslims versus Hindus; ethnic Assamese Hindus and Muslims versus Muslims of Bengali descent in Assam (Baruah 2010: 132) are the direct result of winning the migrants or "the Hobbesian war of all against all" (Shourie: 1983). Now debate on D-voter issue and updating of National Register of Citizens are the sequel of earlier happenings in Assam.

The incident of 6th March 2017 again fuels the competition of language dominance in Assam. On this day a protest meeting demanding the amendment of Citizenship Act, 2003 and a halt to harassment of Hindu Bengali in the name of foreigner was held by the Nikhil Bharat Bangali Udbastu Samannay Samiti (NBBUSS) at Silajanjati High School, Silapathar in Demaji district. The participants in the meeting reportedly rejected the Assam Accord and talked in favour of the proposed Citizenship Amendment Bill.³² They also took out a procession through the town and it was alleged that some unidentified miscreants shouted anti-Assamese and anti-ASSU slogan, ransacked the ASSU office, and damaged the martyr's column on the office premises.³³ It resulted in the state wide protest led by ASSU, the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad

(AJYCP) and other organisations throughout the state. This event again provoked feeling of suspicion between the Assamese and the Bengali.

8. Conclusion:

Assam has been well-known for her broad kindness and capacity of accommodating like-minded people. Every Assamese considers '*Janani Janmabhoomischa Swargadapi Gariyasi*' ('mother and motherland are superior to heaven' uttered by lord Rama and national motto of Nepal') as their motto. Assimilating capacity of Assamese has been seen when they accepted the ethnically and culturally different groups of people coming from Bangladesh (erstwhile) up to 24th March 1971 and other groups of people from the rest of India. Some non-Assamese luminaries like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Amalendu Guha enriched the Assamese culture through their creations. Again, the legalised immigrant communities also accepted Assamese way of life by keeping their own culture and tradition.

Geographically and economically Assam could not bear the burden of fresh immigrants. Land-men ratio reached into a saturating point, people encroached into the reserve lands and forests. As a result, ecological imbalance has given rise to the problems like flood and drought in Assam. Economically, Assam is basically an agriculturist state and industrialisation is in back foot stage. Unemployment in Assam reached about 25 lakhs. Now, the post 1971 undocumented illegal immigrants is equivalent to 'external aggression.'³⁴ Thus the indigenous peoples fear the loss of their identity through dilution of their culture by the influx of outsiders. This fear also expressed by the *Committee for Protection of Land Rights of Indigenous People of Assam* headed by Hari Shankar Brahma report. The report stated that the illegal Bangladeshis encroaches all classes of land in hills, *beels*, reserved forests, roadside reserved lands, *Satra*, tribal belt, block lands and setup illegal villages overnight. More than 8000 *bighas* of

Satra land have been under encroachment by illegal Bangladeshi encroachers. The report also revealed the organized attacks on the indigenous Assamese villagers of Silapathar, Mayaong, Mukalmua, Hajo areas by illegal migrants. So, Assam's protest against illegal migration can never be under estimate by just saying as 'nativism.'³⁵ The rights upon land, employment, political power and cultural hegemony are valid demands for Assamese people. So, the decision of the central government to granting citizenship to some religious minority groups of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan will be a suicidal attempt. How long India can continue such policy? Position of India is like a scapegoat which is covered by some refugee producing countries. If India grants citizenship to the persecuted peoples of the said countries, same will be given to the Tamil migrants from Sri Lanka. Instead, India should create international pressures on those countries to adhere to secularism and to stop persecution on minorities in the name of religion. When the people get their life and property secured, they would never take the risk of leaving their motherland. No doubt it would lessen the burden of India to rehabilitating the persecuted minorities of neighbouring countries.

(Endnotes)

1 Sadako Ogata, the then United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, during her visit to India in May 2000 defined the category of economic as the 'third dimension' of the problem of displacement.

2 The Brookings Institution and the Global IDP Survey categorize IDPs as "persons or group of persons who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of, or in order to avoid, in particular the effects of armed conflict, in situation of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."

3 The 1967 United Nations Protocol on Refugees define refugees as: "Any person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is

outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his formal habitual residence, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

4 “The State of the World Refugees,” *the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2000, 280

5 , Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal: 1905-1947*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10.

6 B.C. Roys’s letter to Nehru, quoted in Prafulla Chakravarti’s in *The Marginal Men*, (Calcutta: Naya Udyog, 1993), 21. Cited in Chandan Nandy, *Illegal Migration from Bangladesh to India: the Emerging Conflicts*, (Brandeis University: SLIFA Program in Inter-Communal Coexistence, 2005), 31.

7 Government of India, Annual Report 2014-15. New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2015, p.236.

8 Lok Sabha Debates, Government of India, May 24 1971.

9 Ibid

10 “Refugees from Bangladesh: Facts of the Refugee Problem,” *Bangladesh Documents*, Madras: B.N.K. Press, 1971), 446.

11 Article 28 (A) provided that the state has an opportunity to make special provision for the advancement of any backward sections of the citizens.

12 Article 29 (3) (a) empowered the state to making special provision in favour of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic.

13 Govindra Chandra Mandal, *Rights of the Minorities: The Case of Bangladesh*, Dept. of Law, University of Dhaka. http://www.academia.edu/839044/Rights_of_the_Minorities_The_Case_of_Bangladesh Accessed February 24, 2016

14 Article 8 (1): “The principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice, together with the principles derived from them as set out in this part, shall constitute the fundamental principles of State policy.”

15 Article 8 (1A): “Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions.”

16 Cited in I. Ahmed, “Refugees and Security: The Experience of Bangladesh,” *Paper presented in a Seminar on Refugees and Internal Security in South Asia, Colombo, 10-11 July 1994*. http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:1245

17 According to the 1991 Census of Bangladeshi, the percentage of Hindu population in Chittagong was 10.55, in Khulna it was 13.80, in Rajshahi 10.49% and in the Dhaka division it was only 8.13. In fact, the Khulna Division has a higher Hindu population than the national average (10.51%).

18 Mandal, *Rights of the Minorities: The Case of Bangladesh*,

19 “Rejected peoples refer to those citizens or legal

residents of a country who are forced to leave their homeland as a result of persecution, violence or threats to their lives or property and whose departure is sought by their governments or by those among whom they live,” Myron Weiner, “Rejected Peoples and Unwanted Migrants in South Asia,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 28 no. 34, (1993), 1737-1746 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4400049> Accessed September 17, 2014.

20 On July 15, 2016 a Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha to bring an amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955.

21 A special provision was incorporated in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1985 to define citizenship of persons covered by Assam Accord.

22 “ASSU Threatens Mass Stir to Protest Against Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016,” *The Economics Times*, October 22, 2016.

23 NESO is a student body of the entire North East which consist All Arunachal Pradesh Student’s Union (AAPSU), All Assam Students’ Union (AASU), All Manipur Students’ Union (AMSU), Naga Students’ Federation (NSF), Khasi Students’ Union (KSU), Garo Students’ Union (GSU), Mizo Zirlai Paul (MZP) and Tripura Students’ Federation (TSF).

24 “Views on proposed Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016,” a memorandum submitted by the North East Student Union to Dr. Satya Pal Singh, Chairman, Joint Committee on Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016.

25 Atul Goswami, and Jayanta Kumar Gogoi, “Immigration and Demographic Transformation of Assam, 1901-1971,” in *North East Region: Problems and Prospects of Development* edited by B.L. Abbi (Chandigarh: CRRID, 1984).

26 By stating the penetration of Bengali officers in Assam, Myron Weiner mentioned that “The teacher is Bengali, the pupil Assamese. The doctor is Bengali, the patient Assamese. The pleader is Bengali, the client Assamese. The shopkeeper is Bengali, the customer Assamese. The government official is Bengali, the petitioner Assamese,” (*Sons of the Soil: Migration and Conflict in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), 116)

27 *Times of India*, Delhi, May 30, 1961.

28 Justice Gopalji Mehrotra Commission Report of Inquiry into Goreswar Disturbances, 1960 (Dispur: Assam State Archive).

29 *Times of India*, Delhi, May 20, 1961.

30 Robert Melsion and Howard Wolpe, “Modernization and Politics of Communalism: A Theoretical Perspective,” *The American Political Science Review* 64 no. 4 (December 1970), 1126.

31 Ibid., 1118

32 “Tense Situation in Silapathar after AASU Office Vandalised by Miscreants,” March 7, 2017 <https://eclecticnortheast.in/silapathar-in-dhemaji-tense-after-aasu-office-vandalized/> accessed March 10, 2017.

33 *The Assam Tribune*, March 8, 2016.

34 *Report on Illegal Migration into Assam*, a report submitted by Lt. S.K. Sinha, Governor of Assam, to the President of India on November 1998.

35 Hari Shankar Brahma Committee Interim Report for Protection of Land Rights of indigenous People of Assam, <http://m.indiablooms.com/news-details/N/34467/hari-shankar-brahma-report-reveals-illegal-bangladeshis-dominates-15-out-of-33-assam-districts-massive-threats-to-indigenous-people.html> accessed on September 24, 2017.

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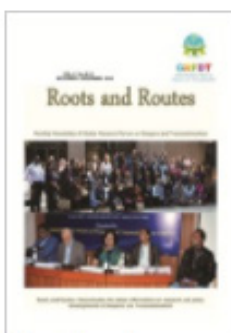
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