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Exploring The Socio - Economic And Political Institution Of Immigration And Its Effects On Bilateral Relations Of India And Bangladesh

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Abstract: *This paper puts forth the causes, scale and routes of the migration of refugees from Bangladesh to India, along with the ways in which these movements impact the socio-economic and political landscape of India especially the North-Eastern States with a special focus on Assam and its neighboring states. Moreover, it looks upon the effects of this immigration on the bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh and presents policy options for handling cross-border migration while preserving regional stability and human rights. It interrogates the institutional logics that shape immigration, including citizenship laws, political discourses, and socio-economic structures that influence labour markets. Through this, the paper presents a fresh and humane perspective on one of South Asia's most enduring migration phenomena.*

Key words: migration of refugees, socio-economic and political landscape, political discourses, logics.

Introduction - Migration between Bangladesh and India remains one of the most complex and persistent socio-political realities in South Asia. This movement, both legal and illegal, reflects a history of shared culture and enduring inequality. The border between the two nations stretching over 4,000 kilometers is not merely a geopolitical line but a living space shaped by kinship, trade, and mutual dependency. Understanding this migration requires situating it within colonial legacies, economic disparities, and environmental factors that perpetually reconfigure regional identities and livelihoods.

Historical Context and Colonial Legacies - The Bengal region was historically a single cultural and economic entity prior to the Partition of 1947. The arbitrary borders drawn during decolonization fractured families and trade networks, yet daily exchanges persisted. The 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh produced one of the largest refugee crises in modern history, displacing nearly ten million people into India. Over the decades, the borderlands have remained fluid, enabling both seasonal migration and permanent settlement. The persistence of such mobility demonstrates the inadequacy of rigid national frameworks to capture regional socio-economic realities.

Causes of Migration - The push and pull factors driving migration from Bangladesh to India are multifaceted. Economic disparities between the two countries which are reflected in forms of rural poverty and underemployment in Bangladesh urge the people to seek employment in our country. In addition, frequent natural disasters such as riverbank erosion, cyclones, and floods, have compelled many to seek livelihoods across the border. Moreover, some groups, particularly religious minorities, face political and social instability in their localities in the form of communal tensions, localized violence or persecution due to which they flee across the border to live in a safe and secure environment.

Impact on North- East India - Large inflow of refugees have altered local demographics in some districts of Assam and neighboring states, creating fears among indigenous communities about loss of linguistic and cultural identity. This problem of refugees or 'outsiders' continues to be a live issue in the politics of Assam and many other states in the North-East. This problem is particularly acute, for example, in Tripura as the original inhabitants which constituted the majority in 1951 have been reduced to less than 30% of the state's population in their own land. The same feeling informs the hostility of the local population to Chakma refugees in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. It has even culminated into mass protests, an example of which is the Assam Movement (1979-1985) led by the All Assam Students Union (AASU). Besides, this region is economically effected as these immigrants are viewed as encroachers on the scarce resources like land and potential competitors to employment opportunities and political power. It also conduces the trouble of population pressure on land. Moreover, polarization has increased as local political leaders have occasionally used migration narratives to their advantage in elections. The potential for criminals or militants to infiltrate through unmonitored border segments also raises security concerns because it makes counter-insurgency and law enforcement operations in the area more troublesome.

Consequences on India- Bangladesh Relations - Historically, the two nations shared warm relations as India played a key role in the Liberation War of Bangladesh from West Pakistan in 1971. Further, both the countries improved their relations by signing a 25 year Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace in 1972 and the Farakka Treaty regarding the sharing of water of the Ganges River in 1996.



However, this perpetual cross border migration has substantially strained the bilateral relations between the two nations. Domestically, the issue is brought up by Indian governments and political parties, which is then followed by diplomatic negotiations. On the other hand, Bangladesh typically disputes widespread illegal migration, claiming that India inflates figures for domestic political reasons. As a result of this denial, both the nations lose trust and cooperation which are the pre requisites of good international relations. Bangladesh experiences domestic backlash whenever India calls Bangladeshi migrants "illegal." Opposition parties and civil society are putting pressure on the Dhaka government, accusing it of caving in to Indian pressure if it consents to repatriation. This restricts the government's ability to work with India thereby limiting the government's space for cooperation. This unresolved dispute often culminates into confined progress in other arenas of cooperation like trade negotiations, water-sharing agreements, security collaboration etc.

Economic Integration and Remittances - Bangladeshi migrants contribute significantly to local economies in India through labor and consumption. Their remittances also sustain rural households in Bangladesh, creating a transnational economy of survival. Recognizing this economic interdependence is vital for reframing migration not as a zero-sum contest but as a mutual exchange.

Legal Frameworks and Citizenship - Legal ambiguity defines the existence of many Bangladeshi immigrants. The implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and the debates surrounding the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have heightened insecurity among Bengali-speaking populations. While the state frames these policies as exercises in legality and verification, their social impacts are devastating. Families risk statelessness, detention, and deportation without due process.

Human Rights and Institutional Accountability - The human rights dimensions of this migration remain pressing. Reports from human rights organizations document arbitrary detentions, denial of basic healthcare, and barriers to education for undocumented migrants (Amnesty International, 2024). A rights-based approach to migration governance must prioritize legal transparency, humane border management, and access to justice. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) firmly emphasizes for safe and sustainable shelter for refugees by all the host nations globally. It believes that proper shelter and security are significant for people who are forced to flee from their homelands due to natural disasters or political instability. Although, this ideology remains a debatable issue in practice because refugees often arrive in debt or poverty, and host nations struggle to provide jobs, healthcare, and education without overwhelming local systems and population which is undoubtedly evident in the immigration dispute of India and Bangladesh.

Reframing the Institution of Immigration - To understand immigration as an institution is to recognize its embeddedness in statecraft, law, and human aspiration. The migration regime between Bangladesh and India is neither static nor unilateral; it is negotiated daily by migrants, intermediaries, and officials. Viewing migration through this institutional lens reveals its dynamic and adaptive character, where legality and illegality co-exist as social practices.

Recommendations - This study proposes an integrated policy framework built on four pillars: (1) institutional cooperation between India and Bangladesh; (2) investment in climate-resilient livelihoods in Bangladesh; (3) accessible documentation processes for long-term residents; and (4) social protection schemes for migrant workers. Such an approach would reorient migration governance toward inclusivity and justice.

Conclusion - Bangladeshi migration to India is a story of persistence, adaptation, and negotiation. It challenges rigid national imaginaries and exposes the limitations of existing policy responses. By centering migrants' experiences, policymakers and scholars can envision a more humane and historically grounded approach to migration one that balances state sovereignty with human dignity.

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