

**MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH INTO
INDIAN BORDER STATES:
A CASE STUDY OF WEST BENGAL.**

M.Phil Dissertation Submitted By

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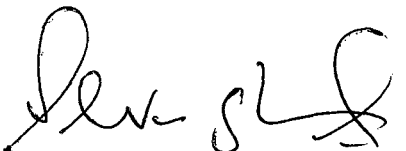
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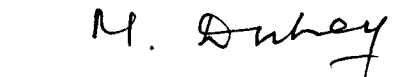
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Acknowledgments

I express my sincere gratitude to Professor Muchkund Dubey for his advice, guidance and contribution towards the successful completion of this project.

Thanks to my parents who have always believed and stood by me and have been very inspiring during the entire period of this work.

To my sister Mrs. Chandreyee Mukherjee, I will always remain indebted for without her timely help I would have found it extremely difficult to carry on with my work. I also thank my brother-in-law, Dr. Subroto Mukherjee for his cooperation.

Finally a special note of thanks to my husband, Mr. Arup Biswas. Without his help, support, patience and encouragement it would have been nearly impossible to complete this dissertation.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is an experience with which most of us are familiar. Defined in simple terms it is a shift in the place of residence for some length of time. But when studied carefully it is seen to be both a cause and a consequence of various social, economic and political factors. Therefore an explanation based on a single variable cannot lead to a meaningful understanding of such movements. Furthermore a set of factors affecting movement during a particular period and from a particular area may be different from the variables which influence such movements in another region, during a different or the same span of time. Thus any attempt at defining migration or different migrant groups must be preceded by an understanding of the specific conditions responsible for such a movement. This also means that the migrant groups placed in a particular situation must be understood in the context of the same situation, without allowing our

understanding to be coloured by our knowledge of nearly similar situations elsewhere.

This is true in the case of migrant groups from Bangladesh into the Indian border state of West Bengal. A study of the volume and causes behind this migration must be undertaken keeping in mind three important features -- their geographical position; the similar cultural and linguistic traits; and the rich history which surrounds them.

It is to be remembered that for a long time these two regions had stood as one; their people had unitedly struggled against British atrocities and even thwarted a British plan to divide Bengal in 1905.

True, they stand separated today, divided by an international border; but within the living memory of a large number of the present generation, the Bengalis of these two areas were one single unit. Thus here we are talking about a people who

have, for centuries, shared a common history, suffered the same economic and political bondages under the British rule and who continue to enjoy a common cultural and linguistic heritage. True, they may be separated by two different religions, with the Bangladeshis being overwhelmingly the followers of Islam and the vast majority of the people in West Bengal being Hindus. However the common cultural, linguistic and historical background shared by the people on both sides of the international boundary imparts a oneness which cannot be entirely wiped out by their beliefs in different religious tenets. As a result the alienation usually present on two sides of an international border is not strong in the case of the people of the said areas.

Given these sets of circumstances it is not at all surprising that migration on a substantial scale has taken place along the 2,203 kilometer border that India shares with Bangladesh. In fact the two basic factors that have facilitated

movement from Bangladesh to West Bengal are that the migrants speak Bengali, the language of the state to which they are migrating; and that many migrants have still relatives on the other side of the border. (Sanjoy Hazarika, 1994:48)

An important question that arises in a study of migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal is : can the migrating individuals or families from Bangladesh entering West Bengal be grouped under the label 'Refugees' ? This again raises the problem of who is and who is not a 'refugee'. First and foremost, the term 'refugee' is a legal category, tightly defined in the 1951 Geneva convention and it's 1967 Protocol as applying to an individual who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion and nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality [or former habitual residence] and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the

protection of that country." (UNCHR 1979:29) The category was later further extended to include "every person, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or residence." (UNCHR 1979:177)

In practice, a number of people can be identified under such a class, but there are others, like those who are the victims of environmental and natural disasters and economic pressures and cannot be placed under the above category. As pointed out by Graeme Hugo and Chan Kwok Bun, the United Nation's definitions of refugees is somewhat restrictive, in that it refers only to persecution or fear of persecution as initiating refugee movement. It excludes people fleeing the ravages of war. (Graeme Hugo and Chan Kwok Bun, 1990:22)

In order to place "refugees" in the correct perspective, these two scholars have given a four-fold classification of migrants -- refugees, voluntary migrants, natural disaster migrants and people displaced by development projects. According to them "refugee migrations are largely involuntary movements brought about by the onset or threat of some form of externally imposed conflict which makes it impossible for people to continue life as they have known it, were they to remain at their home place." (Graeme Hugo and Chan Kwok Bun, 1990:23) Here conflict or the threat of conflict is seen as being the key condition which leads to refugee migration. This has also been stressed by Zolberg and Suhreke. They state: "refugees would be characterized by the immediacy of life threatening compulsion, its relative deliberate exercise by some agent and the inability of some persons affected by it to rely on their government for even nominal protection." (1994:2)

Voluntary migrants have been

described as those whose decision to move is, to a large extent, motivated by their own choice. They are sometimes also referred to as economic migrants.

Natural disaster migrants are those who are forced to flee their home areas by the onset of (or the fear of) a natural calamity or disaster. This category includes not only the migrations triggered by a sudden and violent onset of floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions etc. ; but also 'economic insufficiency' (Olson , 1979:130) and 'silent violence' (Spitz , 1978) caused by droughts, famines and severe food shortage.

Refugees, however, can be distinguished from natural disaster migrants by the fact that in the case of the former the overt force impelling migration has human rather than physical environmental origin. (Graeme Hugo and Chan Kwok Bun, 1990:25) Nonetheless in both type of movements, external pressures are paramount in initiating them. As Kunz

points out, "it is the reluctance to uproot oneself and the absence of positive original motivation to settle elsewhere, which characterizes all refugee decisions and distinguishes the refugee from the voluntary migrants." (1973:130)

Finally there are those who are forcefully displaced by large-scale developmental projects such as dams, the construction of which forces people to move from areas which are inundated or from areas in the watershed.

A detailed study of migratory movements from Bangladesh into the state of West Bengal (which has been undertaken at length in the second chapter) is concerned with mainly three types of migrants -- voluntary migrants, refugees and natural disaster migrants.

Broadly they may be classified under two headings, voluntary and involuntary or forced migration. The former in this case would refer to situations of migration where

movement is part of a population's desire to earn a better livelihood.

The 'pull' it may be said is based on the comparative advantages that can be derived from movements into West Bengal. The 'push' is provided by the poor economic conditions and subsequent pressures on the population.

It is to be noted that according to the traditional push-pull theory migrant flows occur from 'poorer' to the 'richer' countries. However in this context the terms need to be modified slightly and more appropriately it should be stated that the migration is from a 'poorer' to a 'less poorer' country; the latter being India.

Involuntary migration is a broad term including all those individuals affected by crises such as war, riots etc. The 'pull' effect in these cases is created by the desire to inhabit in a more congenial atmosphere; the overwhelming objective being to reach a haven of safety. The 'push' is

created by the specific conditions hostile or turbulent at home; mainly the deterioration of the military, political or social situation at home. This broad category of migrants include what Hugo and Kwok Bun have referred to as natural disaster migrants and refugees.

Involuntary migration from Bangladesh into West Bengal may be seen to have occurred at certain intervals -- during 1950 and 1964 riots, at the time of 1965 and 1971 wars, political upheavals in the years 1975 and 1988, displacement caused by natural disasters like the famines of 1974 and floods which occurred very frequently and which were responsible for large scale devastations and in the wake of the Ayodhya incident in 1992. On the other hand, voluntary migrations may be said to have been a steady phenomenon -- at times quite significant.

An interesting feature of these migrations is that a large number of the migrant groups may be clubbed

together under one single heading -- illegal migrants. The term legal migrants cannot be applied in the case of individuals migrating from Bangladesh as there is no provision for India to take a particular kind or types of migrant on a periodical basis for migration. There have, however, been exceptions like those who came following the riots in the early years after partition. They were treated as refugees and given citizenship subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions. Subsequently surreptitious methods of legalization have been followed for migrants who have been staying illegally for a long time. They have been absorbed in the society, given ration cards and other papers as attributes of citizenship. The exigencies of electoral politics have played a role in this. But what is of note is that there is no known or established method of legalization and a large number of those crossing the border are illegal migrants.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that it is difficult to

attach a particular label to individuals migrating from Bangladesh and that the terms to be used for a particular group of migrants is to a large extent derived from the particular situations in which the migration has taken place. What is also noteworthy is that the status of migrants largely depends on the political decision of the receiving state. As Portes and Bach put it, "it has been a common occurrence that receiving states insist on labeling particular migrations The definitions bestowed on particular international flows is ultimately a political decision in the hands of the receiving state." (1985:75) It is, as stated by Leopold, the national asylum law and practice which determine who fits into which categories. Such decisions are affected by many political factors, including internal public opinion regarding foreigners. (1992:10)

This is applicable also to the migrants from Bangladesh. In the early years after partition, as stated earlier they were given

citizenship. However there occurred a change in the late sixties and finally in the seventies when no succour was given to the migrants who tried to enter. The prima facie designation was now 'illegal migrant'. For a short while at the time of the liberation war the people crossing over into West Bengal were given refugee status and were treated accordingly. They were not, however, accorded citizenship by the government; although surreptitious methods of bestowing legalization continued. The message, thereafter has been loud and clear -- they were welcome to stay but only on a temporary basis. The point is that from the seventies nearly all or most of the people crossing over from Bangladesh have been viewed as illegal migrants.

Causes of Migration from Bangladesh

In the case of Bangladesh mainly three specific conditions have been responsible for migratory movements into the Indian border states like West Bengal. They are :

a) poor economic situation at home and consequently the desire on the part of the people to eke out a better living;

b) displacement caused by natural disasters;

c) unstable conditions created by war, riots and political upheavals. Persecution of the minorities because of their religious affiliations has, to a considerable extent, been responsible in the escalation of such migratory movements during wars, riots and at times of political upheavals. A closer look at each of these conditions reveals interesting facts, which help considerably in understanding the situations which have caused people to move.

Economic conditions in Bangladesh:

Although Bangladesh occupies only three-thousandths of the total land area on earth, it is the eighth largest country in the world in terms of population size. The population of Bangladesh in the year 1951 was 44,165,740; by March 1 1974 it had grown to 76,398,000 and by March 11 1991 it had become 111,455,185. The table below (1a) gives the Inter-censal growth rate of population. Table 1b gives the population in figures from 1951 to 1991.

Table - 1a : Inter-censal growth rate of population, 1951-91.

Year and date of census	Growth rate (exponential)
1951 March 1	0.50
1961 Feb. 1	2.26
1974 March 1	2.48
1981 March 5	2.35
1991 March 11	2.17

Source : Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 14th edition
Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, April 1994, page 46.

Table - 1b : Inter-censal rate of population increase, 1951-91.

Year and date of census	Population	Variations from previous census period	
		Number	percent
1951 March 1	44,165,740	2,168,443	5.16
1961 Feb. 1	55,222,663	11,056,923	25.04

Table - 1b : Inter-censal rate of population increase, 1951-91 (continued).

Year and date of census	Population	Variations from previous census period	
		Number	percent
1974 March 1	76,398,000	21,175,337	38.35
1981 March 5	89,912,000	13,514,000	17.69
1991 March 11	111,455,185	21,543,185	23.96

Source : Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 14 edition, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, April 1994, page 46.

Such a large population base and high rate of population growth has led to rising landlessness in a predominantly agrarian economy. In fact, a look at the population density of Bangladesh between 1961 - 1991 reveals the growing landlessness of the country.

Table - 2 : Density of population in Bangladesh, 1961-1991.

Census Year	Bangladesh
1961	922
1971	1286
1981	1567
1991	1940

Source : Gautam Gupta, Debash Chakrabarty and Sarbari Bandyopadhyay, Migration from Bangladesh to India: During 1971-91: Its magnitude and causes, paper presented in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Inst. of Asian Studies, Calcutta 1994.

The growth in population has led to a situation where the average farm holding is less than one hectre (or less then two acres). (Sanjoy Hazarika, 1994:46) According to one estimate, the population growth in Bangladesh will slash in half the amount of cropland available per capita by 2025. (Dixon, Boutwell, Rathjens, 1993:40) The crisis is worsened by the fact that all of the country's good farmland has already been exploited. "At about 0.08 hectre per capita, cropland is already desperately scarce, " says the study.

The narrow industrial base of the country has failed to wean away the excess labour from land. Infact, the following table (3) clearly shows that agricultural sector continues to occupy an important position in the economy.

Table - 3 : Share of the three sectors in the GDP of Bangladesh in % .

Sector	1970	1991
Agriculture	55	36
Industry	9	16
Services	37	48

Source : World Bank, World Development Report, 1993.

The significant increase in the share of the service sector in Bangladesh may be attributed to a steady expansion of public utilities and an increase in construction activities, a large portion of which has been financed by foreign aid. Between 1970 -1991 the share of industry in Bangladesh's GDP increased by about 75%. However "this growth in industrial development lags behind most of the developing countries." (Bangladesh Towards Twenty first Century, 1994:124).. The average annual increase in real output in the industrial sector between 1980-88 was 6.5% for India, 6.3% for Pakistan, 5.4% for Bhutan and in the same period 4.3% for Bangladesh.

Moreover, although the share of agricultural sector is shrinking, (see table 3) it continues to employ directly or indirectly three-fifths of the civilian labour force. The economy, thus is largely rural and agrarian with a large number of people still dependent on the primary

sector.

The average annual growth rate of GNP per capita in Bangladesh has also been very poor, lagging behind most of the South Asian countries. During 1980-92 the average annual growth rate of GNP per capita in India was 3.1%, in Nepal 2.0%, in Pakistan 3.1%, in Sri Lanka 2.6%, in Bhutan 6.3%. In Bangladesh the average annual growth rate during the same period was 1.8%. (Human Development Report, 1994: tables 1 and Annex Table AS.3)

Low investment to a large extent, has been responsible for limited growth of the economy. Historically the investment rate in Bangladesh has been low averaging around 12% of the GDP. (Bangladesh Towards Twenty First Century, 1994:126).

Table - 4 : Investment Growth Rate; Financial Years 1985 - 1992.

	FY85	FY86	FY87	FY88	FY89	FY90	FY91	FY92
Investment	12.8	12.5	12.5	12.0	12.2	12.1	10.4	10.3
Public	7.4	6.7	6.3	5.6	5.7	5.7	4.6	4.7
Private	5.4	6.0	6.2	6.4	6.5	6.4	5.8	5.6
Domestic Savings	1.6	3.0	3.2	2.6	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.8

Source : Bangladesh Towards Twenty First Century, published by External Publicity Wing, Ministry of Information, Bangladesh, March 1994.

The gradual decline in public investment has been because of increased privatization. However, the overall level and rate of growth in private investment has been far from satisfactory. The rate of domestic savings in Bangladesh has been very low, varying between 1.6 to 3.8%. Foreign aid has, thus, played an important role in the economic development of Bangladesh. In 1991, foreign aid contributed 7% of GNP in Bangladesh. In per capita terms Bangladesh received \$14.8 in 1991. Much of the funding for the development budget for the mid 1980's was financed by external donors. In the financial year 1988, the development budget called for resource mobilization of US \$ 1.6 billion, the majority of which -- more than 85% was to be provided by foreign grants and loans (Bangladesh - A country study, 1989:106). The total socio-economic development assistance through the UN system (in thousand US \$) received by Bangladesh in 1988 was 383,086 and in 1990 was 264,000 US dollars. (Statistical Year Book of UN, 1990:1070)

Net financing of the government deficit through official development assistance has decreased (see table 5) from 7.4% in FY89 to 5.9% in FY92. However, it still continues to play a major role especially in the priority sectors and in the development of infrastructure which are essential for modernizing the economy. Besides if one looks at the net domestic financing, the scene is far from encouraging.

Table - 5 : Main Components of Fiscal Accounts as a Percentage of GDP;
FY88 - FY92.

	FY88	FY89	FY90	FY91	FY92
Total Revenue	8.9	9.5	9.3	10.0	11.0
Current expenditure	8.1	8.5	8.8	9.0	8.9
Food account deficit	0.9	0.6	1.2	0.9	0.8
A D P	6.4	6.7	6.4	6.5	5.8
Other capital as net lending	0.6	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.7
Budget deficit	7.1	7.2	7.8	7.1	5.2
Net foreign financing	6.9	7.4	6.6	6.5	5.9
Net domestic financing	0.2	-0.2	1.1	0.6	-0.7

Source : World Bank, 1993.

Low domestic rate of savings is usually attributed to widespread poverty. In fact, Bangladesh in terms of per capita income occupies the twelfth lowest place among the 127 countries listed in the World Development Report, 1992. It has a

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per capita income of less than \$170 per year, half that of India (Bangladesh Towards Twenty First Century, 1994). The very low per capita income and the consequent incidence of poverty is reflected in low calorie intake and high level of malnutrition. In 1986, half of the population still had inadequate energy intakes and 58% of rural children and 44% of urban children suffered from chronic malnutrition. (Mahabob Hossein, 1990:1).

According to one study, there was a marked reduction in poverty (as shown in table 6) between 1973-74 and 1988-89. The percentage of poor on the basis of per capita expenditure classification fell from 71.3% in 1973-74 to 43.8% in 1988-89. Similarly head count ratio of urban poverty fell from 63.15% in 1973-74 to 33.42% in 1988-89. There was, as indicated in the table (table 6), a slight reversal in the trend between 1985-86 and 1988-89 because of the devastating floods in 1987 and 1988. However the study also indicates that the incidence of ultra poverty (with

daily intake of less than 1805 calories) might have increased. (Bangladesh Towards twenty-first Century, 1994)

Table - 6 : Trends of Poverty in Bangladesh, 1973-74 to 1988-89.

Head count ratio (%) in rural areas	1973-74	1981-82	1983-84	1985-86	1988-89
a) Per-capita expenditure classification	71.3	65.3	50.0	41.3	43.8
b) Per-capita income classification		60.0	43.8	38.9	38.7
c) Per-household expenditure classification	60.3	55.3	46.3	37.3	43.9
d) Per-household income classification		51.3	39.8	35.9	40.0
Head count ratio (%) in urban areas	63.15	48.36	42.63	30.59	33.42

Source : 1) Mahbub Hussain and Binayak Sen "Rural Poverty in Bangladesh Trends and Determinants" Asian Development Review, vol.10, no.1, 1992.

2) B.sen and Q.T.Islam, Monitoring Adjustment and Urban Poverty in Bangladesh; Issues, Dimensions and Tendencies (mimeo) CIRDAP, Dhaka, 1991.

In many respects, writes Hazarika, "Bangladesh represents the Malthusian nightmare: too many mouths to feed and too little food, or too many people on too little land;" a nightmare which assumes a terrible

shape at times of floods and famines.

Natural Disasters :

Natural causes, mainly floods have been responsible for sudden and swift devastation of standing crops as well as loss of life and property on a large scale repeatedly.

Table - 7 : Land area affected by floods, 1971 - 1988.

Year	Flood Affected Area	% to total land in Bangladesh
1971	36,475	25.33
1972	20,000	14.44
1973	29,900	20.76
1974	52,720	36.61
1975	16,590	11.52
1976	28,418	19.73
1977	12,548	8.71
1978	10,832	7.52
1980	33,077	22.97
1982	3,149	2.13
1983	11,112	7.72
1984	28,314	10.66
1985	11,427	7.93
1986	4,589	3.19
1987	57,499	39.92
1988	1,22,000	60.00

Source : Gautam Gupta, Debash Chakrabarty and Sarbari Bandyopadhyay, Migration from Bangladesh to India: During 1971-91: Its magnitude and causes, paper presented in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Inst. of Asian Studies, Calcutta 1994.

Nearly every year from 1971 different districts in Bangladesh have faced the wrath of the raging

waters; and at times the intensity of such floods have been devastating. In June 1976, nearly 4,000,000 people were affected in the eastern and southern areas of Bangladesh. (Hugo and Bun, 1990:28) On 11 August 1980 the north western areas were devastated by flooding waters. On 28 April, 1983, the district of Sylhet was badly hit. Nearly 50,000 people were made homeless. Floods on August 5, 1983 and September 28, 1983 made 4,000,000 people homeless. On August 29, 1984, sixty of the country's sixty-four districts were covered by the flooding waters. Five successive floods in 1984 submerged nearly 14 million acres, destroying the homes and hopes of over thirty million people. They claimed nine hundred lives, eighty-five thousand heads of cattle and washed away a million homes. (Hugo and Bun, 1990:27) The 1988 floods reduced rice production by 1.6 million tons and caused 1.3 billion dollars worth of damage to roads, railroads, houses and industrial machinery. (Hosseini, 1990:3)

B.G.Vergheese describes the scale of flooding in these terms: "A huge monsoon flood discharge, draining over 1.5 million square miles in five countries straddling both sides of the Himalayas and containing far and away the highest rainfall density zones in the world, funnels into the sea through the Bangladesh nozzle comprising barely 7.5% of the total basin. No other country anywhere faces a flood problem of the nature and magnitude that Bangladesh does." (1991:122) Experts in Bangladesh agree that the single most harmful environmental factor in the country is flooding. "It has led to temporary and permanent migration not only across districts, but also across international frontiers." (Atiur Rehman, 1985:11)

During the annual floods, the country is virtually trisected into three nations, each with the raging water of an angry river as its natural frontier. The Meghna Brahmaputra, and the Ganges divide the eastern, northern, and western sectors during the flood season.

"Floods cover the country side like a vast sheet often under a meter or two of water." (Sanjoy Hazarika, 1994:50)

According to one estimate, one third of Bangladesh is covered by flood waters every summer. A study by the Jehangir Nagar University, Dhaka says that eighteen to nineteen million people are affected by flooding in Bangladesh each year. (Rogge, 1990:35) Under such conditions it becomes impossible to grow even tall rice in such high water, thus forcing people and livestock to migrate "inside the national frontiers where land is available and across the international frontiers." (Hazarika, 1994:51)

Bangladesh also has to contend with tidal waves that sweep the southern coast every year between April and December, rising nearly twenty feet high at times and smashing shelters, villages, bridges and killing tens of thousands of villagers. (Hazarika, 1994:52) On December 13 1981 the southern western

coast was hit by a tidal wave and thousands were made homeless. (Hugo and Bun, 1990:28) Although experts debate whether or not major climatic change and a rise in the sea level will occur, most agree that large section of Bangladesh's coastline are extremely vulnerable to inundation by sea water. (Hazarika, 1994:52)

Cyclones have also played their part in creating havoc in the lives of the Bangladeshis. Faridpur, Comilla, Mymensingh and Pabna, for instance, were greatly affected by a cyclone on April 21, 1980. Thereafter on December 13, 1981, the southwestern coast was hit by a cyclone. Again on May 16 and 25, 1985 Sylhet was hit by a cyclone. (Hugo and Bun, 1990:28) Bangladesh, rightly points out Sanjoy Hazarika, seems to move through an unending cycle of floods, cyclones, devastation, death, drought and famine. (1994:49)

What is interesting is that of the total area of 8.28 million hectares vulnerable to flooding, only 32% were protected by 1984-85. During

the 1990's the government wanted to increase the level of protection to more than 40%. But management of the flood plains, a CSE (Center for Science and Environment) report points out, is an extremely difficult task because of population densities and large scale landlessness. Resistance to new management practices is widespread. (1991:23) Furthermore they are essentially of a temporary nature, as they get breached and require frequent repairs and added investment. Thus the solution is of a temporary nature.

What is of note is that the continued misery provoked by flooding has a great impact on the economy of the flooded area. At the time of the floods, districts affected have often been turned into zones of severe food insecurity. (Gupta, Chakravarthi and Bandopadhyay, 1994:12) The system of restrictions on inter-district mobility of food enforced by the Bangladesh governments, to a large extent is responsible for food shortages at the time of droughts and famines. These restrictions were

originally put in place to help procurement, but they continue to be enforced during shortages. (Gupta, Chakravarthi and Bandopadhyay, 1994:12) Furthermore news of flood and devastation raises expectation of price rise in adjoining districts, leading to speculation and hoarding. Attempts, no doubt, are made by the government to provide necessities to the people; voluntary agencies also come forward at such times of distress. However the overall situation is one of shortage, leading people to move in search of food. According to Ruzickee and Chowdhary, out migration was an almost immediate response to the onset of food shortage in the 1974-75 famines. The net migration loss from the survey villages more than trebled from 2367 to 8073 between 1974 and 1975 respectively, and the net out migration rate increased from 9 to 31 per 1000. (Ruzickee and Chowdhary, 1978)

According to a report published in the Statesman on April 30 1974, nearly sixty thousand Bangladeshis

crossed into Nadia to escape "from unemployment and soaring prices." About 1000 of them, from Palpara, Chakadah, Badkulla and Nabadwip, were pushed back by the district police. Between April 21 - 24 1974, the BSF at the Gede check post alone intercepted nearly 150 such people. (Statesman, Calcutta, 30.4.1974) The Times of India (New Delhi edition) reported that nearly 500 people from Bangladesh had crossed into Bongaon and Basirhat. (30.10.1974) Economic distress generated by famine, as pointed out by the daily Sanghbad of Dacca, was the main reason why thousands were fleeing from their homes in Barisal district and heading towards Indian borders. (1.10.1974)

In years when food shortages are not so acute the other push factors continue to exist. As stated earlier, with over population, large scale landlessness in a predominantly agrarian economy, with a small industrial base, low domestic savings and a creeping or nearly stagnant GNP rate, the economic situation in Bangladesh is far from satisfactory.

The migrants are, thus, fleeing at times of distress and at other times, to escape the poverty related degradation of their lives.

The question is, why are they fleeing to India; into border states like West Bengal? The answer is that in comparison to Bangladesh the existing economic situation is better. India is the 'less poor' country which offers economic opportunities for the "poor" people in distress in Bangladesh. (Muchkund Dubey, 1993)

Gupta, Chakravarthly and Bandopadhyay have worked out an interesting estimate of difference in economic opportunities between India and Bangladesh based on the Harris-Todaro model.

Table - 8 : Estimate of difference in economic opportunity between India and Bangladesh.

Year	Annual Avg. per capita income: Bangladesh	Annual Avg. per capita income: India	Rate of unemployment India	Average Income India	Difference in economic opportunity
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(3) - (4) = (5)	(5) - (2) = (6)
	\$	\$	in %	\$	\$
1971	74	103	10%	92.7	18.7

Table - 8 : Estimate of difference in economic opportunity between India and Bangladesh. (continued)

Year	Annual Avg.per capita income: Bangladesh	Annual Avg.per capita income: India	Rate of unemploy- ment India	Average Income India	Difference in economic opportunity
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(3)-(4)=(5)	(5)-(2)=(6)
	\$	\$	in %	\$	\$
1981	140	260	6%	244.4	104.4
1991	220	330	5%	313.5	93.5

Source : Gautam Gupta, Debash Chakrabarty and Sarbari Bandyopadhyay, Migration from Bangladesh to India: During 1971-91: Its magnitude and causes, paper presented in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Inst. of Asian Studies, Calcutta 1994.

In the above table, the scholars point out, underestimates the pulling force on migration since

1) unemployment in Bangladesh is ignored

2) unemployment figures in India have been taken on the higher side.

Furthermore per capita income is not necessarily a good measure of expected wage but has been taken here for representative purpose. (Gupta, Chakravathy and Bandopadhyay, 1994:7) In spite of these limitations the above table gives a fairly good idea of the differences in opportunities in India and Bangladesh.

Again a glance at the difference in the density of population in these two countries brings out some interesting features.

Table - 9 : Density of population in India and Bangladesh.

Census Year	India	Bangladesh
1961	142	922
1971	177	1286
1981	1230	1567
1991	273	1940

Source : Gautam Gupta, Debash Chakrabarty and Sarbari Bandyopadhyay, Migration from Bangladesh to India: During 1971-91: Its magnitude and causes, paper presented in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Inst. of Asian Studies, Calcutta 1994.

While density of population may have very little bearing on economic opportunities in a largely stagnating economy, it does relate inversely to conditions of housing, sanitation, civic amenities and other 'Quality of life' features. Thus if density of population is accepted as a representative measure, it can be said that a plethora of above mentioned factors have contributed to migration. (Gupta, Chakravarthi and Bandopadhyay, 1994: 14)

Wars, Riots and Religious Persecution:

Religious persecution has played a role in pushing out a number of minorities, mainly Hindus from the region, over the years. The partition of 1947 along religious lines had set not only man-made boundaries, but boundaries of mistrust and hatred between the Muslims and the Hindus. The communal strife and bitterness generated by the partition, in fact, drove a wedge between them. In the prevailing atmosphere, the Hindus in the then East Pakistan progressively found themselves shrouded in webs of insecurity. The subsequent migrations in 1948, 1950, when riots took place in many areas of Bangladesh must be understood in the light of the insecurities created by communal tension and hatred. Furthermore the riots which took place between 1955 and 1960 did little to remove their fears. (Amalendu De, 1993:4) They were further aggravated by the imposition of martial law in 1958. Survival then became the greatest problem and an easy answer to that

was sought by migrating to India. The communal violence that broke out in Dhaka in 1964 and the war in 1965 caused further waves of Hindu migration to India. At the time of 1971 war nearly ten million people fled to India, out of which seven million were Hindus. (Muhammad Gulam Kabir, 1980:10)

What is of note is that even after the emergence of Bangladesh there was no respite in the flow into West Bengal. The political upsurge of 1975, declaration of Bangladesh as an Islamic state in 1988, the riots in 1992, again, played a role in aggravating the insecurities constantly harboured in the minds of the Hindus; forcing many to seek shelter in the Indian territories.

Religious persecution, however, cannot be seen as the main driving force behind migration. It, no doubt, played a major role in pushing out many in the post partition era. Thereafter, especially from 1971 onwards, it may be said that it has

operated as a marginal factor. The figures in table 10 indicate that there was a large drop in the composition of Hindu population in Bangladesh between 1951 - 1971. The percentage of Hindu population thereafter has remained more or less the same.

Table - 10 : Religious communities as percentage of the total population in Bangladesh.

Census Year	Muslim	Hindu	Others
1951	76.9	22.0	1.1
1961	80.4	18.5	1.1
1971	85.4	13.5	1.1
1981	86.6	12.1	1.2
1991	87.4	12.6*	

* includes all other minority religion

Source : Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 14th edition, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, April 1994, page 74.

The point of note is that a large number of Muslims have also migrated into West Bengal, especially from the 70's of this century. Many have been intercepted by the BSF, state police and Mobile Task Force.

Table - 11 : Interception of illegal migrants by the BSF, State Police and Mobile Task Force .

Year	% Hindu	%Muslim
1977	34.99	55.19
1978	66.78	28.03
1979	37.26	57.16
1980	33.44	63.09
1981	30.87	67.60
1982	23.42	73.19
1983	19.06	79.73
1984	18.85	80.87
1985	25.79	73.98
1986	25.53	74.47
1987	25.23	73.79
1988	26.82	72.75
1989	25.97	73.79
1990	31.64	68.24
1991	24.86	75.04

Source : Gautam Gupta, Debash Chakrabarty and Sarbari Bandyopadhyay, Migration from Bangladesh to India: During 1971-91: Its magnitude and causes, paper presented in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Inst. of Asian Studies, Calcutta 1994.

From the above table, it appears that the percentage of Muslims intercepted have been greater than the Hindus. If religious persecution was the main driving force behind migration, one would have seen a substantially higher percentage of Hindus among those arrested.

This clearly brings out two points:

that religious persecution can at best be noted as one of the causes of migration and;

that the difficulties caused at times of distress and poor economic conditions at home have 'pushed' many across the international border in the recent years.

Finally it is important to reiterate a point made earlier -- the common cultural, linguistic and historical background shared by the people imparts a oneness Thus the Bengali speaking migrant hardly finds himself in an alien atmosphere. Language gives him access to job, property and education. This apart, the initial presence of a large number of people with deep rooted ties with Bangladesh makes passage of information regarding employment, wages etc. easy through personal contact and by mail. It is to be remembered that many have relatives on this side of the border.

Thus while discussing the causes behind migration from Bangladesh, the common cultural and linguistic

heritage shared by the people of Bangladesh and West Bengal and consequently the oneness that arises out of it, deserves special mention, for they provide that 'extra push' across the border.

The Extent of Migration from Bangladesh

Religious factors played an important role in the migration that took place from the then East Pakistan to India, in the early years after the Partition. Most of the migrants during this period were Hindus. After the Partition they faced generally a hostile situation in their country of residence and, therefore, an extreme sense of insecurity.

The riots of 1948 and 1950 and the imposition of Martial law in 1958 caused a number of the members of the minority community to move into India, mainly the Indian state of West Bengal. By the middle of 1948 about one million Hindus had migrated into West Bengal. The riots of 1950 caused another one million to move. (Muhammad Gulam Kabir, 1980:10) Communal violence that broke out in Dacca in 1964 and the war in 1965 caused further waves of migration to India. In these two years the number of refugees registered in West Bengal, states Kabir, was far greater

than all those of the preceding seven years. (Kabir, 1980:12) Between 1961-65, nearly ten lakh people entered West Bengal. (P.K.Chakravarthy, 1990)

To an extent the two Acts of 1951 East Bengal Evacuee Property (Restoration Possession) Act of 1951 and the East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property) Act of 1951 -- the Act of 1952 - East Bengal Prevention of Transfer of Property and Removable of Documents and Records, Act XII of 1957 and the East Pakistan Enemy Property (Lands and Buildings) Administration and Disposal order of 1965, also played their part in repeatedly regenerating the sense of insecurity among the minorities; which then assumed abnormal proportions at the time of the riots and the wars, causing many to move. P.K.Chakravarthy states that between 1946 and 1970 nearly 5,283,328 people moved from the region into India. (1990:2-5)

The point is that India and the border states like West Bengal were

viewed as a place of sanctuary: a place where one could escape from a volatile situation or atmosphere and seek refuge. The formation of Bangladesh gave rise to the hope that this ingrained sense of insecurity would gradually diminish under a secular regime. But this hope proved to be very short-lived as the principle of secularism gave way to an increasing Islamisation of the society during Zia-ur-Rahman's and Ershad's rule.

At the time of the liberation war (March 25 to December 15 1971) of 1971, many homeless souls marched into India. 9,899,305 refugees were accommodated in camps in the border states on India. The table below gives an idea of the trend of influx.

Table - 12 : Trend of Influx.

Month	Average daily (persons)	Monthly arrivals in thousands)
April 1971 (10th to 30th)	57.00	1,221.00
May 1971	102.00	3,158.00
June 1971	68.00	2,056.00
July 1971	26.00	797.00
August 1971	34.00	1,055.00

Table - 12 : Trend of Influx. (continued)

September 1971	27.00	804.00
October 1971	14.00	425.00
November 1971	8.00	217.00
Backlog		166.00
	Total	9,899.00

Source : Bangladesh Documents, Volume II.

What is of note is that out of total of 9,899,305 people; 7,493,474 came to West Bengal. The following table shows the influx of refugees vis-a-vis the normal population in the concerned states.

Table - 13 : Influx of Refugees Vis-a-Vis Normal Population in the Concerned States.

Name of the State	1971 Census (persons)	Refugee Population in thousands)
Assam	14,952.00	313.00
Bihar	56,383.00	9.00
Meghalaya	983.00	668.00
Tripura	1,557.00	1,416.00
West Bengal	44,440.00	7,493.00
	Total	9,899.00

Source : Bangladesh Documents, Volume II..

The Chief Minister of West Bengal in a meeting held in New Delhi on 28th September 1992 said that many enter with valid papers, but after

the stipulated time fail to return and get lost among the general populace and that it is very difficult to hunt them out. He also stated that between 1972 and 1990 3,315,000 Bangladeshis entered with papers. Among them 2,727,000 returned but 588,000 continued to remain after the expiry of their visas. (Jyoti Basu , 1992)

Again with an open border of 2203.49 kilometer and very few battalions of the BSF to man it, it is not very easy to keep back those who wish to get back. According to Mr. Jyoti Basu the BSF is mainly responsible for protecting the border and controlling migration. However in the Southern parts of West Bengal, out of seventeen battalions only eleven are involved in patrolling the border. In the Northern half of West Bengal out of sixteen battalions, only nine man the border. (Jyoti Basu, 1992) It has also been said that the BSF is successful in capturing and pushing back only 20% of the people trying to cross the border into West Bengal.

(T.V.Rajeshwar, 1990) The Chief Minister also said "many are successful in cutting the net" spread by the BSF and entering West Bengal. (Joyti Basu, 1992)

The figures of the total number of people as classified by place of last residence and by place of birth available from the 1981 Census Report shed some light on the extent of migration. The figures given indicate that a large number of people moved across the border into West Bengal till 1981. Table 13 gives the distribution of migrants, i.e., those who last resided in a place of enumeration by duration of stay. Table 14 gives district wise distribution of migrants, i.e., those who were born in a place outside the place of enumeration but are currently residing in West Bengal.

From table 13 it appears that 2,679,029 people had entered the said state over a period of twenty years or more. It means that the table includes figures of those who crossed over into the state even before 1971.

Thus we have to take into account a large number of people who came to reside in the state probably after 1947. However, at the same time table 13 also indicates that between 1971 and 1981 nearly five lakh Bangladeshis have come to reside in the state.

Table - 13 : Figures According to the Place of Last Residence.

Last residence	Duration of residence in place of Enumeration				
	total	male	female	--less than 1 year--	
				male	female
Bangladesh	1,439,621	1,239,408		15,216	13,215
Bangladesh	rural	751,712	644,350	8,528	7,918
Bangladesh	urban	687,908	595,058	6,689	5,597

Table - 13 : Figures According to the Place of Last Residence.(continued)

Last residence	Duration of residence in place of Enumeration				
	total	----1 to 4 years----		-----5 to 9 years----	
		male	female	male	female
Bangladesh	110,006	111,968		123,294	127,394
Bangladesh	rural	60,256	61,489	68,531	69,977
Bangladesh	urban	49,750	50,479	54,764	57,617

Table - 13 : Figures According to the Place of Last Residence.(continued)

Last residence	Duration of residence in place of Enumeration				
	total	----10 to 19 years--		-----20+ years----	
		male	female	male	female
Bangladesh	416,821	367,103		702,530	554,533
Bangladesh	rural	248,761	208,752	345,191	273,733
Bangladesh	urban	168,060	158,351	357,339	275,800

Table - 13 : Figures According to the Place of Last Residence.(continued)

Last residence	Duration of residence in place of Enumeration -period not stated--		
	total	male	female
Bangladesh		71,753	64,695
Bangladesh	rural	20,446	17,481
Bangladesh	urban	51,307	47,214

Source : Census of India, 1981, West Bengal, Series 25, Part IV, table D2.

Table - 14 : Figures According to the Place of Birth.

Districts	Birth Place	Total	
		male	female
Kooch Bihar	Bangladesh	157,388	135,706
Jalpaiguri	Bangladesh	150,451	128,735
Darjeeling	Bangladesh	29,487	22,927
West Dinajpur	Bangladesh	136,228	119,795
Maldah	Bangladesh	54,658	48,823
Murshidabad	Bangladesh	39,830	36,849
Nadia	Bangladesh	272,569	249,445
24 Paraganas	Bangladesh	567,863	505,872
Calcutta	Bangladesh	119,587	101,539
Haora	Bangladesh	28,345	24,608
Hugli	Bangladesh	72,437	63,843
Medinipur	Bangladesh	14,299	12,748
Bankura	Bangladesh	6,017	5,326
Puruliya	Bangladesh	2,281	1,632
Bardhaman	Bangladesh	89,769	74,519
Birbhum	Bangladesh	7,802	6,813

Source : Census of India, 1981, West Bengal, Series 25, Part IV, Table D1.

A point stressed by Mr. Jyoti Basu is of note. He said that from the seventies a number of Muslim migrants have also been regularly entering India. According to official figures between 1977-1992 nearly 235,521 Bangladeshis have been captured and pushed back by the BSF. Among them 68,472 were Hindus and 164,132 were Muslims. (Jyoti Basu, 1990) At the same time the mobile task force and the state police have returned 216,985 illegal migrants. Among them 56,342 were Hindus and 169,775 were Muslims. Table 15 indicates the interception of illegal migrants from Bangladesh by the BSF and the State Police and Mobile Task Force between 1977 - 1991.

Table - 15 : Interception of Illegal Immigration : Bangladesh to West Bengal.

Year	State Police and Mobile Task Force			BSF			Total	
	H	M	O	H	M	O	H	M
1977	1,047	1,921	6	457	451	416	1,504	2,372
1978	4,101	1,598	21	1,169	614	389	5,270	2,212
1979	2,360	5,664	-	2,183	1,306	681	4,543	6,970
1980	2,365	5,537	30	1,157	1,108	336	3,522	6,645
1981	3,063	7,168	18	824	1,343	175	3,887	8,541
1982	2,160	7,282	4	1,103	3,014	370	3,263	10,296

Table - 15 : Interception of Illegal Immigration : Bangladesh to West Bengal. (continued)

Year	State Police and Mobile Task Force			BSF			Total	
	H	M	O	H	M	O	H	M
1983	2,070	12,347	18	2,364	6,202	263	4,434	18,549
1984	1,942	12,085	32	2,612	7,452	36	4,554	19,537
1985	2,938	13,970	-	4,044	6,061	62	6,982	20,031
1986	2,963	13,295	-	6,419	14,086	-	9,387	27,381
1987	5,860	17,579	385	6,637	17,504	77	11,997	35,083
1988	7,142	19,847	121	5,348	14,047	79	12,490	33,887
1989	5,606	17,365	85	5,831	15,131	19	11,437	32,496
1990	4,862	11,988	52	13,039	26,623	16	17,901	38,611
1991	5,420	15,839	73	12,884	39,418	6	18,304	55,237

H - Hindus , M - Muslims , O - Others.

Source : Gautam Gupta, Debash Chakrabarty and Sarbari Bandyopadhyay, Migration from Bangladesh to India: During 1971 - 91: Its Magnitude and Causes, paper presented in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Inst. of Asian Studies, Calcutta 1994.

The numbers given in the table are of people who have been caught and then returned. Keeping in mind that the BSF, State Police and Mobile Task Force are only able to capture a small percentage of those attempting to enter; it can be said that the number actually attempting to enter is quite large.

Some interesting trends in the growth of population during 1981-91 is projected by the Provisional Census Report of West Bengal, 1991.

In the table below, the districts which share a border with Bangladesh have been given. The other districts of the state are Calcutta, Haora, Hugli, Medinipur, Bankura, Puruliya, Barddhaman and Birbhum.

Table - 16 : Districts which share a border with Bangladesh.

Districts	Border area in KM.
Kooch Bihar	561.82
Jalpaiguri	157.00
Darjeeling	27.00
Murshidabad	125.00
West Dinajpur	538.00
Malda	173.00
Nadia	263.00
North 24 Paraganas	280.00
South 24 Paraganas	63.00

Source : Shantanu Singh, Anuprobesh Prasange, Swastika, Diwali edition 1994.

It is interesting to note that some of the districts had a growth rate higher than that of the state during 1971-81 and 1981-91. (see table 17) Infact during the said decades the six border districts of Jalpaiguri, West Dinajpur, Maldah, Murshidabad, Nadia and North 24 Paraganas, consistently had a growth rate higher than that of the state as a whole. The other districts which registered a growth rate higher than

the state during 1971-81 were Kooch Bihar, Darjeeling, Hugli and Barddhaman; and South 24 Paraganas and Haora in 1981-91.

Table - 17 : Decadal Variation in Population since 1961.

State/Districts	Percentage Decadal Variation in Population		
	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91
West Bengal	+26.87	+23.17	+24.55
Kooch Bihar	+38.67	+25.28	+21.82
Jalpaiguri	+28.76	+26.55	+25.96
Darjeeling	+25.16	+31.02	+30.40
West Dinajpur	+40.50	+29.31	+30.25
Maldah	+31.98	+26.00	+29.63
Murshidabad	+28.57	+25.49	+28.04
Nadia	+29.91	+33.29	+29.82
N. 24 Paraganas	+40.16	+31.42	+31.66
S. 24 Paraganas	+26.73	+19.42	+30.08
Calcutta	+12.39	+11.04	+06.33
Haora	+18.58	+22.74	+25.35
Hugli	+28.72	+23.86	+22.36
Medinipur	+26.89	+22.39	+23.83
Bankura	+22.02	+16.93	+17.88
Puruliya	+17.86	+15.65	+19.61
Barddhaman	+27.04	+23.47	+23.65
Birbhum	+22.80	+18.01	+21.96

Source : Census of India 1991, Provisional Population Totals.

At the same time during 1971-81 there were border districts like Darjeeling, Nadia and the district of Haora which witnessed a significant

increase in population from the previous decade. The rise in the decadal growth rate for Darjeeling from 25.16% (1961-71) to 31.02% (1971-81) is significant in respect of the quantum of increase as well as in that this ushered in a trend of increasing growth rate that was maintained during the next decade too. In the case of Nadia the increase from 29.91% (1961-71) to 33.29% (1971-81) is also substantial. (The Census of India, Provisional Population Totals 1991:54) The increase in Haora was from 18.58% (1961-71) to 22.74% (1971-81).

During 1981-91, the decadal growth rate registered a marked increase in eleven districts : West Dinajpur, Maldah, Murshidabad, N. 24 Paraganas, S. 24 Paraganas, Haora, Medinipur, Bankura, Puruliya, Barddhaman and Birbhum. (see table 17) These increases assume greater significance when it is noted that out of the eleven districts mentioned, in as many as ten (West Dinajpur, Maldah, Murshidabad, N. 24 Paraganas, S. 24 Paraganas,

Medinipur, Bankura, Puruliya, Barddhaman and Birbhum) the growth rate had declined during 1971-81 compared to the rate in 1961-71. "The reversal in the declining trend of growth rate assumes further significance when the incremental growth rate during 1981-91 is considered in conjunction with the fall in growth rate during the preceding decade." (The Census of India , Provisional Population Totals 1991: 55) For instance the increase in the decadal growth rate by 2.55% in Murshidabad and 0.24% in N. 24 Paraganas in 1981-91 appears to be not at all negligible when viewed along with the fall in growth rate by 3.08% and 8.74% during 1971-81 in Murshidabad and N. 24 Paraganas respectively.

If one looks at the border districts alone, it will be seen that some of them like West Dinajpur, Maldah, Murshidabad, N. 24 Paraganas and S. 24 Paraganas have witnessed increments of 0.94%, 3.63%, 2.55%, 0.24% and 10.66% respectively in 1981-91. (see table 18) If these

figures are studied along with that of table 19 it will be seen that these five districts have witnessed a significant rise in population.

Table - 18 : Difference in Decadal Growth Rates for Districts.

Districts	Decadal Growth Rates		Difference
	1971-81	1981-91	
Kooch Bihar	25.28	21.82	-3.46
Jalpaiguri	26.55	25.96	-0.59
Darjeeling	31.02	30.40	-0.62
West Dinajpur	29.31	30.25	+0.94
Maldah	26.00	29.63	+3.63
Murshidabad	25.49	28.04	+2.55
Nadia	33.29	29.82	-3.47
N. 24 Paraganas	31.42	31.66	+0.24
S. 24 Paraganas	19.42	30.08	+10.66
Calcutta	11.04	6.33	-4.71
Haora	22.74	25.35	+2.61
Hugli	23.86	22.36	-1.50
Medinipur	22.39	23.83	+1.44
Bankura	16.93	17.88	+0.95
Puruliya	15.65	19.61	+3.96
Barddhaman	23.47	23.65	+0.18
Birbhum	18.01	21.96	+3.95

Source : Census of India 1991, Provisional Population Totals.

In West Dinajpur the percentage rise to the total growth of population in West Bengal, as

indicated in table 19 has been from 5.31% (1971-81) to 5.43% (1981-91), in Maldah from 4.08% (1971-81) to 4.49% (1981-91), in Murshidabad from 7.31% (1971-81) to 7.74% (1981-91), in N. 24 Paraganas from 12.88% (1971-81) to 13.06% (1981-91) and from 6.95% (1971-81) to 9.85% (1981-91) in S. 24 Paraganas.

Table - 19 : Decadal Growth of Population : 1971-81, 1981-91.

State/District	Decadal growth of Population		Percent to total growth of West Bengal	
	1971-81	1981-91	1971-81	1981-91
West Bengal	10,268,636	13,402,085	100.00	100.00
Kooch Bihar	357,460	386,526	3.48	2.88
Jalpaiguri	464,712	574,956	4.53	4.29
Darjeeling	242,492	311,349	2.36	2.32
West Dinajpur	545,060	727,427	5.31	5.43
Maldah	419,214	602,071	4.08	4.49
Murshidabad	750,989	1,036,726	7.31	7.74
Nadia	740,342	883,994	7.21	6.60
N. 24 Paraganas	1,322,077	1,750,764	12.88	13.06
S. 24 Paraganas	713,671	1,320,158	6.95	9.85
Calcutta	410,469	261,416	4.00	1.95
Haora	549,575	752,050	5.35	5.61
Hugli	685,190	795,354	6.77	5.94
Medinipur	1,233,549	1,607,094	12.01	11.99
Bankura	343,776	424,640	3.35	3.17
Puruliya	250,926	363,622	2.44	2.71
Bardhaman	919,214	1,143,662	8.95	8.53
Birbhum	319,920	460,276	3.12	3.44

Source : Census of India 1991, Provisional Population Totals.

At the same time we have to take into account the fact that in 1981-91 the decadal growth rate had declined in the border districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Nadia, Kooch Bihar and in the districts of Hugli and Calcutta. However the growth rates for Darjeeling (30.40%), Nadia (29.82%) and Jalpaiguri (25.96%) are above the overall growth rate of the state and except in the case of Jalpaiguri, quite high by themselves. "In the case of Darjeeling and Nadia", the Provisional Census Report states, "Migration from across the border must have contributed to their high growth." (1991:61) In Kooch Bihar, Hugli and Calcutta the decline in decadal growth rate, it is to be noted, is consistent.

It appears that the growth rate has been declining in some border districts and rising even in some non-border districts like Haora, Medinipur, Bankura, Puruliya, Barddhaman and Birbhum. In the absence of fertility and migration

tables of the state (1991), which are yet to be published, and other demographic parameters, it is difficult to explain the underlying processes responsible for the decline in growth rate in some border districts and increase in few non-border districts. An in depth study at a micro level is required. But for that we have to wait for detailed results of tabulation of the Provisional Census data.

However what we can say with some amount of conviction is that the increase in the decadal growth of West Bengal (from 23.17% to 24.55%) signifies a disquieting reversal in the growth trend especially in the context of the drop in the all India growth rate to a level below that of West Bengal. (The Census of India, Provisional Population Totals 1991:83) Secondly in atleast eight districts - Maldah, Murshidabad, Nadia, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur, N. 24 Paraganas, S. 24 Paraganas and Jalpaiguri, the growth rates in 1981-91 have been quite high; higher than that of the state. In four of them it

has been above 30%. Furthermore, as stated earlier, in six out of the districts mentioned the growth rates have consistently been higher, than that of the state for the last three decades. Thirdly ten districts, despite witnessing a decline in the growth rate during 1971-81 have registered marked increments in the growth rate in 1981-91.

The growth rate of population in a state like West Bengal, it is to be remembered, depends on two factors, 1) demographic gap of the difference between the birth rate and the death rate signifying the natural growth rate, measured as the rate per 1000 population, per annum 2) net in migration.

It has been stated in Provisional Census Report (1991) that, according to the result of sample registration the gap between the two demographic parameters varied roughly between 20 and 22 during the period from 1981-89. "The natural decadal increase of population," it has been said, "should accordingly harbour around 20 to 22 per 1000 population or 2% to

2.2% per year leading to decadal growth rate of 20% to 22%. Any increase over and above that should usually be ascribed to net in-migration unless some special reason can be detected. Assuming that the accuracy of 1991 Census was more or less the same as that of 1981 and also that the general impact of the massive program of family planning in the state has not weakened during the decade in any perceptible degree, the excessive increase in population of about 3.5% points over and above the norm indicated above has accordingly to be attributed to an increase in net in-migration." (1991:70) In absolute terms the excessive increase comes to about 1.91 million. (The Census of India, Provisional Population Totals 1991:70)

The state of West Bengal is not a close state and neither is the population living within an impregnable border, following only the relatively simple course of demographic changes in birth rate, death rate, etc. The geographical situation, the socio-economic pull

exerted by it in the context of Eastern India and the neighbouring countries being what they are; it is quite possible that there could have been a flow of migrants from the neighbouring states as well as from the international border.

Problems Following Migration

That a passage from Bangladesh into West Bengal does not necessarily mean a passage from hardship to a life of ease, is clearly understood when one stops and listens to the hardships and the problems faced daily by a number of Bangladeshi migrants living in Anandnagar colony and Paschim Panchsheela in Kardah, North 24 Paraganas. Anandnagar colony is situated near the Kardah station and stands on the land which belongs to the railways. According to the old local residents like Nirmala Ghosh, Aurobindo Sankar Mitra and Alok Kanti Ghosh the land was once free of the hovels which now stand on it. According to them it was during early 1972 that the first makeshift huts made their appearance. Today there stands a colony which houses over a hundred Bangladeshi families.

I interviewed thirty residents of this colony (13 males and 17 females); all of whom were Hindus and had migrated from Bangladesh

between 1975 and 1978. They had come either from the district of Faridpur or Barisal in Bangladesh.

In Paschim Panchsheela the number of individuals interviewed was fifteen (12 males and 3 females) and all of them were Hindus. The settlement in Paschim Panchsheela is much smaller and comprises of fifteen families. With the exception of one family which had migrated from Bangladesh in 1971, the rest of the people interviewed in this settlement had left Bangladesh between 1976 and 1986. They had migrated either from Jessore or from Faridpur district in Bangladesh.

The interviews carried out in these areas, it is important to state, are based on random selection. No questionnaires; were prepared and neither was a sampling method used. The information collected was gathered during the course of conversations with the settlers of each settlement. Though the interviews were not carried out along strict scientific lines, they

nonetheless enable us to form an idea about the conditions that the migrants live in and the struggles that they face daily.

Anima Haldar generally known as 'mashi' (aunt) gave me a tour of the Anandnagar colony. While moving from one house to another it was possible for me to see the pitiable conditions in which most of the people interviewed lived. Most of the houses were situated next to a canal which served as a dumping ground for rubbish and a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Capable neither of protecting the residents from rain or cold, many hovels housed two or three families, each sharing one room along with their meager belongings. One such family comprises of Amartya and Shefali Bepari and their two small children. They live along with widowed Anima Haldar and her grownup son and teenage daughter. Part of the house in which Amartya and Shefali Bepari live has been sublet by Anima Haldar for two hundred rupees. She in turn pays a sum of three hundred rupees to her landlady Archana

Rajbankshi who owns a few such huts in the colony. Subarna and Sunil Haldar also live in a house which is divided into four parts and each part is shared by a different family. According to them "people are coming daily from Bangladesh and constraints for space and money force many to live in this fashion; sharing a house with others." "This is a common occurrence in Anandnagar colony" stated Anima Haldar.

Life for the ladies like Subarna Haldar, Anima Haldar, Kanan Baidi and the others interviewed is not very easy. All the ladies interviewed in Anandnagar colony work as maidservants in some houses in Kardah. Some of them like Pushpa Rajbankshi, Anjana Das, Piyabali Sarkar and Arati Rajbankshi work for nearly thirteen hours a day. Their monthly wages, as I was told, form the only source of regular income for their families as their husbands are unemployed. They shoulder the entire responsibilities of their families.

Life for them, in fact, is a

constant struggle. There is no electricity nor an ample source of drinking water. They have to walk to nearby tube wells which are not sufficient for all the members of the colony. The water in the canal has turned black, yet part of it continues to be used by them to wash utensils and clothes for lack of better facilities. They live in conditions unfit for healthy living. But as stated by 'mashi' they have learned to live in the given conditions.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Mayana Shikdar and Santi Bepari, residents of a settlement in Paschim Panchsheela. Life is equally hard for them. They work long hours as maidservants to make both ends meet. Although very eager to provide their children with an education, they have been forced to put them to work to meet some of the needs of their families.

Most of the women whom I interviewed stated that before migrating to West Bengal they had not

worked outside the confines of their houses. Difficult circumstances and family needs had forced them to work as maids in other people's homes.

Among the men interviewed eleven were unemployed. Some worked as daily wage labourers, others pulled rickshaws, sold vegetables and fishes and some like Manindra Rajbankshi drove a van. All have them had worked as agricultural labourers in Bangladesh. But now individuals like Manindra, Narayan Bepari (fishmonger), Sukhdev Kanjilal (bidi factory worker) and Raju Rajbankshi (pandal worker) had learned other trades to support their families.

What is interesting is that among all the individuals interviewed, men and women, there was a willingness to make the necessary changes to survive and stay where they had settled down. This probably gave them the added strength to face the challenges and the problems that came their way. They were ready to compromise and continue their struggles with the existing

conditions of their lives; they were intent in carving out a niche for themselves in the areas they lived. However they were not ready to return. When asked if they wished to return to Bangladesh, the answer repeatedly given was an emphatic no. All of them more or less gave the same reason: They had no land, no occupation or even a shelter to return to and as Pushpa and Otol Rajbankshi stated, god had brought them to this land and despite the difficulties they must learn to live and better their lives in the given conditions.

The human aspect of the problem of migration has been brilliantly portrayed by Ranabir Samaddar in his work titled - "Marginal Nation: Report on Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal." (yet unpublished) The report while discussing the deeper issues of the different aspects of transborder migration, also brings out the difficulties faced by the migrants, and the changes and compromises they are often forced to make as part of

the process of adaptation.

Thus we hear about the Hindu migrants in Swarupnagar, in the Basirhat subdivision; many among whom after migration are forced by circumstances to change their professions for worse --"college to school teaching, school teaching to private tuition, agriculture to petty business, petty business to vending, sometimes destitution. (Ranabir Samaddar 1996:68) Then there are the migrant settlers of Nalgola, situated in Basirhat subdivision and Canning which is close to Calcutta, who have also moved over to different kind of works in order to survive.

Nalgola is inhabited by Muslim migrants from Dumuria upazila of Khulna district where, Ranabir Samaddar states, they had worked as agricultural labourers. After migrating to Nalgola some among them have taken up masonry, painting of wooden furnitures, work of quasi-mechanics in small workshops. Others, we are told, work in the brick fields and prawn/shrimp units in and around

Haroa, Hingalgang and Minakhan blocks of the same subdivision.

Most of the migrants living in Canning were peasants in Bangladesh. However the majority are now engaged in rickshaw pulling/ cycling, headload work, small factory jobs and even in prostitution.

Like the Hindu women interviewed by me some of the Muslim women in Samaddar's study, work as housemaids while others are engaged in small factory units or are engaged in self earning professions. There are others who, along with the men work in the brick fields or are employed in the tailoring industry, for instance, in Metiabruz in South 24 Paraganas.

We also hear about migrant labours of Badartala and Ramdashati II, whose lives are marked by extreme poverty. They are mostly Bihari Muslims from Bangladesh who often work as hired labour in public works and as helping hands to tailors. Such is their life that they have to spend their nights

in what the locals call 'lineghars'.
(Ranabir Samaddar, 1996:100)

What is significant is that despite the odds, the numerous struggles, the hard work and deprivation, the migrant settlers mostly prefer to remain where they are and face the challenges of their new lives. There are, off course, among them some who work on a seasonal basis and return to Bangladesh after the completion of their work. But for most the decision to migrate is followed by a desire to settle and become a part of the life they have consciously chosen for themselves. The reason being, for most, is that there is nothing worthwhile left to make the journey back home.

Thus their willingness to adapt in a new land is explained by the fact that, more often than not, there is no strong enough reason for them to go back. In fact, going back often means being drawn into those very situations from which they had escaped.

Thus migration does not necessarily mean an automatic passage to a better life. For many migrants, life is a constant struggle; a tireless race for a better existence. However, it is for many, at times, the only visible option; an option for a comparatively better and secure life.

When we talk about migration from Bangladesh into West Bengal as a problem, we must take care to remember that is largely a human problem involving a section of desperate people, for whom migration is the path for a new life -- for better or for worse.

Conclusion

For finding an effective solution to the problem of migration from Bangladesh into the Indian border states like West Bengal, it is necessary to have a clear-cut recognition of the problem and an understanding by both the countries of its extent and the factors that are responsible for it. Unfortunately none of these conditions for solution prevail today. In fact this issue continues to remain a major bone of contention in Indo-Bangladesh relation.

Bangladesh, has always refused to acknowledge the problem. For instance in the discussion held in April 1975 in New Delhi, the Bangladeshi officials mostly evaded the issue. (Statesman, New Delhi, 13.10.75) Again the Indian Prime Minister in a personal letter to President Zia-ur-Rahman had expressed his concern about the influx of people from Bangladesh. The President, however, failed to give a satisfactory answer.

(The Times of India, New Delhi, 8.11.77) Later he said, "there are no Bangladeshi refugees in India any more. There is no question of our taking any people back." (The Times of India, New Delhi, 8.11.77) Even Mrs. Khaleeda Zia, while on a visit to India, denied the very existence of such people in India. If one examines the position of Begum Khaleeda Zia, "it will be clear that as the head of the Government of Bangladesh, she was not left with any option but to claim that there has been no illegal migration. No leader will publicly accept that the conditions in his or her country are so pitiable that a constant stream of people are migrating to a neighbouring country." (Muchkund Dubey, 1993)

The Bangladesh government realizes that once it agrees to discuss the issues, the defense it has been building on the matter, over the years, will fall. The effort, has mostly been to accuse India of providing false figures and raising issues, which according to them were

baseless and motivated.

On the other hand, parties like the BJP in India, as pointed out by Muchkund Dubey and Kameshwar Choudhary, have tried to colour the issue with a communal tinge. The understanding of the BJP on the question of Bangladeshi immigrants, writes Choudhary, is completely communal. The party talks of two kinds of immigrants in this connection i.e., the 'infiltrators' and the 'refugees'. All non-Muslims such as Hindus, Buddhists and Christian immigrants are regarded as refugees and only the Muslim immigrants are considered infiltrators. In Bangladesh also, some of the political parties have tried to gather political mileage from the issue by communalising it. The Jatiyo Party and Jamaat-e-Islami Party have alleged that India was raising this issue because it was out to drive out its own Muslims. Viewed in such a prejudiced light, the problem will never be solved.

Various suggestions have been made for solving the problem. It has,

for example, been suggested that the interception at the border should be made more effective. The Chief Minister of West Bengal stated in 1992 that the number of BSF battalions at the border should be increased. At the same time the Mobile Task Force should be made more efficient by providing them with the necessary equipment and more men. Mr. Joyti Basu also stated that visas should be issued selectively after proper screening. The Chief Minister also called for assistance by the Central Government for effectively implementing its scheme for constructing roads along the border and fencing the entire length of the same by barbed wires.

These measures can, of course, be of some help. Erecting barbed wire fences and increasing the number of patrolling forces may indeed thwart quite a few from making an attempt to enter the Indian side. But there will be others, pressed by dire needs, willing to take the risks and cross over to the other side of the border.

It is extremely difficult for India to solve the problem unilaterally without the co-operation of the Bangladesh government. Therefore, friendly dialogues between the two countries and a willingness on the part of the Bangladesh government to amicably and objectively discuss the issue is of utmost importance for solving the problem.

Any attempt to solve the problem must ultimately seek to remove the underline tensions and pressures which have created the problem. There is, therefore, an urgent need to attend to the root cause.

What is needed is to impart growth and dynamism to the Bangladesh economy and bring prosperity to the people, apart from giving them, particularly the minorities, a sense of security. This is essentially the responsibility of the Bangladesh government.

However, the Bangladesh government alone with its meager

resources and swelling population cannot bring about any momentous change in its socio-economic structure. What is required is a combined attack by Dhaka and its neighbours on the over population and the poverty that is sweeping the entire Gangetic-Brahmaputra basin. (Hazarika, 1993:61) In fact no nation in this region can operate in isolation. Prevention of such movements across the international border requires vision, dedication and cooperation among the states of the region .(Shamsul Bari, 1995.97) A regional association like SAARC can work towards the development of common strategies to enhance the security of the people.

Cross-border displacement, coercive or voluntary, is a problem faced not just by India but by most of the states of the region. The need, therefore, is to put it on the agenda of regional co-operation. The problem of population displacement across the borders, if viewed from a more broader regional perspective than as a primarily bilateral issue

can probably help to bring about a solution. The Heads of the different South Asian countries can, by pooling together their resources and expertise work out a harmonized, comprehensive regional approach. But for that the different South Asian states have to bury their mutual political distrust and difficulties and muster up enough political will to put people's security and welfare as main items on the agenda for regional co-operation.

Thus India alone cannot deal with a problem which forms a part and stems from the underlying tensions, conflicts and pressures of poverty which exist in the subcontinent amongst a population so diverse and numerous. The problem of population displacement cannot be treated in a isolated fashion, but has to be seen as related to the broader problems of development and security. Thus for a solution of a long term nature the different South Asian states; including India and Bangladesh; have to realize the need to identify the root causes, which are directly

linked with sustainable economic development of the region, responsible for such displacements and then together work toward their prevention and finally their elimination.

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