

# **The Partition Displaced: Impacts On Demography and Politics Of Barak Valley upto 1971**

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## **Abstract**

The partition of India, on the eve of Independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, and just before it the Sylhet referendum on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> July 1947, followed by a series of bloody communal riot in East Pakistan was responsible for immigration of a large number of people in India. As Barak Valley was an adjacent area and within the fold of almost same cultural and linguistic identity , maximum refugees from East Pakistan took shelter in this valley. The regular wave of migration from erstwhile East Pakistan changed the demography of the then Cachar. Up to 1970 about 2,13,946 people entered in Barak valley. Day by day the refugee problem became very critical and it was a huge burden to India. However, the Govt. of India temporarily made arrangements for shelter of the refugees. The Govt provided lands for their settlement. In every town and village pressures of population increased .Besides many hilly areas, jungles, barren lands, allotted to the refugees were made habitable by them. Mention can be made of Ramkrishna Nagar, Dualiha, Bag-o-Bahar, Irongmara, silcoorie etc. These displaced people effected the political system also. They took part in various agitation and movements, organised meetings and raised their voice for rehabilitations and demanded various facilities. They also actively took part in language movement of 1961. They also contributed to various political affairs of the country.

*Key words : Refugee ,demography, political impact*

The continuous wave of immigration from Sylhet to Barak valley after partition was mostly responsible for the growth of population and demographic change in this valley .Migration was already going on in the then Cachar before partition for various reasons . During British period when tea garden was established in this region , large number of labourers were brought from Sylhet and adjoining areas . Besides a number of businessman and cultivators emigrated to Cachar in search of livelihood and settled here. But on the eve of independence in 1946 when Noakhali riot broke out and on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> July 1947 Sylhet Referendum was held and India achieved independence at the cost of partition then it was followed by a series of communal riots, people started to take shelter in India out of fear to save their life and property . Due to the regular flow of immigration , growth of population was increasing tremendously which was a huge burden on India .The following table will show the growth of population in Cachar from 1941 to 1971 :

Year	Persons	Variation	% of decade variation
1931	8,03,694	52,134	6.94
1941	8,95,140	91,446	11.38
1951	11,15,865	2,20,725	24.66
1961	13,78,476	2,62,611	23.53
1971	17,13,318	3,34,882	24.29

Source: Cachar District Gazetteer P. 57.

From the above table it is clear that the growth rate of population during the post partition was more than double. During the decade in 1941 to 1951 the growth rate of population was the highest . It was because in October 1946, the Noakhali riot and in August 1947 the partition of India led large scale exodus of the victims.

Before 1950 about eleven lakhs Hindu family left East Pakistan not only for life risk but for self respect also.<sup>1</sup> In 1951 in Cachar 1,30,000 people were immigrants from Pakistan out of them 93,000 were refugees.<sup>2</sup> Among these refugees 22185 were in urban areas i.e, in Silchar, Hailakandi and Karimganj and remaining 70,322 were found in rural areas. The Refugees were accommodated in different areas of Cachar as follows:-

Karimganj and Badarpur	19732
Patherkandi-Ratabari	17897
Kathigora,Borkhola and	11745

Udarbond	
Rural silchar	8251
Hailakandi-Katlicherra	6625
Lakhipur-Sonai	6072

(source: Cachar District Gazette)

Above table shows that the highest number of refugees settled in Karimganj subdivision. Density of population was higher in Karimganj, Badarpur, Patharkandi and Ratabari area than Silchar and Hailakandi. In Hailakandi subdivision the refugees settled only 6625.

The total number of displaced families in Cachar in 1955-56 was 32,619. The three subdivisions of Cachar at that time were Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The refugees were scattered in these three subdivisions. The following table shows the number of refugee families in rural and urban area in these subdivisions

Subdivision	Urban	Rural	Total
Silchar	3257	8924	12181
Karimganj	3822	12207	16029
Hailakandi	954	3455	4409
Total	8033	24586	32619

(Source : Cachar District Gazette)

Number of immigrant people in 1951 was 93177 and in 1958 it was 240823. In 1961 in Cachar the number of immigrants were 156307. Among them highest number of immigrants came in 1947 and in 1956. Again from 1964 to 1967 a large number of displaced people entered in Cachar as a result of violent communal riots.<sup>3</sup>

Not only the Hindus a large number of Muslims who were not supporters of partitions also migrated to India out of fear. As a result of various communal riots in East Pakistan and continuous flow of infiltrations of refugees in Assam created a feeling of communal hatred. Nearly one lakh Muslims fled to East Pakistan out of fear. 14,000 Muslim people of five thousand families displaced from Cachar to East Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> But when Nehru-Liyakot pact was signed and both the government agreed to provide shelter and security to the minority section in their own countries, a large number

of Muslims who fled to Pakistan out of fear , returned home after this pact. But probably these Muslim people did not register themselves as refugees, as they were already the inhabitants of this valley .As a result of the large scale influx of Hindu refugees the Hindu population increased a lot. The Muslim people who were already here and those who came and settled here before partition became minority after partition . The following table shows the number of Hindu and Muslim population from 1951-1971 in Cachar:

Year	Hindu	Muslim
1951	6,76,540	4,29,457
1961	7,89,348	5,39,457
1971	10,05,995	6,83,387

Source: Cachar District Gazetteer .

The above table indicates that from 1961-1971 the Hindu population increased more than the Muslim population. Growth rate of both the communities in these three decades were almost same . It indicates that though the Hindu communities migrated in a large scale but the Muslims did not migrate to East Pakistan in that number rather as a result of communal riot those who fled to East Pakistan they returned home after the Nehru-Liyakot pact.

Influx of refugees changed the demographic pattern of this area. Many hilly, barren lands and jungles were converted into habitable areas. The uprooted people, who were the victims of the partition crossed the border and worked hard for their food and shelter. Though the Government provided lands for their settlements but many areas were not fit for habitation, wild animals were used to roam here and there in day time also. People cannot imagine to settle in these areas at that time. Here mention can be made of Ramkrishnangar, Dualia, Veterbond, Netajinagar, Baghbahar, Lowerbond, Irongmara, etc. All these “khas” lands were allotted to the refugees by the Government for their settlement. As a result of the effort of the homeless people the demography of these areas changed totally. They started cultivation for livelihood thus the unproductive area changed into productive land

The migration of refugee from East Pakistan adversely affected the political field of Barak Valley.As a result of Sylhet referendum, maximum portion of Sylhet district went to Pakistan which created a feeling of ego among the Assamese leaders

On this background in 1948 a proposal was sent to the central govt to form a new state by annexing Cachar with Tripura and Manipur. It is called “PropasaL of Purbachal” In 1958 again this proposal was sent to the state Reformation Commissioner whose chairman was Sayyed Fazal Ali and

members were K.M.Panikar and Pandit Hriday Nath Kunjaru. But the leaders of Cachar Kalyan Samity protested against this proposal. However this proposal could not get public support.

The partition of Sylhet was gladly accepted by the Assamese leaders . Rather they were ready to hand over Sylhet to Pakistan because this Bengali speaking district was a burden and a cause of fear for them. Prior to the referendum the Assam Provincial Congress Committee declared that the province of Assam should be organised on the basis of Assamese language and culture otherwise the survival of the Assamese nationality will be on danger. According to Sujit Choudhury “The partition of the country , for the Assamese leaders was perceived not as a tragic development but as a ‘God sent’ opportunity to carve out a linguistically homogenous province.”<sup>5</sup> Another cause was to save Assam from the Muslim immigrants. It was a fear that , if the Muslim immigration continued then the Assamese Hindu will become minority in this province. But the joy of Assamese leaders was short lived because thousands of Hindus crossed the border of East Pakistan and took shelter in Assam

During the period of sixties a strong feeling of Assamese Nationalism was emerging rapidly and ultimately in 1960 Assamese language was declared as state language in the Assembly. The Bengali people of Cachar reacted strongly against this language Act and they formed Cachar District Ganasangram Parishad . A large number of Bengali refugee people joined the movement against the Act. Actually the immigration of Bengali people from East Pakistan increased the strength of Bengalees in cachar. In 1951 Bengali population in Cachar was 77%, in 1961 78.73% and in 1971 it was 77.76%.<sup>6</sup> The Refugees also vehemently protested the govt. policy and participated in the movement. This fact is clear from a memorandum submitted to Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, by the Assam Sahitya Sabha on July 1960 . In this memorandum it had been written “ a section of Bengali people mostly Refugee, started an agitation against the Assamese people and the Assamese language..... “ further “ on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1960 , the conference of the Bengali speaking people .... Was held at Silchar ..... some Refugee took the leading part.....”<sup>7</sup> . Under the leadership of Cachar District Ganasangram Parishad a strike was called on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1961. When the nonviolent language movement and strike was going on in Silchar then the police fired upon this Satyagrahis’s in Silchar rail station. Eleven youths became martyr on that day for their mother tongue which stunted the entire country. Out of this eleven martyrs eight belonged to the refugee who migrated from East Pakistan. They were: Kamala Bhattacharjee, Hitesh Biswas, Chandicharan Sutradhar, Kumud Das, Satyendra Deb, Birendra Sutradhar, Sunil Sarkar and Tarani Debnath.<sup>8</sup> But their sacrifice bore fruits, ultimately the Assam Government was bound to declare Bengali language as official language in Cachar.

The refugees contributed a lot in various political affairs of the valley as well as the country. Many leaders from these refugees were elected as MP or MLA and as members of other local bodies.

To sum up , the influx of large number of East Pakistani Hindu refugees in Barak Valley increased the number of Hindu population in this Valley. Secondly, immigration from East Bengal contributed to the growth of Bengali population in Cachar . Migration of Dimasas , Manipuris , Tea garden labourers, Marwaris etc., in this valley from time to time, changed the demographic pattern but the migration of Bengalees from Sylhet and adjoining areas in Assam specially in Cachar transformed the demographic pattern and the Bengalee people became majority in this valley . Thirdly the immigration of large scale Bengalees in Cachar was the cause of tension of a section of Assamese leaders and ultimately a strong feeling of Assamese nationalism was growing rapidly which resulted the declaration of Language Act in 1960 and it led to the language movement in Barak valley and eleven persons sacrificed their life out of whom eight were partition displaced.

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