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INFLUX OF REFUGEES IN BARAK VALLEY

Leena Chakrabarty¹
&
Dr. Habibullah Mazumder

Abstract

The People who bound to migrate from one state to another and sought economic and political help can be called refugee. The problem of infiltration of refugee in India started mainly after the partition of India in 1947. A number of communal riots broke out in erstwhile East Pakistan, after the partition, on communal line between the period of 1947 to 1971 and a large number of Hindus and Muslims also who were not secured in East Pakistan crossed the Indo-Pak border and came in India. As the Barak valley is an adjacent area number of migrants entered in this valley in different stages and it became a continuous process. This article endeavoured to reveal the influx of refugees in various stages and number of refugees who settled here, on the basis of available data.

Refugee, the term cannot be defined in a single line. It is a political term. The people, who bound to migrate from one state to another and sought economic and political help can be called refugee. In the UNO convention in 1951 a classical definition of the Refugee had been given. The convention was later extended by the 1967 Protocol. It defined refugee as: "any person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the country, or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his formal habitual residence, is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return it." A refugee is legally entitled to the basic human rights like right to life and liberty, equality, sustenance, work, healthcare, primary education etc. ¹ The people who

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migrated in India before August 15, 1947 were called migrants.' The people who took refuge in India after partition following the Communal riot and those among them registered themselves seeking relief and rehabilitation were called as refugees.

India got independence on 15th August 1947 but at the cost of partition of the country. According to Mountbatten plan, announced on 3rd June, 1947 India should be free but would be partitioned. The Muslim dominated areas may be separated from India to form a new independent state and it would be constituted by partition of Bengal and Punjab. A referendum of North Western Frontier provinces and Sylhet would be held to decide whether it should join Pakistan or to remain in India. The partition of Punjab and Bengal was affected by Redcliff Commission, The Sylhet referendum was held on 6th and 7th July 1947. 56.6% voter was in favour of Pakistan and 43.4% voter wanted to remain in India. As per the decision of the people, Sylhet, a Bengali dominated district of Assam became a part of East Pakistan except three thanas of Patharkandi, Ratabari, Badarpur and a part of Karimganj went to East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). The partition of Sylhet was gladly accepted by the Assamese leaders because this Bengali speaking district was a burden and a cause of fear for them. But the joy of Assamese leaders was short lived because thousands of Hindus crossed the border of East Pakistan and took shelter in Assam, West Bengal, and Tripura. Before 1950 about eleven lakhs Hindu family left East Bengal not for life risk but for self respect. Immediately after the partition of India Jinnah in his first speech to the constituent assembly declared that in Pakistan there would be equal status of both the communities and they would enjoy same rights. But after the death of Jinnah a section of leadership provoked communal riots in entire East Bengal in 1950 where the Hindus were minority.²

During this time of tension, turmoil and lawlessness, in 1950, a series of communal riot broke out in Noakhali, a district of erstwhile East Pakistan. In this communal riot thousands of people lost their lives. This communal riot spread all over the country like a wild fire. Many women lost their chastity in the hands of the terrorists. Bloodshed, rape, loot, burning of houses of the Hindus were going in full swing. In this circumstances the Hindus were bound to leave their ancestral home and started to migrate in India.

In 1951 in Cachar 1,30,000 people were immigrants from Pakistan out of them 93,000 were refugees. All these people were victims of communal riot.³

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	19,732
Patherkandi-Ratbari	17,897
Kathigora, Borkhola and Udarbond	11,745
Rural silchar	8,251

Hailakandi-Katlicherra	6,625
Lakhipur-Sonai-	6,072 ⁴

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 will show 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 Gazetter)

Number of peoples in 1951 was 93177 and in 1958 it was 240823.⁵

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.⁶

Not only the Hindus a large number of Muslims who were not supporters of partitions also migrated to India out of fear. When this bloody communal riot was going on, at this situation 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 were returned home after this pact.

The infiltration of refugees in cachar started in different stages. The first wave came after the Noakhali took place after the partition of India in 1947. When the Sylhet referendum was held in July 1947 initially the Hindu people of newborn East Pakistan specially of sylhet were not in favour of leaving their mother land. Because there was assimilation and communal harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims. But gradually the situation became worse. Many Hindu inhabitants of East Pakistan left the country with empty handed to save their life and prestige. The third stage of migration happened when communal riots broke out in the month of February and March in 1950. More or less this influx of refugees became a continuous process. Some people were the victims of the communal riot who faced harassment, lost their property and even family members also, crossed the border and took refuge in India. Many others migrated out of fear and a part of these immigrants shifted in India who had their relatives in this country. The fourth major wave came in India in 1970-71 during the period of emergence of Bangladesh.

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 and riots began in various parts of Assam in 1950. As a result 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.⁷ From a report it has been estimated that about 25,000 people of both the communities came to India every year from East Pakistan since 1951.⁸ Though after the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 many of them returned home but a number of migrated people remained in India and became Indian. Day by day the refugee problem became very critical and it was a huge burden on India. West Bengal and North Western States were very much effected by the burden of the refugees. The Govt of India ordered that the refugees who would cross the Indo-Pak border after 1.11.64 had to take permission of the High Commissioner, Deputy High Commissioner or Assistant High commissioner at Dacca otherwise the India govt would not take any responsibility of these displaced person. But the flow of refugees was as well though central govt took the responsibility stopped rehabilitation. In Cachar central govt took responsibility of the relief and rehabilitation of the the refugees since 1st may 1951. 22764 applications for rehabilitaton loan were eligible out of 30178 applications.⁹ Refugee camps were established for temporary accommodation of the displaced persons, Weekly Rs 30 were allotted for one man family and for every extra member Rs 5 were increased.

However the infiltration of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan to Cachar created many problems. The influx of refugees initially created pressure on the economy of the state. Besides it 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 roaming 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, Baghbhar, Lowerbond, Irongmara, Katlicherra 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 and geography of these areas changed totally. They started cultivation also and thus the unproductive area changed into productive land and thus it helped in the economic progress. Not only economically, socio-culturally and educationally also the area became advanced by the efforts of the refugees. Many schools and colleges were established with the cooperation of the refugee people. Thus the refugees had a great contribution towards the development of this valley.

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