

Policy Perspectives

Migration as a Security Dilemma: A Case Study on Bangladeshi Illegal Migration to Assam

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Abstract

Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety, and a better future. Non-traditional security concepts include migration as a threat. Here we have done a case study for a broad understanding of migration as a security threat for the nation. It analyses how globalization encouraged people to move from one country to another. Focused on contemporary global phenomena, security is the main component for a sovereign state, and illegal migration negatively affects the countries' socioeconomic security. It analyses the triangular relationship between globalization, security, and migration. To understand the security crises in the contemporary world, a case study has been made on illegal Bangladeshi migrants to Assam which is a part of South Asia. This study shows how migration negatively impacts both sides. The causes of Bangladeshi migrations are found due to poverty and religious violence in Bangladesh. As a result, the population in Assam has doubled within a few years. Therefore indigenous people suffer from deprivation from the various opportunities within their birth land; hence they started agitation against Bangladeshi migrants. To solve these issues migration diplomacy needs to be implemented in this concern.

Keywords: Globalization, Security, Migration, Assam, Bangladesh, Neoliberal, Diplomacy

1. Introduction

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another. In the international sense, migration refers to the movement where people move from their mother country to another country across the border. This process has created long and lasting effects that have been sustained since the existence of humanity. Generally, it seems like a simple concept, but this process is not simple.

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Migration is a core concept of security in contemporary times. It has long-lasting effects, specifically on the state; and regions' individual, societal, and international security, and hence, its relationship with security is quite close. Traditional security was related to military security that provides the security of territory and sovereignty of the state. But, after the post-Cold War, the world began to think about different ways of security that can be said as 'non-traditional' security which includes economic security, human security, regional security, food security, and so on. Migration emerged as a big threat to international security post-Cold War. Another Significant concept of non-traditional security is human security, which is closely related to the migration problem in contemporary areas. According to Amitav Acharya, the Western security concept is different from the East, specifically mentioned in the Asian context. Western idea of security focuses highly on 'rights and liberalism', at the same time, Eastern security focuses on 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' (Acharya, 2001).

In 1994, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) listed components of human security, which include economic security, food security, environment security, personal security, community security, political security, and health security. The most obvious threat to security is migration which is closely related to these components of security listed by the UNDP. Now, in this essay I'm going to discuss broadly this migration problem as a security threat in international relations in the contemporary world with a special case study, that is, the Bangladeshi immigrants to Assam, a state situated in the northeastern region of the world's largest democratic country, India, located in South Asia. In contemporary times, the idea of security is highly needed to discuss how globalization, security, and migration are interlinked with each other.

2. Globalization, Migration and Security

Globalization has serious impacts on migration and security. The neo-liberal current world is far from equal, which is now the main motto of the global world. It makes some countries, specifically of the Global North, richer, and at the same time, it makes some countries, especially of the Global South, poorer, which is a result of exploitation by Western countries.

Due to Globalization, problems like unemployment and underemployment, environmental degradation, community and identity security threats, civil war, internal threats within a country's territory, and international terrorism began to increase daily. All these threats created an atmosphere of insecurity, which led us to think about state security.

People suffering from individual insecurity and economic crises, and who think that their ultimate authority is unable to provide security, go on to search for protection with a hope for a better future. Globalization set an easy way in motion, population movement. Hence, crossing the border illegally is a threat to the state and human security. The presence of illegal migrants poses an obvious threat to the

nation and the native population in a country like India, which has already been recognised as the world's second-highest populous country.

Security concern whether it is internal or external is controlled by the authority of a territory or state. They are responsible for the smooth functioning of the state. Thus, any kind of threat to the security of the nation directly comes under their purview. The issue of migration is a threat to a sovereign state because international law says "state is the absolute authority over its territory including border; hence migration is state threat for a sovereign state". We can examine therefore a strong inter-connection between migration and security.

Neo-liberal economic policy badly impacts the global south, giving it less opportunity to develop smartly and quickly. Without ignoring the structure and history, the global south started to adopt a neo-liberal economic policy as a universal concept, which is a live example of Bangladeshi migrations to its neighboring country, India.

3. Migration and India

From the human perspective view, people do migrate for expecting a better security; no one wants to live in terrible conditions. Although there are several causes for migration, all the migrants can't be considered under the same category. Sometimes people are forced to flee to escape violence, conflict or persecution and they cross the international border illegally to find safety in another country. Generally, the state doesn't want to take responsibility for these refugees, but the case of political asylum seeker, who seeks protection threatened by the authority itself, is quite different.

In the case of political asylum seeker Dalai Lama, India has widespread sympathy because of cultural affinities with Buddhist Tibet. But, the highest threat for India is illegal immigration, entry by crossing the international border, which violates the immigration law. They continue to live within the territory without any legal rights. They become the user of the resources and the opportunities, without having any legal rights and duties. National security has been threatened in recent years by terrorist attacks, one of the biggest threats of the era. The Mumbai attacks in 2008 is the ultimate live example in the context of India, it was attacked by members of Lahkar-e-taiba, a terrorist organization from Pakistan.

The migrations to India have been flowing from the ancient era to the 21st century. But the modern era's migration issues become gradually very complex. Particularly, since 1947 it become an international security threat. Especially migrants flowing from its neighboring countries.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nation refugee Agency published that as of 31st of January in 2022, more than 46,000 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with UNHCR India, it is mainly from Afghanistan and Myanmar (UNHCR 2022).

However, Bangladeshi illegal migrants highly affected the North East area of it. In this paper, we are going to discuss the migration issue specifically in the

context of Bangladeshi migrants to Assam, a northeastern state of India that is located in south Asia through the lens of contemporary impacts on it which is an unending long-term security threat for the Assam as well as India.

South Asia faced the challenge of migration issues when it experienced partition twice, one in 1947 when the united India was divided by drawing an international border and created two dominions India and Pakistan and another in 1971, when Bangladesh was created as a sovereign country from Pakistan. The world's largest democratic country, India, has shared a 4,096-kilometre-long international border with Bangladesh, among this Assam solely shares 856 km (Wikipedia 2022).

However, India is the largest migrant host nation in Asia with an estimated 6.1 million migrants and the Bangladesh-India migration corridor is the fourth largest among the migration corridors in the world. Most of them come across the border. From the late 19th century to after the Independence of Bangladesh, Bangladeshi migrants come to India illegally to seek refuge from the genocide, widespread rape, economic security, environmental security, personal security and specifically for seeking human security.

Sharing the international border with Bangladesh, Assam is the most affected state in India. The migration took part in a particular phase in other parts of India, but in Assam, influx migration has continued till today, and as a democratic country India thus faces big challenges in the security dilemma in two senses, one is an external security threat and another is the internal threat within it, like the movement against Bangladeshi by its citizen, for example, Assam Agitation movement in 1986 led by Assamese people due to feeling of insecurity of economic, identity, community and cultural land and so on. This led to high political instability in this region.

However, the history of Bangladeshi migration to Assam has its own distinct story to tell, since the 19th century specifically between 1911 and 1931, more than a million Bengalis migrated to Assam and by 1951 more than a half million Bengalis migrated to Assam. After the Bangladesh independence war, more than 10 million refugees arrived in it. Although Bangladesh adopted a secular character, lots of Hindus suffer in Individual security due to religion, according to Piyali Dutta for this reason we see out of 10 million Bangladeshi, 80% were Bengali Hindus (Dutta 2022).

But the poorest thing is although in 1989 Bangladesh declared itself a Muslim Country, Muslim migrants who yet till 2022 haven't stopped themselves to leave their motherland, and their reason for migrating to Assam is economic insecurity. Due to underemployment and unemployment, they came illegally by crossing international borders and provided cheap labor to earn their livelihood, this section can be examined as labor class. To discuss elaborately this, it is highly needed to focus on Bangladesh's security context in international relations.

4. Structure of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, geographically a small deltaic country, located in south Asia, is the 9th populist country of the World. Post-independence Bangladesh adopted socialism; its current characteristic is the neo-liberal market economy.

Although its current economy is stable, it maintain between 5-6 percent gross domestic product growth for the last two years, it is not viable enough to create an effective platform to occupy all skilled, semi-skilled, and non-skilled in the country. Bangladesh ranks 140 among nations on the Human Development Index as presented in 2016 (Human Development Index, 2016). The country struggles to escape from poverty, by 2022, 20% of people suffer from food insecurity. In 2014, the World Bank identified Bangladesh as a low-middle-income country. The World Factbook of CIA shows that the total dependency ratio in Bangladesh is 52.6%, whereas the youth dependency ratio is 44.9%. As a result, Bangladesh faces formidable challenges in providing adequate job facilities for its job-seeking citizens. Therefore, people are trying to go abroad for economic security and a better future.

During the Bangladesh independence war, almost 10 million people came to India, specifically in Assam to escape the widespread rape, brutal violence and genocide action being carried out by the West Pakistan (Now Pakistan) armed forces. Women and children were the most affected category during this time. Women were unable to escape rape culture neither in their motherland nor in India. But the noticeable thing is the Hindu Bangladeshi came as refugees as a result of persecution and also economic need and the Muslim Bangladeshi came specifically by economic need.

Being a country rich in water resources, with a number of rivers flowing throughout, environmental or climate change factor plays a significant role in the movement of Bangladeshi people to settle. Natural hazards in Bangladesh are floods and cyclones, floods, earthquakes, riverbank erosion, sedimentation, environmental pollution etc are common problems. Bangladeshi people are also suffering from food security crises. Fifth million people in Bangladesh still live in extreme poverty and 40% of children lack the nutrition they need for healthy lives (Sarma, 2015).

The insecurity threat specifically, economic, human security and environmental changes have significant relevance in the context of illegal migration from Bangladesh to India. Individual security suffered when people lost their faith in their authority, which wasn't able to provide sufficient security for a better living standard. The Bangladeshi people suffer from these life-threatening security crises even after a long time of independence from their motherland. Since the partition of India in 1947, merely on religious lines, this problem is still occurring today. As a Muslim dominating country, Hindu Bengalis sometimes face torture from Muslim fundamentalism.

Since 2022 the anti-Hindu violence has been going strong, due to India being ruled by the Hindutva regime. This anti-Hindu violence is going on even today. Being less strict border security in India, and suffering from extreme human security, Bangladeshi people choose to migrate to the neighboring state of Assam. From a

humanitarian perspective, that is why maybe UN Secretary Koffi Annan once argued that “The refugee cannot be stopped and must be managed better, more humanely, protecting migrant’s human rights whilst accepting states right to control their borders”.

5. Migration: A threat to security in Assam

Barry Buzan, founder of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies argued that “security studies should not only focus on the military security sectors, but should be further developed to encompass societal, environment, economic and political security”. In the case of migration, societal security threat refers to challenges to a state’s traditional national identity and its core values. The inability of immigrants to integrate or assimilate is argued to have a negative effect on the society and government’s stability.

This exactly happened in the case of Assam, a northeastern socio-economic-cultural development state in India. The region of Assam is surrounded by Bangladesh to the South and West, Myanmar to its East, China and Bhutan to the North and only 20km of land connects it to the rest of India (Naik 2016). Thus, its unique location makes the situation more and more challenging by itself. Assam’s demography consisted of Assamese-speaking Hindus and Muslims and a range of colorful Indigenous groups, which viewed both the Muslim and Hindu immigrants with suspicion (Sarma 2015).

Both the Hindu and Bengali in large scale migrated to Assam in the early 19th Century and they continue to do so even today. This illegal Bangladeshi migration becomes a serious security threat for Assamese Indigenous people who have been suffering from land scarcity, unemployment, population crises, environment degradation, identity crises and so on. The highest threat for Assamese indigenous people is language imbalance and community insecurity.

A large scale of Bengali population day by day within this Indigenous area, among Indigenous people a threat has begun to grow of language insecurity as well as cultural insecurity with identity insecurity, that means, growing feelings of fear of becoming minor language and identity within their birth land. Besides, Bangladeshi migrants are unwilling to assimilate with the Assamese culture as they have also their own culture.

Gradually, they tried to establish a Bengali-dominating culture as they had sufficient population support, which wasn’t acceptable to the original Indigenous people of this area and also they started to demand all the rights and opportunities from the Indian government.

But the problem is, being a developing country with limited resources, besides a huge population; India isn’t in a condition to carry on such overload, irrationally where even 6 % of people live below the poverty line.

Hence, due to the large growth of the continuously growing population, Indigenous people are gradually deprived of their deserving rights and opportunities that are given by their country itself. Most of the immigrant people are settled down in forest land and they are chosen for manual labour and cultivation. But the dangerous thing is as they use chemical things to produce more and more that they

can earn a good income easily. This is a very threat to environmental security as well as health security. However, by cutting down the trees and clearing land for settling down within it, immigrants have created a serious threat to the biodiversity of Assam. However, as illegal migration, the income isn't included in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in India, and some Bangladeshi migrants go back to their motherland after earning their livelihood on this side.

Crossing the border with Indian currency to a foreign country is a big loss for the Indian economy. However, various insurgency groups of the northeast get the opportunity to take shelter in Bangladesh by crossing the international border. Similarly, terrorist groups from Bangladesh enter easily by crossing the international border. Both are the most obvious threats to the national security of India.

6. Government Response

As a result, India faces several internal and external security threats; several agitations led to political as well as socio-economic instability within it. One remarkable agitation in the history of Assam is the Assam agitation, whose main parts were led by the young modern educated Assamese students. Assamese indigenous people started the agitation against the illegal migration, and their demand to the Indian federal government was to stop illegal migration from Bangladesh. As a response Indian government signed the Assam Accord by promising to give special protection and security in societal, economic, cultural and regional security to the indigenous people of Assam, but due to corrupted political culture it is unable to see any practical implications in this case. Sometimes politicians use this illegal immigration as a vote bank by giving voter cards and ration cards.

Every election in this region comes with promising security issues, but nobody wants to find a permanent solution for this security threat. Prominent writer Professor Sanjiv Baruah called it once as “unfinished business” of partition. (Baruah 2020). From this view, it seems that there is a huge number of illegal migrants, whose voting support does matter for politicians, it is very poor in such a democratic country, which is itself suffering a national security threat.

In the early times, several policies were introduced to protect security for Assam citizens as well as India's national security. These are the prevention of infiltration from the Pakistan Act of 1964, the Illegal Migration Act of 1983, the Assam Accord of 1985, the issue of national identity cards, etc. Regarding human security, a very interesting step was taken by the current BJP ruling government, whose ideological motto is making a Hindu country.

This government proposed the Citizenship Amendment Bill in 2014, and it became an act in 2019 (CAA 2019) where it proposes to shelter persecuted religious minorities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It seeks to put Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jains, Parsis and Christians from this country that came to India on 31 December 2014, even if they entered illegally (Baruah 2020). But this protection excludes Muslims. But at the same time, it also violates the Assam accord which promised to protect the indigenous people.

Although this act was highly criticized in the rest of India for excluding Muslims, because under the umbrella of the Indian Constitution, secularism gives equal respect and value to Muslims also, the perspective of Assam including the entire North-East is not the same case. These people have been suffering from a security crisis for a long time from Bangladeshi migrants, which still reminds us of the unending and unsolved issues. The government's other response to the Indigenous people of Assam is the National Register for Citizens in Assam, whose purpose was to select Indigenous people. However, in terms of practical implications, it always faces challenges and various political issues. However, the implementation of CAA has already violated the NRC in Assam. Therefore, we are unable to search for a positive step that is taken by the government for Indigenous people. But it is seen by 2021, 3141 kilometers of the border was fencing out of 4096.7 kiloliters of the international border between India and Bangladesh.

7. Analysis

For globalization, the countries sometimes get relatively more equal levels and sometimes it is seen as far from equal. Some social scientists argue due to globalization, the global north has become more developed, and the global south is not in the position that it deserves. According to A G Frank, the global south is less developed not for lack of capital but because of the global north itself, which dominated the global south by importing resources. Neo-liberal economic policy in developing countries didn't much help for fast development, because without solving fundamental problems, capitalism doesn't suit developing countries.

However, due to industrialization, people in developing countries face more poverty issues. Existing poverty led human insecurity in a country, which is the main cause for leading other types of insecurity in a country. Bangladesh and India both have significant relevance in world politics, so the stabilization of socio-economic conditions in both these countries is most important. Therefore, it is highly needed to solve this issue and strengthen their security in international relations.

Bangladesh is India's one of the largest business partners, today the relationship between the two nations crosses above 50 years. Bangladesh's foreign policy is defensive because of its lower capabilities of being a non-nuclear state. Bangladesh's Security is primarily driven by its relationship with countries within the South Asia region (Foreign Policy of Bangladesh 2021). The foreign policy of Bangladesh highly is affected negatively by the population and economic problems. So, it is high time to focus on more human security by the Bangladesh government.

India and Bangladesh have maintained good relations for a long time, regarding national security both countries have various defense cooperation, cooperation over rivers, economic relations, cooperation power sector and so on. Both countries need to focus more on other activities such as investments, security connectivity development, cultural economy, environment, disaster management and so on, these all may be a positive way for human security, economic security, cultural security and finally it all would be led to the final goal, that is "national security".

Conclusion

Philippe Bourbeau explained security as a multidisciplinary dialogue, for example, the concept of security deals with personal threats to domestic violence and the political security of national to international security. Security can be different from different perspectives such as From an anthropology perspective security can be different from the perspective of geography. This paper has focused on the political concept of security in international relations.

It analyzed broadly the concept of security, from the perspective of Western as well as non-eastern, and the perspective of traditional to non-traditional security concepts. Security here is taken as a specific part that is migration. Migration has a close tie with security. This perspective is elaborated with a specific case study on Bangladeshi Migration to Assam, a north-eastern state of India. Through this case study we got a positive as well as negative effect due to migration. Migration issues are not an end issue, but they become a serious issue when its close relationship ties with security in a sovereign country.

In the case of Bangladeshi illegal migration to Assam, we see a pathetic scene for both the country. For the permanent solution to this, it must be established a close cooperation between both of the nations. Both the country should adopt the Migration diplomacy process, it is a multifaceted process, where it components two ways one, in terms of action involved and another in the strategies employed. In the article “Migration Diplomacy in World Politics”, Adamson and Tsourapas explained that migration diplomacy involved linkages with other areas of state interest, including national and domestic security concerns, economic interests and interest and interests in promoting public diplomacy or other to reach forms of enhancing a state’s soft power, in terms of strategies, migration diplomacy can be approached as a zero-sum game by pursuing relatives gains or as a positive sum game in order reach mutually beneficial outcomes. (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019).

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