

Chakma Refugees and India-Bangladesh Relations

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India's Far East comprises an area of 255,000 square kilometers. Its demographically larger neighbour, Bangladesh on account environmentally-induced displacement and involuntary economic migration has been the source of several million immigrants. Two streams of migrants resulted: the Chakmas of the Chittagong Hills Tract, a tribal minority displaced by the Katpai dam and second, economic migrants stemming from a dense impoverished population from the plains of Bangladesh. Designated in India as refugees and illegal migrants respectively these migrants have often been viewed as a threat to local demographic equations. The problem of immigration from Bangladesh is a little over a century old. Only with India's independence and the changed political boundaries did the migration become 'illegal'.

The first wave of Muslims that came to Assam were those which came from north India during 13th century, they were followed by other Muslims from north India and Bengal who came in the wake of several 17th century Mughal invasions of Assam. In course of time these migrants assimilated themselves with the local culture and developed close societal relations with Assamese Hindusⁱ. These early streams of Muslims are identified as the Assamese Muslims and can be easily distinguished from the later Muslim migrants from the erstwhile East Bengalⁱⁱ that started in the last decades of the 19th century. This latter stream of migration continues till today and has been problematic for north east India. The migration problem began with large migrations from the predominantly Muslim districts of undivided Bengal into Assam for work opportunities in the rice fields and tea estates thereⁱⁱⁱ; gradually their movement grew so large that it becomes a type of undeclared invasion of the state.^{iv}

Immigration from East Bengal continued till 1947, the year of Independence of India and Pakistan. As long as East Bengal was a part of Pakistan the border was guarded by military and paramilitary organizations and it restricted considerably the rate of illegal immigration, once Bangladesh was formed the border was virtually thrown open and massive Bangladeshi infiltration took place to Assam and other north eastern states^v.

The plight of the indigenous and 'tribal' people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts has been and continues to remain the darkest episode in the national integration process of Bangladesh. The indigenous people of the Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT) are the only significant group of people of Bangladesh who are ethnically different from the majority community. Their number, in the context of 110 million people of Bangladesh, is relatively small indeed as less than 800,000.^{vi}

Possibly the first ever 'environmental refugees' generated by a man-made venture in South Asia was caused by the huge hydroelectric project in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, south-east of Bangladesh. The socio-economic condition of a large section of the hill people was affected by the construction of this hydro project.^{vii} The Kaptai Dam (popularly known) inundated 253 square miles, including 10 square miles of reserved forest. Nearly 54,000 acres of plough land that was about 40 per cent of the district's total cultivable area submerged under the biggest human-made reservoir named Kaptai Lake. Homesteads of 18,000 families and approximately 100,000 people were displaced from their hearths and homes of which 70 per cent were Chakmas.^{viii} In the aid-game of 'Green Revolution' to produce more food and Industrialisation, the Government of USA built a hydro project damming the Karnaphuli river criss-crossing from northeast India. Built in early 1960's, the Karnaphuli Multi-Purpose Project submerged 40 per cent of the rice bowl of the Hill Tracts and displaced one-sixth of the indigenous population. Thousands of hill people migrated into sparsely populated regions of Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and Arunachal. Perhaps 40,000 'environmental refugees' migrated to India (and another 20,000 migrated to Myanmar), where today, they live in the Arunachal Pradesh state of northeast India. They are without citizenship rights in either state of India or Bangladesh.^{ix}

The arrival of refugees in India has affected the dynamics of nation-building and perceptions of national and regional security. Now question arises – why such large number have been forced to migrate, legally or extra-legally and the process by which their presence has affected India's security and foreign relations. The dynamics by which the host nation adjusts to, and accommodates the presence of a large number of refugees is another matter of serious concern. The changes in India's response to the arrival of forced migrants will also have to be examined. The external dimension of the refugee problem vis-a-vis the impact it is going to have on relations between the host country and the refugee creating country also need evaluation. To also proposes to examine security in all its diverse dimensions: political, economic and social, as they affect India-Bangladesh relations, also pertinent issue to be interrogated.

The withdrawal of British colonial rule resulted in the carving up of imperial India into two nation-states. This inaugurated one of the strangest political experiments in history, the creation of a two-nation state, that is Pakistan with a majority of Bengali population located in the Eastern wing, known as East Bengal and subsequently East Pakistan and the predominantly Punjabi-Sindhi Western wing known as West Pakistan. The experiment petered out in 1971 with the creation of Bangladesh.

The primary source of refugees migration into India can be fixed from the year 1947 from the Eastern wing of Pakistan now Bangladesh. Estimates differ as to the exact number of people who have shifted residence from across the East Pakistan (Bangladesh) border, but it is conservatively estimated at over 16 million. Most of these people have settled and merged with the local populations as citizens belonging to the state of West Bengal, from where officially six million refugees/migrants have gone to Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Meghalaya.

The refugees/illegal migrants arrived in India at different times, sometimes as a mass exodus, sometimes as a trickle, sometimes as an almost invisible shadow blending into the background and practically indistinguishable from the local population. The attitude of the Government of India in the early days after partition was clearly enunciated by

Nehru's vision who considered them, people, "especially those who are in danger, should for the present be allowed to come away anyhow and that the door should be kept open for them to travel from one part of Bengal to the other."^x The fear which prompted the people to flee erstwhile East Bengal/East Pakistan was well recognised by the political establishment. In this context Nehru made it explicit that, "so far as the Hindu population of East Bengal is concernedthat entire population is full of fear and apprehension about the future and given the opportunity, would like to come away."^{xi} Assessing the impact of the open door policy, Barun De has summed up the reaction admirably:

As far as Bengal was concerned, the news of this transfer of power came with a severe shock. Apart from the ravages caused by the colonial rule in general and recent disasters such as famine and communal riots in particular, West Bengal faced, immediately after Independence, the stupendous problem of a steady flow of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan ... Their accommodation, resettlement and relief put great strains on an already crisis-ridden economy.^{xii}

What was true of West Bengal was almost equally true of Assam and the North East, joined to India by a slender corridor and an unprotected border that allowed tens of thousands of people, call them refugees or illegal migrants, to pour into the sparsely inhabited lands of Assam's Barak Valley, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. While the movement of Hindus out of erstwhile East Bengal/ East Pakistan/ Bangladesh can be explained in terms of ethnic tensions between a minority community and a majority Muslim population, the forced migration of tens of thousands of Muslims to parts of Assam, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura require a different set of explanations.

Among the forced migrants, the position of tribal from Hill Tracts of Chittagong, is of a peculiar matter. They are permanent victims of insecurity, both as a small ethnic, linguistic, cultural minority in Bangladesh and before that in East Bengal/ East Pakistan.

Their insecurity is both ethnic and environmental. The tribals of the Hill Tracts of Chittagong are not a single homogeneous group, but are split into Chakmas, Mnrmas and Tripuris, who have been clubbed together as Chakmas in all official and non-official documents for the sake of convenience. Here, also this accepted description of the multiplicity of tribal groups from the Chittagong Hill Tracts as Chakmas have been accepted to avoid an unwieldy string of names.

While the world has been noisily made aware of the problems of Chakma refugees living for over a decade in the refugee camps of South Tripura, their numbers swelling to as much as 85,000 at times and ebbing to 25,000 at others, serving as a cause to be espoused by human rights organisations and the Indian political establishment, the tragedy of another group of Chakmas who came over much earlier and have remained as non-citizens for over thirty years in India's North Eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, has been virtually forgotten.^{xiii}

Some 45,000 Chakmas fled across the international border into India in 1963, pushed out by the pressures of a modernising East Pakistan, victims of the Kaptai Hydro-Electric project that inundated their homeland. Over the last thirty years, the first large group of officially recognised Chakma refugees have multiplied and grown. The present estimate of these Chakma refugees is that over 80,000 of them are jostling for space and identity in Arunachal Pradesh, under increasingly hostile and violent pressure from locals, belatedly resentful of their presence.^{xiv}

As permanent losers in the battle against centralising political authority in Bangladesh, groups of Chakmas have sought refuge in India. Their presence in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Mizoram reveals the security dilemma of nations in the making, coping with the internal dynamics of identity formation in pluralist societies and the external problem of regional security.

As nation-states still in the making, India and Bangladesh are trapped in the throes of coping with the political upheavals of emergent nationalism within the bubbling cauldron of national

identity, other sub-national and sub-regional identities have begun to emerge, vying with one another for recognition and space, defining and redefining themselves by constant comparison to the 'alienness' of an 'other' group.

The external dynamics of regional security are relatively straightforward compared to the volatile and complex nature of the internal dimensions of the security problem, In term of regional security, the state is recognised as the most representative institution through which the nation as a whole tries to protect, preserve, uphold itself from damage, destruction, dismemberment by an external enemy, serving the twin objectives of securing national interest and regional as well as international esteem.^{xv}

The issue of security assumes that the nation-state is in danger and it involves the two opposing ideas of war and peace in which national security is posed as a problem arising out of the state's desire to maintain order and peace externally and internally in the face of a threat or threats to its institutions. Discussions on internal security assume that there are groups within the nation-state which are at war, declared or undeclared, with the established political authority. Internal security is usually defined in terms of the state functioning as a rational actor pursuing certain pre-determined goals, about which there is an underlying consensus, operating through certain well recognised structures, like the law and order machinery, the para military forces and in extreme circumstances, the army,

Instead of keeping the issues of cross-border ethnic traffic, regional and internal security in South Asia separate, there has been an almost obsessive tendency towards converging these issues and compounding the problem. In some measures the convergence of issues is deliberate since it provides endless opportunity to the national political elites to manipulate and mobilise the masses by rousing xenophobic sentiments.^{xvi}

The use of the description 'refugee' or 'migrant' interchangeably in the chapter is deliberate, even though it appears clumsy, if not confusing. The confusion stems from the perception in India that refugees are different from illegal migrants, the one being recognised and the other largely indistinguishable as separate from the indigenous population. To describe all cross-border ethnic traffic from Bangladesh or earlier East Pakistan as refugees would affect the analysis of the distinctively different impact that these groups have had on the Indian environment and the security perceptions of India's ruling elite.

It is significant that the descriptions used by national authorities of refugee/infiltrator/migrant that stream across the border from Bangladesh has changed, even though there is no fundamental difference in the reasons why people move from one country to another. They move across the international divide from an area of relative deprivation to an area of lesser deprivation, Deprivation in this context is an omnibus term that encompasses issues as divergent as physical security, cultural security, economic security and sometimes political security.

The process of identifying the boundaries of community in the varying contexts of struggle in the eastern states of India was a slow one, though the conditions for it had been created in the immediate post-partition period.^{xvii} With an innocence born out of a supreme disregard for the sensitivities of local, unorganised and inarticulate indigenous populations, the Government of India had allowed large numbers of people to move from erstwhile East Bengal/East Pakistan now Bangladesh into the adjacent areas of the North-Eastern states. Some of them were recognised as *bona fide* refugee groups like the Chakmas who were handed over documents giving them rights to land but not citizenship and allowed to settle in colonies in Arunachal Pradesh, while the far more numerous illegal migrants occupied large tracts of virtually uninhabited territory, acquiring citizenship status through a process of deliberate accommodation by the ruling elite anxious to co-opt ever larger numbers as committed supporters in order to improve their electoral prospects.

The varying contexts of struggle were visible in Assam during the *Bengal Kheda* movement in the 1950s which gathered momentum in the next decade only to transform itself into a militant 'Sons of the Soil' agitation which acquired legitimacy, culminating in the intense turbulence of the All Assam Students Union between 1979 and 1985.^{xviii} Since then, the Assam valley has been rocked by successive waves of ethnic conflict, affecting internal security and destabilising the political environment. The AASU was followed by the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) insurgency movement that splintered into the Bodo agitation. The Bodo agitation began in the early 1990s against Assamese linguistic chauvinism and turned into a violent struggle in the Barak Valley. The Indian army was involved in two major operations namely: Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino in 1990-91 to try and break the back of ULF A movement.^{xix}

The distinction drawn between legitimate 'refugees' of the Immediate post-independence period and the migrants whose legitimacy as Indian citizens has been questioned during the intensification of atavist movements, turning tile issue into the most divisive political upheaval in recent times, is the fallout of the systematic rejection by emerging elites of the earlier spirit of accommodation.

Ethnopolitics as a consequence of growing ethnic chauvinism was the response of emerging elite to the presence of numerically large groups of 'outsiders' or aliens who had illegitimately and, in connivance with the established elites occupied lands, jobs and position of power, to the disadvantage of the indigenous population. Language became a symbol of identity differentiation in the Assam movement, because it was one way of excluding the 'foreigners'.

The older political parties, especially the Congress, was identified as being pro-migrant/refugee, since the inflow of people from across the border was in direct response to the policies pursued by that party at the national level. Since the Congress was illogically opposed to the fragmentation of states on linguistic and ethnic basis, its

response to the assertiveness of sub-nationalisms was a rejection of the sentiments that gave rise to it. The perception of the Congress ruling elite created the problem of internal security in which refugees/migrants became a threat to the integrity and stability of the nation. The response of the ruling elite to demands of ethnic groups for a share of power is a classic instance of a dominant political organisation, which had arrogated to itself the role of embodying the spirit of the nation and believed that its goals were identical to the state.

The new political groups necessarily presented their appeal to their constituents among the masses in exaggerated terms in contrast to the far more conservative style of the dominant political party, which constantly harped on the heterogeneous but essentially unified character of the Indian state, stressing the theme of unity in diversity. As emerging elites, refugees/migrants, that is, the alien enemies within the borders were an easy target and a symbol against which to vent pent up frustrations. Other than the Indian state of West Bengal, where the Congress is not perceived as being strongly pro-refugee or migrant, elsewhere in the North-East, the party is, closely identified with the progress by which refugees and migrants were settled on the lands which are today claimed by ethnic political groups like the Asom Gana Parishad and the Bodo Liberation Force. These refugees were the 45,000 Chakmas who, as noted earlier, came across the border around 1963, pushed out by the pressures of a modernising East Pakistan, especially the Kaptai Hydro-Electric project that inundated Chakma homelands.

Urmila Phadnis has pointed out that "after the withdrawal of the British in 1947, the people of Chittagong Hill district, due to their dominantly non-Muslim character, wished to opt for India, but the Radcliffe Award (the boundary commission headed by Radcliffe on the eve of transfer of power) allotted the district to Pakistan because of its geographical inaccessibility from India." The

Chakmas were perceived as "showing an intransigence toward the "" state in religio-cultural terms."^{xx}

The response of the Chakma political elite to the efforts of the erstwhile East Pakistan administration at settlement of ethnically Bengali populations on tribal lands was to set up tribal organisations like the Chittagong Hill Tracts Welfare Association (*Parbatta Chattagram jana Sanghati Samity*) which acquired a militant arm. This was later transformed into the underground Shanti Bahini, trained and armed "as pawns in the games played by two neighbouring countries."^{xxi} The assimilationist trend which the tribals felt was disruptive, resulted in the flight of Chakmas from their homeland to areas in neighbouring India, like the refugee settlements in Meghalaya, Mizorarn and Arunachal Pradesh. The later waves of Chakmas who left the Hill Tracts arrived in South Tripura and have remained there off and on since 1981.

The Chakmas are refugees from the processes of modernisation and economic development, complicated by the fact that in the perception of the Bangladesh ruling elite, the Shanti Bahini was "collaborators of the Pakistan army" and remain active underground.^{xxii} The demand for tribal autonomy has been interpreted by successive regimes in Bangladesh, as a secessionist movement, which is challenging the nation-state and trying to underline the sovereignty of the state.

The problem of land-hunger in Bangladesh's plains area as against the comparative availability of land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts resulted in the permanent settlement of ethnically different people on tribal lands, reducing the Chakmas in their homeland to a marginal and vulnerable majority. The tribal leadership has opposed the changes:

On the plea that these policies have been assimilations that processes of widening employment avenues have helped the non-tribal in enhancing their dominance in the district in socioeconomic terms, and finally, the expansion of communicational network has facilitated not the development of the tribal people but easy movement of the armed forces.^{xxiii}

As permanent losers in the battle against centralising political authority, groups of Chakmas have sought refuge in India. In the 1960s around 45,000 Chakmas were resettled

in former North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) by a formal government order^{xxiv} By natural increase, their numbers have grown to about 80,000, occupying larger and larger areas of lands. The rise of ethnic tensions in Arunachal Pradesh, where the Khasis and other indigenous tribal groups are demanding a share in political power, by raising nativist slogans has brought the Chakmas into conflict with the local people in another demonstration of the changing contexts of conflict. As Phadnis has concluded:

The thrust of ethnicity thus is the manifestation of the increasing politicisation of the people and, following from it mass politics striving to find avenues for a better life as well as cultural identity anchoring. The mobilisations of such urges are reflected in social movements with ethnic movements being one of the contenders for group protest and revolt in this respect.^{xxv}

The extent to which hostility has grown against the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh is evident from the representation made by the Arunachal Pradesh Students Union to the Union Government in New Delhi, demanding the ouster of these Chakmas from the lands on which they were settled. In 1965, Chakma refugees were given titles to land in the tribal areas of Arunachal Pradesh (then known as NEFA). Since then the Chakmas have remained in the area, without benefit of political rights, especially citizenship, but enjoying economic rights that automatically flow from the titles they hold to land and the fact that they are an intrinsic part of the local commerce, trade, agriculture and business. The original Chakmas may be unrecognised by the Census, but their progeny have a right to citizenship having been born in India.^{xxvi} The emergence of these Chakmas, Indians by birth, but refugees by parentage has upset the demographic, political and social balance in Arunachal Pradesh.^{xxvii} The same factors that forced the Chakmas to leave the Chittagong Hill Tracts are at play in Arunachal Pradesh. The local population is threatened by an increasing sense of being marginalised in their homeland by a culturally and ethnically different group. Modernisation is increasing the pressure on the indigenous population to assimilate itself into the political, social and economic life of the area, which is already occupied by the Chakmas. In a bid to protect themselves from being ousted, the Chakmas have built links, with militant organisations, causing the balance of forces to change and posing problems for internal security.

It is significant that the tribal Chief Minister of Tripura Dasarath Deb has opposed the Government of India's move to lift the inner line regulation system, which imposes restrictions on free movement and settlement of people within the area of the state. Rejecting the proposal, Deb said in Agartala that "the socio-economic identity of the most backward tribal areas had already been seriously threatened as a result of unchecked influx from Bangladesh and the then East Pakistan."^{xxviii} Equally interesting is the distinction now being made between the problems specific to the tribal areas of Tripura and the non-tribal areas, which are populated mostly by generations of migrants from former East Bengal/East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.^{xxix}

Nossiter, a Marxist scholar writing about communist regimes in India, holds that "latterly, however, the scale of demographic upheaval and the exhaustion of any remaining opportunities for agricultural expansion, have threatened the historic accommodation of Bengali and tribal."^{xxx} He suggests that "it seems probable that the common experience of tribal and non-tribal people in a new rural economy has until recently minimised communal tensions and maximised possibilities for class-based political mobilisation."^{xxxi}

The era of class-based political mobilisation and accommodation in Tripura is clearly drawing to a close. The signs of increasing unrest among the tribals, probably encouraged by established political parties, anxious to settle scores, were evident in the spate of killings in 1987 just before the elections to the Tripura state assembly. This resulted in the declaration of the whole of the state as a Disturbed Area on the eve of the elections. Since then there have been outbreaks of violence by tribals on the non-tribal population and retaliation to it in the form of incidents of violence against individual tribal targets, like tribal women.^{xxxii}

The signals being sent out from Tripura are that the tribals are growing increasingly nervous of the demographic changes brought by the presence of nearly 50,000 Chakma refugees, living in camps. The cordon surrounding the refugee camps segregating the Chakmas from the local population has grown slack over the years. Interactions between the Chakmas and the local tribals have intensified and social as well as family relations have been established.^{xxxiii} Eyewitness accounts in South Tripura district suggest that the Chakmas have gradually integrated themselves into the area, through a variety of commercial activities and social connections. At the same time, the tribals in the area have begun spreading their wings which has brought them into conflict with

the refugees who act as a physical barrier having become virtually permanent settlers.

The pressure to find a solution to the refugee encampments is two fold. Unless visible and credible efforts are made to negotiate the return of the refugees, the local tribal population is likely to feel nervous and threatened, sparking off the kind of ethnic conflict to which Tripura has been subjected off and on over the years. The fear is that there could be a reaction against the Chakmas, but in view of the volatile nature of ethnic conflicts, once the spark is lit, it could spread to other communities, which are bigger, easier targets and racially and culturally very different. There is an equally valid fear that Chakma groups in India could go underground and mobilise to fight the ethnic/communal upsurge.^{xxxiv}

The presence of the Chakmas in Tripura has exacerbated the tensions between the Bengalis and the tribals, increasing the violence against the former in the state, spearheaded by organisations like the militant Tripura National Volunteers (TNV). There are fears of collusion between unhappy Chakmas and the TNV, which has according to reports from Indian intelligence sources, contributed to the build up of arms with the militant TNV. The Chakmas are believed to be a conduit for arms to not only the TNV but other secessionist movements and groups in the North East.

The attempts to work out a solution to the problems of the Chakma refugees of South Tripura has made some progress; the basis of which is guaranteed by the Bangladesh government of internal security in the Chittagong Hill Tracts for those returning to claim their tribal lands.^{xxxv} The first exercise in repatriation in early 1994 was a partial success, since out of the 400 odd families that went across to explore the conditions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, some returned, complaining that the agreements reached between the Governments of India and Bangladesh had not been honoured.^{xxxvi}

In early July 1994, there were fresh rounds of talks between representatives of the Jumma Welfare Association and the Bangladesh government about the return of a second batch of refugees to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The second batch would consist of another 11,000 refugees. Political observers in Tripura are not optimistic about the speed of repatriation, maintaining that it would take months to send back such large numbers of people. The uncertainty stems from the fact that the Chakmas going home have a bleak future. They have been offered homestead land and some financial support, but their basic condition would remain unchanged. The Chakmas would go back

to being a culturally, religiously threatened numerically precarious majority in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong, surrounded by ethnically and religiously different people, dispossessed of their tribal homelands and marginalised by the pressures of modernization.^{xxxvii}

Political observers in Tripura believe that the Chakma situation is unstable and will remain so. There is very little optimism that the Chakmas will happily resettle in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. There is infact apprehension that only those among the 50,000 refugees will go back who have not as yet been able to sink roots on Indian soil and remain on the fringes of the camps. There is as yet no study on tile returnees to establish which amongst them are the first to leave the shelter of Indian soil for the uncertainty of life in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The suspicion is that many will not go back, particularly those who have worked to establish themselves in and around the camp areas, having made investments in the future by acquiring land, jobs, businesses. While life as refugees is unenviable, a marginal and insecure existence in the homeland is likely to be worse, political leaders from Tripura said.^{xxxviii}

Will closing the doors to refugee traffic from Bangladesh whether it is Chakmas, Hindus or Muslims, solve the problems of internal security is perceived. If it seen as a mechanical process, which assumes that the danger to national interest is always externally generated then it is possible to reach the erroneous conclusion that if the doors are closed and the borders tightly scaled, the problems of internal security will disappear.

This myopic view also assumes that the millions of refugees/migrants/illigal settlers can be detected and pushed back without destabilising the internal dynamics of a society and polity that has over a period of time learnt to live with the traveling population. While it may be possible to repatriate the 50,000 Chakmas from Tripura, it would be impossible to repatriate about 80,000 Chakmas who live in Arunachal Pradesh and a few thousand more that have been absorbed into the policy in Meghalaya. Where can the lines be drawn? This is not to suggest that lines ought not to be drawn, but to seek an answer that would be realistic and possible to implement.

An inkling of how difficult the task would be is to be found in the situation in Assam. Under the terms of the 1985 accord signed by the AASU and the Congress government headed by former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, foreigners who had entered the state from Bangladesh were to be detected, their names scratched off the electoral rolls and they were to be sent back to the country of their origin.^{xxxix} In a peculiar arrangement, those who had come over from Bangladesh immediately before 1971 would be given a ten year quarantine period, to serve as probationary citizens, before their legitimacy would be reorganized. The time is drawing close for the legitimacy of the illegal migrants of the pre-1971 period and if the rumblings from Assam are any indication, this could swell into a tidal wave of ethnic confrontation with the almost inevitable concomitant of violence.

This fear skips ahead of the basic problem, which is how many foreigners even though detected have been sent back To date, nothing of any significance has happened about sending back illegal immigrants from Bangladesh living in Assam. The Bangladesh government does not recognise the population as being their own, the Assamese having won their political point seem reluctant to pursue the problem. The Situation has been complicated by the emergence of Bodo sub-nationalism which is directed against Assamese linguistic chauvinism.^{xl}

The process of fragmentation of identities into ever smaller units of ethnic and culture plurality seems to be an endless one. The reason is perhaps that in South Asia by a strange reversal of logical historical processes, the creation of the state preceded the creation of a national identity. Irrespective of the age and sophistication of India's political institutions, the post-independence period emphasised the need for integration and viewed all rival claims of allegiance as being part of a process of disintegration and therefore anti-national interest.

The Assam Accord for the first time in India's independence history sought to create a sieve that would filter out the infiltrator/ refugee/migrant from the citizens of the state. The process worked on paper as Assamese nationalism was appeased and the Asom Gana Parishad successfully staked a claim to state power. The process has failed in the sense that the sieve was unworkable.

The Assam movement was a serious threat to India's internal security and the problem was contained through the device of the accord, conceding the principle that illegal had entered Indian

soil, polluted the environment and therefore ought to be removed. The same yardstick, however, would not work in the hands of a political elite with a different ideological orientation. In the hands of the votaries of Hindutva, none of the Hindus in India, not even migrants/infiltrators are aliens but the religious minority of Muslims from Bangladesh most certainly is unfortunately, the historical process of migration has not worked in ways that can fit the theoretical propositions of the Hindutva votaries.^{xli}

In Assam and in West Bengal, tens of thousands of Muslims came across the border in the aftermath of partition. Under the terms of the Assam Accord, these Muslims are legitimate citizens or probationary citizens. In the post-1971 period, the preponderance of migrants were Hindus and they would automatically under the terms of the Assam Accord be considered illegal migrants. It is hypothetical to consider what might happen if the implementation of the Assam Accord had to be undertaken by the political party which espouses the Hindutva cause.

As a convenient political rallying point, the issue of religious identity is a recurring motif in the politics of India. The secular model of nationalism constructed by the Congress, particularly "its Nehruvian stream", "underestimates the alarming extent to which the power of Indian nationalism emerged from, or was a merely politically redescribed or redirected form, of the power of violated religious sentiments," and which continues to manipulate sentiments in pursuit of power, by playing upon the theme of identity.^{xlii}

The threat of internal security is not from reorganised refugees like the Chakmas of South Tripura about whom the governments of India and Bangladesh have commitments for repatriation. The threat lies in the potential for destabilisation and conflict that the very formulation of the problem of internal security poses linked to the issue of refugees. The perception of threat to security, internal and regional, posed by the exiles is born out of the "pattern of domestic and political alignments and disputes", in its reactions to the environment of hostilities. The hostilities could be fallout of identity creation problems between an established elite and a fledgling one. The hostilities could

be one more issue for manipulation in the fragile structure of regional security in South Asia.

The tendency to pool together certain issues of domestic and bilateral politics in relations between India and Bangladesh turns the question of refugees-migrants or self exiled population into a sensitive and potentially explosive one. It is interesting to note that population-territory-asset are the central issues in the relations between Bangladesh and India.

Therefore a different set of rules will have to be drafted to accommodate the contentious problem of refugees and internal security in the necessarily larger context or regional security, since the first cannot be tackled without involving the second kind of security considerations. While outbursts by Chakma refugee leader Subas Chakma that repatriation is being used as a bargaining point in the negotiations between India and Bangladesh over transition rights, can be discounted. But the kernel of truth embedded in the outburst cannot be entirely dismissed. For India, obtaining transition rights through Bangladesh is an essential part of building up the infrastructure of internal security, whereas Bangladesh may not be willing to allow the transit facilities which would open up more space for direct contact and contamination.

Shifting away from the conceptual problems of defining refugees and separating them from the migrants and the issue of internal security interpreted in its broadest sense to include regional security, there is another serious practical dimension to the problem of internal security.

The porous border and the presence of large groups of migrants/ refugees in the border areas has led to the growth of a criminal underworld that operates in tandem with internal security forces. The contamination of the security forces in the border areas with Bangladesh, including the local police is a menace. Estimates of the cross-border illegal trade vary in the Eastern Sector, but it does run into hundreds of crores of rupees. The illegal trade is carried out by settlers, legal and illegal with links across the border. Through this conduit pass consumer items, cattle, food and far more dangerous -narcotics

and arms.

The presence of people with confused identities in the border areas has undermined the internal security arrangements in India. The special Border Security Force which operates in the area has had its discipline and operational effectiveness weakened as the profits of colluding in the flourishing smuggling trade have increased over the years. For any state, the corruption of its security forces is a matter of serious concern.

There have been a number of clashes between local populations and the BSF all along the border, in which ghastly killings have taken place, eroding the confidence of the people in an internal security agency. Somewhere tucked away behind official explanations of the violence has been a far more menacing one - of confrontations taking place over the distribution of spoils from smuggling, or in some cases resistance by the local people to the open smuggling that goes on across the border with the connivance of the security force. The clue to finding the solution to the problem of peripatetic population as they impinge on considerations of internal security lies in the perception of the 'people'. Fences and border patrols will not succeed in preventing the march of people away from a place of insecurity to a place of relative security. As demonstrated by the Chakmas, unless their security is guaranteed, people will come and go back and forth across the border line, violating every rule of international behaviour and internal law.

Nearly two hundred thousand ethnic people in Chittagong Hill Tracts were forced to migrate due to two primary reasons. First, forced eviction was caused by the implementation of the Kaptai Hydro Electric Project in the early 1960s and that subsequently persistent political crisis since mid 1970s in the CHT led the ethnic minorities to abandon their hearth and home. The Government of Bangladesh was duty bound to rehabilitation the returnees as per the agreement in 1997 that facilitated the repatriation of the refugees from India but political will to address the rehabilitation and to provide compensation had been lacking. This was also true of the negotiations for repatriation and one major reason for the considerable delay in the process was the half-hearted nature of the initiatives, especially the successive governments of Bangladesh. The

repatriation was postponed time and again, and even when it was organised it failed the test of sincerity and determination to pursue the matter to its logical end. As a result, repatriation was undertaken in phases and when finally the agreement of 1997 paved the way for repatriation of all the refugees, the arrangements and provision for the returnees proved inadequate. This has led to dissatisfaction and has also caused internal displacement. It is most shocking that the returnees have become internally displaced in large numbers and therefore the plight of the hill people of CHT has not improved despite the fact the refugee problem is over.

Domestic Implications

Local perceptions of illegal migration vary widely. Illegal immigrants from Bangladesh are viewed as a demographic, economic and political threat. The small ethnic groups of North East India perceive the Bangladeshis as a threat to their demographic status and the 19 tribes of Tripura bear testimony to such fears. These tribes have been demographically, economically and politically marginalized. Although numerical strength does not always translate to economic and political supremacy, in many ways this does happen. The tribal of Tripura with low literacy levels and fragile economic means ended on the short end of the stick. It was easy for them to be politically outmaneuvered. For many other small ethnic groups in India's Far East, land is as a premium and when dispossessed of land their very existence can be threatened. The Nellie massacre was a result of such underlying forces. In February 1983, about 2,000 Bengali-Muslims were massacred in Nellie (Assam) in one night^{xliii}; other estimates put this figure slightly lower at 1200^{xliiv} to 1753^{xliv} though the lessons to be drawn are the same: ethnic population groups were dispossessed of their land by illegal immigrants and pressures over scarce resources led to a vicious reaction. While it would be difficult for the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to dispossess the upper echelons of the Assamese middle class, for the lower classes, the first signs of such economic dispossession are evident. Early this year, when 5000 posts of constables were advertised in Assam, such illegal were sought to be given employment, at the cost of local unemployed youth. Fortunately, the judiciary stepped in and prevented the

process. However, when political power is gained by illegal migrants and numerical strength does count- gaining a larger share of the economic cake is a question of time.

Another aspect of illegal migration from Bangladesh is that of the security aspect. Although this has been pointed out, on occasion at the highest levels^{xlvi} due attention has not been given to this dimension. A Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) report had alleged that the Bangladesh Government was "not doing enough" to prevent the country from becoming a "haven for Islamic terrorists" in South Asia^{xlvii}. When the international media also reported along these lines^{xlviii}, it stoked much attention for a while, but later this aspect was ignored. Although it has been pointed out that, the activities of militant outfits in Bangladesh probably have a regional and global dimension, although there has been no serious investigation or probe into this aspect.^{xlix} India has generally turned a Nelson's eye to such developments. Barring a few attempts,^{l,li}; that assert that 'the problem is illegal migration has an immense potential for the deterioration of the security situation in the East and Northeast of India^{lii} very little in terms of policy decisions has resulted . Unfortunately contentious issues are at stake and in the guise of looking after the interests of minority population groups, local politicians in Assam 'farm' immigrant votes to further personal ends. Unfortunately neither policy nor even the debate that precedes it seems to be on the cards until then "an indigent migrant population harbouring little or no loyalty to the host country"^{liii} continues to strengthen its numbers and networks.

It would be incorrect to treat the illegal immigrants issue and the security issue without a reference to insurgent groups that abound in the North East.“ The growing bond between the native militants of the Northeast, and the ISI and other

foreign-based Islamist organizations encourages not only terrorist activities, but also the fundamentalist attitude. In a recent report to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the central intelligence agency (of India) had cautioned about the ISI's nexus with underground groups in this region. At regular intervals, the security forces in the Northeastern states remind the Union Government about the growing influence of the ISI and Islamic terrorists

who fund religious organizations, institutions and madrassas in the region”^{liv}. From time to time newspaper reports^{lv} indicate ISI agents operating from Assam^{lvi}; such persons find it easy to melt into the local population given linguistic and facial similarities. The apex judiciary court in India, the Supreme Court, has hauled up the union government for not taking the issue of illegal immigrants seriously. The editorial of a national daily observed:

The Supreme Court has done well to ask the Union Government to file a comprehensive affidavit on illegal migration from Bangladesh into West Bengal and the north-eastern States. As the court pointed out, the matter is serious as it threatens to change the demography of the States. The available information is alarming. According to a study by the Indian Statistical Institute, of the 1.6 million migrants settling in West Bengal between 1981 and 1991, 700,000 were from other States of India. Nine hundred thousand were from Bangladesh. Many more seem to have come since then as the rate of influx appears to have accelerated. According to official estimates, about 300,000 people cross over from Bangladesh into the north-eastern States annually. The migration has been so heavy in Tripura that the local tribal population, who earlier constituted a majority, have been virtually swamped. Besides posing economic burdens and causing social and ethnic tensions, illegal migration, as has lately become apparent, seriously threatens India's unity and integrity. Agents of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operating from Bangladesh find crossing the porous border with India easy. Their activities, which have already seriously disturbed the whole of north-eastern India, assume a diabolical significance in the light of the ISI's plan to create an independent Islamic state in north-eastern India.^{lvii}

Recent incidents have renewed attention to the issue of illegal immigrants in the North East, when a local NGO based in Dibrugarh started a campaign calling for a social and economic boycott of suspected illegal Bangladeshis. An estimated 15000 illegal left the district and settled elsewhere in Assam. Minority political parties raised a hue and cry and several politicians made hurried trips to the area. The remaining states of the regions, promptly alerted security along the inter-state borders to prevent possible infiltration into

their states. Press releases by the government in Assam abounded, stating that bonafide Indian citizens had been hounded out and that there were no illegal immigrants in Assam. The incident focused the contrasting sentiments of the Assamese: that illegal immigrants were unwelcome; and that of the state government: that it would handle precious vote banks with kid gloves, the observations of intelligence agencies and the federal Home Ministry notwithstanding.

The officials of the Election Commission of India met the Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister on 28 August 2003 and unequivocally conveyed to him that “so long as the Chakmas were ordinarily residents in the state, they could not be denied their Constitutional right of enrolment of their names in the electoral rolls of the state.” In a official communication in September 2003, the Commission further informed the Chief Minister that “the preparation and revision of the electoral roles was constitutional duty conferred on the commission by Article 324 (1) and the state Cabinet resolution refusing voting rights to the Chakmas was an hindrance to the commission’s constitutional obligation to prepare and revise the electoral rolls”. The State Government was directed to suitably amend or altogether scrap its Cabinet resolution. Instead, the State government asked former Chief Minister Mukut Mithi to challenge the Election Commission order before the Guwahati High Court and it became a respondent.^{lviii}

It remains to be seen what further measures are taken by he Election Commission of India to uphold its constitutional obligation to ensure the right to franchise of the Chakmas considering that Bengal Frontier Regulation of 1873 has nothing to do with Representation of Peoples Act of 1950. In a State bereft of any hot political issue, the demand for expulsion of the Chakmas refugees is undoubtedly an important issue to climb up the political ladder and collect money. A former President of the All Arunachal Pardesh Students Union (AAPSU) went to become the spokesman and Education Minister of the State government led by Mukut Mithi. The AAPSU leaders reportedly collected millions of rupees to continue their movement to drive the refugees out.^{lix} Though Chakmas share

excellent and cordial relations with their neighbouring communities, it is the mob rule, which rules the roots in Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh's ruling Congress party has pledged to evict 60,000 Bangladeshi refugees if voted to power in assembly elections. "The Congress would give top priority to solve the Chakma refugee issue and take steps to resettle them outside the state," Chief Minister Gegong Apang told IANS. The tribal Buddhist Chakma refugees had been staying in Arunachal Pradesh since 1964 as stateless citizens after fleeing their native Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh following alleged persecution by Muslims. India's Election Commission had in May, during the general elections, ordered inclusion of names of the refugees in the state's electoral rolls, sparking off angry protests among the tribal people in Arunachal Pradesh. A total of 1,497 Chakmas were listed in the voters' list and all of them voted in the parliamentary elections. The Chakmas voters were, however, in a quandary with all political parties contesting the assembly elections in the state making a vow to resettle them outside Arunachal Pradesh. A refugee leader, S. Chakma said "We are unable to make up our mind which party to vote for as all of them were speaking the same language of expelling us from the state if they were elected. At the same time we don't want to abstain from casting our votes, a right that we have got after a long fight." The other two main parties contesting the polls, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Arunachal Congress, a regional party, are also adopting a similar line by harping on the issue of driving out the refugees.^{lx}

The 'vote bank' politics in northeast India is not very new, people who are migrating from the neighbouring countries viz., Tibet, Burma, Nepal and largely Bangladeshi voting in favour of Congress Party, though they do not have legal right of voting, but they are voting regularly to the Congress Party, though they do not have legal right of voting, but they are voting regularly to the Congress party because they even have mind set that, they allowed and settled in India but the Congress government under the Mujib-Indira agreement. On the another side the parties like BJP is playing the politics of religion to

these migrants, when BJP led by NDA was in power, granted Citizenship rights to the Chakmas in 2004 (1497) in Arunachal Pradesh, only because they are largely Buddhist and Hindus, but BJP led by NDA was in power, granted Citizenship rights to the Chakmas in 2004 (1497) in Arunachal Pradesh, only because they are largely Buddhist and Hindus, but BJP led by NDA was not in favour to apply the same policies to the migrants in Assam because they are largely Muslim population from Bangladesh and voting for congress party for both Lok Sabha and State Assembly.^{lxi} The very simple and basic question to be asked is that, one cannot apply two policies to check the infiltration as well migration. If in Assam the Bangladeshis Muslims are illegal migrants than in the entire part of the republic of India all those who illegally migrated from neighbouring countries are illegal and should have to check not in the name of religion or by playing dual policy for same migrants.

Implication on Relations with Bangladesh

In March 1972, India and Bangladesh (Indira-Mujib agreement) signed a 25 years treaty of friendship cooperation and peace. At a time when USA, China, Pakistan and a number of other countries had withheld their recognition of Bangladesh, Indo-Soviet support was both politically and economically significant. Moreover, the dauntlessness displayed by India in winning independence for Bangladesh had already created a favourable atmosphere for a warm beginning of their relations.^{lxii} India had been a host of approximately ten million refugees and faced all the attendant problems they carried with them. After the birth of Bangladesh, refugees started retreating and then India helped Bangladesh extensively in her refugee rehabilitation and economic reconstruction program. India supplied Rs. 185.8 million for refugee rehabilitation. Besides, giving medicine, drugs, food, clothing, transport and building material, India granted Rs. 250 million to Bangladesh for purchase of essential commodities including food, sugar, salt, baby food, oil, petroleum products, cements, steel products, power generation equipments and vehicles. A credit of Rs. 100 million was also provided for reconstruction of railway network. In addition a foreign exchange loan worth 5 million pound was also given to Bangladesh to meet her urgent requirements of foreign exchange.

Besides all these the Government of India opined that all the immigrants could not be termed illegal infiltration because before and after partition, minorities were assured that

they would be given complete protection in India if they were forced to live Pakistan due to internal disturbances. Moreover, the government was firm on not agreeing to 1951 as the base year for it would lead to legal and international complications. It would have defined Nehru-Liaquat Ali pact 1950 and the Indira-Mujib understanding 1972. Under the Citizenship Act 1955 provisions exist for a person born out of India on or after 26 January, 1950 to retain the right to become Indian citizen by descent, if his father was a citizen of India at the time of his birth. Acceptance of 1951 would have perforce flushed out approximately four million people who entered India after 1951 and were given recognition by the 1972 understanding.

The Chakmas refugees have been residing in India for more than thirty-five to forty years. Indira Gandhi declared on 15th June 1971, in Rajya Sabha that: “we will have to go through hell to meet the challenge passed by the developments in Bangladesh”. From the onward India started providing help for securing their rights, which involved the liberation of Bangladesh. Under the Indira and Mujib agreement of 1972, it was determined that India and not Bangladesh would be responsible for the migrants who entered India before 25 March 1971. Furthermore, the Central Government has often asserted that the Chakmas have a legitimate claim to Indian Citizenship. In a letter for Home and Parliamentary Affairs M.N. Jacob said: “being ‘New Migrants’, viz., refugees from Bangladesh who came to India between 1964 and 1971, respectively are eligible to the grant of citizenship according to the policy of the Government on the subject and most of these migrants have already been granted citizenship”. Again in 1994, Minister of State P.M. Sayeed stated: “under the Indira-Mujib agreement of 1972, it was decided that the Chakma refugees who came to India from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) before 25.3.1971 will be considered for grant of Indian Citizenship.”^{lxiii} Further, a very large proportion of these refugees would have been born in India and therefore, would be automatically entitled to the grant of citizenship. The salient features of the treaty of friendship, co-operation and peace between India and Bangladesh of 19 March, 1972 popularly known as the Indira-Mujib Agreement and peaceful co-existence, determination to maintain regular contact on matters of mutual interest and development of co-operation in the economic, technical and

cultural fields. The fact is that, there was no agreement on the provisional settlement of Chakma refugee.^{lxiv}

Large-scale movement of population from Bangladesh (East Pakistan) to India, which started in the early part of the twentieth century, is continuing unabated. The early movement of population was confined mainly to the neighbouring Indian states like Assam, Tripura and West Bengal. But in the recent years migrants have moved to even far of states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Delhi. It has been reported that there are approximately 20 million illegal Bangladeshi living in various parts of India. But there is no doubt that Chakma refugees who came to India before the commencement of the constitution or before 1971 (Before the creation of the Bangladesh) should grant Citizenship right as according to the provisions of the constitution of India.

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