

## Interpreting Changing Patterns of Migration Dilemma in India's North-Eastern States

Ashwati Chembayilkoppat<sup>1</sup> & Rajeesh C.S

The turbulent phase of conversion from the colonial government to a sovereign state in the twentieth century was established with optimism as cherished in India's constitution. The newly liberated state was dedicated to breaking chains of communal frenzy in the political behaviour; nonetheless, the post-colonial moment came with partition. Punjab and Bengal were divided to form component units of India and Pakistan; this process entailed mass exodus of refugee movement across newly created borders. This paper aims to advance the predicament of movement of populace destined to traverse India and Bangladesh borders through three phases forming new political categorical identities namely, refugee movement, migration fearing persecution, infiltration involving crime and terror. Three phases mentioned above in a historical timeline have produced new dimensions to politics of recognition and representation in North-East India. They have remained marginalized in their socio-economic engagements with the state of origin as well as in both voluntary and non-voluntary host state. Hence, investigation through human security approach will enhance an in-depth knowledge development of the population who have become a transnational subject and a source of a crisis between India and Bangladesh (earlier East Pakistan), as well as the problems faced by inhabitants in the North-Eastern states.

Throughout the evolution of Earth, geography has shifted and dramatically altering the position of continents, human explorations of new lands by the retreating years of medieval period embarked on imperial projects of invading colonies across South America, Africa, and Asia. The visible features were the establishment of authority through bifurcation or the linking of territories which were alien to each other earlier. Suez Canal as a link to the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea is a striking example of European mastery to expand areas of influence and control under colonialism. The human endeavoured transitions in political geography in the modern period has dismantled older avenues of communication, whereas estranged became strategic neighbours, the fate of population either declined entirely or rose to significance under the changed circumstances.

Transnational migration and the citizenship dilemma have dominated the diplomacy between India and Bangladesh (also in its East Pakistan period) in the past seven decades. Typically the population movement involves three critical elements that are borders, a behaviour of the host state/ home state, and the population on move. A migrated population is either segregated or integrated, depends on the national interest of the state at receiving end. In the Indian context, the country has acted as the voluntary and non-voluntary host state, which had an immense impact on the internal politics and security. Historically population movement in the modern period is associated with the event of a partition that has encapsulated the imageries of an Indian state, and its people since 1947, and a plethora of academic works in the past seventy years dealt with the aftermath of bifurcation through diverse dimensions.

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Ashwati is a Research Scholar at Centre for South Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Rajeesh C.S is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Lovely Professional University.

<https://www.gapcritique.in/interpreting-changing-patterns-of-migration-dilemma-in-indias-north-eastern-states/>

Received 31 January 2019; Received in revised form 30 May 2019; Accepted 26 June 2019, Published 10 July 2019

The tangible theatre of partition received attention from two political units, i.e. Punjab and Bengal. Population movement across either side of Punjab was rapid and met with gruesome intervals of communal fissures and associated violence, Bengal relatively had a slower pace of migration and comparatively less violence than the former. The objective of this study is to explore the varying dimensions of population movement that has happened between India and Bangladesh in three phases. The first initiation took place in the last decade of the 1940s due to the communal fissures especially in the Bengal region during and after partition. The second phase could be roughly traced during the East Pakistan crisis of 1971 when martial administration of Pakistan (Western wing) launched Operation Search Light to incur human rights violations on the people of East Pakistan for their popular mobilisation intended for external self-determination demand based on linguistic terms. And the third phase could be characterised as population mobility involving infiltration or illegal entry of migrants in search of employment opportunities or as criminals involved in illicit trafficking.

In these three phases Government of India was in intense pressure to deal with the influx on humanitarian grounds with limitations resources. The borders that India and Bangladesh shares form the fifth longest in the world, geographically international lines of demarcation passes through hilly terrain to the South East of Chittagong Hill Tracts adjacent to Tripura state of India, riverside borders passes through Indian states in the North East[1], North West[2] and South West[3] of Bangladesh. Among the river borders along the West Bengal and Assam are characterised by *char lands*[4] and the thick vegetation along the Mizoram and Tripura's borders with Bangladesh are challenging factors for the erection of fencing. The porosity of the borders and complexities aforementioned have thrown open many issues that have pressed both states to be driven by classic zero sum game as well as blame game of accusations and counter-accusations reflected mainly echoed in the electoral campaign narratives. In the first two phases, there was a relative mutual understanding between the host state and the home state due to the precarious situation prevailed then. The third phase has remained a rationale for friction, with no avenue for constructing a holistic cooperative framework. It is in this context my work will examine and analyse the mobility of population in different periods, attitudes of governments in concern and the plight of people on the move.

### **A transition from Colonial Subjects to Citizens of Two States: Case of 1947 Partition and Vulnerable Refugees**

The world is not new to partition politics, in the modern period from the scramble for Africa to the contemporary realities of North Korea-South Korea divide presents the case in point. Chaim Kauffman's fivefold underlying consequences of partition are worth to apply in the India partition scenario. Accordingly partition is defined as an event or a process which has no conclusion rather a continuing phenomenon, eventually leads to split of new territories or demand for the same prop up due to the tendency sprouting from the imageries of partition. Second relevant outcome leads us to the plight of refugees who are subjected to violence, and the administrative-bureaucratic machinery's hitches for rehabilitation and provision for relief and aid for the former. Thirdly, during population movement involves exploitation and other forms of crimes against humanity are devised by hostile communities, such situations often motivate for mushrooming of revisionist attacks or probably civil war. As the partition not only divide territories rather the resources and national assets, leading to a probable situation where one state inherits economic and military strength comparatively stronger than the splinter state, often it has the capacity leading to classic security dilemmas and relative weakness proceed them to revanchist forms the fourth essential repercussion. Fifth and final reason d'être offered by the scholar is a context where the hostile parties maintain their animosity, and the avenue for tranquillity is not devised (**Kauffman 2003**).

Theoretically, there are many models of partition. When homogeneous population demands for creation of a homeland as a solution to complex contradictions between various subjectivities, it also generates schizophrenic agents who claim to be real embodying elements of the proposed nation, this is known as a national partition. When demographic patterns comprise heterogeneous entities on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or any other categories, demand for partition is termed as a multi-national partition. When a particular group or groups within the territorial and sovereign limits demand autonomy, leads to internal partition as it does not change the status quo of the existing external boundary (**O'Leary, 2012**). Anxieties of ethnonational groups' makes external partition indispensable, as like the case of India where modifications of sovereign borders and jurisdiction were concluded in 1947. As discussed, partition occurs due to various rational motives as prescribed by the agents.

What makes real influence are the internal and external agents, where they either intervene forcefully or in a non-conflictual manner.

Much before Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations hit the global equations of harmony and discord based on cultural and civilizational differences, colonial India was divided in 1947. If the partition was a great human tragedy from the perspective of human security, the retrospective research on the event produces various narratives. The relentless quest is to underline the factors and determinants which drove then political elites for a consensus for partition. When the Indian subcontinent was cherishing the independence from shackles of colonial rule, the trauma of partition was felt in the borderlands from where the limitations of two newly independent nation-states were drawn. What has remained the least researched theme in the partition history is the dearth of documentation capturing the degree of violence forced on the refugees, which reflects till date. Partition as imagined by colonial administrators and then nationalist leaders as a solution to the contending communal fault lines could only ignite the overarching communal divide to majoritarian domination over minorities in varying intensities, as even after partition population movement was evident to avoid religious persecution.

The event of the partition of British India has encapsulated the imageries of three states namely India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and its people since 1947. The plethora of academic works produced in the past seventy years dealt with the aftermath of bifurcation through diverse dimensions. The tangible theatre of partition received attention from two political units, i.e. Punjab and Bengal by the mid-1940s. Population movement across either side of Punjab was rapid and met with gruesome intervals of communal fissures and associated violence, Bengal relatively had a slower pace of migration and comparatively less violence than the former. The case of Bengal partition was a different scenario, from a nuanced class perspective the middle class Hindu populace made their way to India much before the Radcliffe Award was announced, driven by economic needs, followed by Hindu and tribal peasants, whereas Muslim peasants mobility or migration to East Bengal was absent, while only visible were the Muslim middle classes (Umar 2017).

Sophisticated dividing lines of models of partition displayed the recurring demands felt by

communities or groups, where vivisection of territories become the last resort to avoid further contradictions and related violence. Radcliffe Line signified the partition and creation international boundary first between India and Pakistan (Western and Eastern Wing) after liberation war of 1971 and creation of Bangladesh added one more party to the existing international boundary and Pakistan in this scenario lost its Eastern Wing. The genesis of the history of partition is difficult to fit in any specific context, space, and time, because the partition of Bengal under Lord Curzon could be a possible precursor, followed by provisions for separate electorate, and finally Britain's acts in the early part of the year 1947 shows its swiftness to end its administration and transfer the power to warring Congress and Muslim League. Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who was designated with the project to partition British India, and demarcate the boundaries for the newly independent states of India, and Pakistan. Although Radcliffe line was destined to draw the margins for both states, in reality, it flared up the communal divide among the people as it aggravated the suspicion and confusion on the direction to which they were forced to move. The Boundary Commission constituted by the then Viceroy in 1947 was the result of the failure of political elites in undivided British India, as they could not compromise over the construction of an inclusive notion of the nation, this made the commission project to vivisection of Bengal into Muslim and Non-Muslim political units. Moreover, Cyril Radcliffe was under profound pressures from various political outfits and lobbyists in terms of influencing colonial government's procedures of boundary demarcation.

As per the instruction, the commission was influenced under politics of border-making to delineate margins of nation-states on the basis of Muslim and non-Muslim. Willem van Schendel in his book makes a critical analysis of the Hindu-Muslim divide as the major narrative downplayed in the partition literature produced by three countries. This is because, when it comes to Bengal Borderlands, near to 4000kms were drawn; three-fifths of the borders did not show any Hindu-Muslim divide along the borders. In his study, on the Pakistan side of the boundary comprised two-fifths of the non-Muslim population, on the other hand, India's part possessed one -fifth of Muslim majority areas. The partition entailed not just demarcation of Hindu-Muslim majority areas but also Bengali, Non -Bengali in which certain communities did not fit in the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy.

As the boundary demarcation went through Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Burma (became an independent nation-state). The author questions the narrative popular in the literature on Hindu-Muslim and Bengali divide, in actual along the lines demarcated in Garo hills of Meghalaya were Christians, similarly in Tripura where some stretches dividing lines had majority Buddhists.

The author contends that the popular Hindu-Muslim antagonism prevailed over the historiography of border-making, little or no space was left for the other communities and their contribution and reactions during the turbulent period. From the perspectives of the population, their opinions were not granted prominence or remained obscured, and tensions were the concept of national borders, derived from the idea of probable areas to be marked to be borders. This somehow enhanced the dilemma among the people, who on divided fault lines were to make choices of territory (Schendel, 2005).

The communal fault lines produced volatile outcomes in a catastrophic than the Direct Action Plan day riots and killings. With the passage of time, the Radcliffe line became the new margins of the Hindu-Muslim enmity. Chaotic population movement was met with communal rioters, remained far from colonial administration's control. A book titled *Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* has made an attempt to underscore the challenges posed to governments and the refugees in the resettlement of the latter. The proposed study conducted by authors of the book took into account the government's *Dandakaranya* scheme as a rehabilitation measure for uprooted people of partition.

As part of the rebuilding procedures, authors have identified a complex relationship between four major variables that are identity, landscape, choices of dependence and their self-help techniques. The fragmented identities which started taking shape in the wake of heightened sectarian and communal violence destroyed the unifying factors in the Bengali cultural sphere which kept the fuzzy boundaries at bay for many centuries. As per this book, Radcliffe line did not take into account of the significant infrastructures like the networks of railways, places of religious and cultural significance and vital water channels, in essence, all of them possess strategic importance.

After partition inflow and outflow of refugees was a gradual process, moreover the division of Bengal made the two succeeding units with varying deprivations, as the ramifications are still relevant. West Bengal became a food deficit because agriculturally

prosperous regions were destined. The tangible theatre of partition received attention from two political units, i.e. Punjab and Bengal. Population movement across either side of Punjab was rapid and met with gruesome intervals of communal fissures and associated violence, Bengal relatively had a slower pace of migration and comparatively less violence than the former.

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As per this book, Radcliffe line did not take into account of the significant infrastructures like the networks of railways, places of religious and cultural significance and vital water channels, in essence, all of them possess strategic importance. After partition inflow and outflow of refugees was a gradual process, moreover the division of Bengal made the two succeeding units with varying deprivations, as the ramifications are still relevant. West Bengal became a food deficit because agriculturally prosperous regions were destined to be part of East Pakistan, whereas the latter could not develop the necessary infrastructures to sustain it (Tan & Kudaisya, 2000). As explained in the first part of this section, GOI's approach towards East Pakistan refugees stood entirely different and irrational to the experiences of

communal carnage they have borne since Lord Curzon's Bengal partition in 1905. By the year 1948, India and Pakistan decided to reach consensus through Inter-dominion treaty to devise an arrangement to discourage the mass exodus through both borders of the Radcliffe line. Ministers designated for Minority affairs and their rehabilitation was put forward for the treaty. Neither, however, the treaty could be successful nor could both governments institutionalize measures to check the refugee exodus or influx. Hence the tardy movement of refugees kept flooding West Bengal and Government's unresponsive nature remained stumble blocks for the uprooted East Bengali people to settle in a peaceful manner.

Narratives from the North East, and partition related rehabilitation of refugees brought fissures between government and people. Monirul Hussein in his study on North-East development calls the development as a mechanism which reveals the class orientation of the state. For him development induced displacement is among the prominent issues in the region, met with popular resistance and protest, simultaneously led to unrest. In his thesis, he has utilized various sources, through which a clear image of refugee flows to Assam could be materialized. Accordingly, India received 52.83 Lakh persons from East Pakistan as refugees in the aftermath of partition. West Bengal accommodated nearly 39.56 lakh, and remaining 13 lakh were settled in adjoining North-Eastern states of India. Assam's share is estimated to be 6.87 lakh. For the rehabilitation and resettlement generated fissures in the demography and economy of Assam, as land acquisition for the purpose forced 1,46,500 to be turned as displaced persons (Hussein, 2008). This could be calculated as primary factors contributed to anti-Bengali sentiments in North eastern states. Second major development in this phase was the government's initiative to check the migration was by enacting Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan scheme.

The dislocated or fragmented territorial consciousness developed as the minority communities both in West Bengal and East Pakistan came to be regarded as 'trans-territorial citizens' in the state centric calculations. Moreover minorities in both states preferred to migrate to the land of religious affinity only when their land of origins failed to protect their lives and property, thus were left with only option to seek asylum in states of India proximate to East Pakistan. Although there was a hope inhabited by the people on transnational move to return to their ancestral place once issues ceased, nevertheless their imaginary identity of statehood on move was prevalent in the pre-partition period, and in the post-partition phase such movement had introduced them to severe challenges (Roy, 2012).

Problems faced by refugees owe much to the immature political decisions and policy choices of the government in power. From the utmost mass level, influx of refugees brought anxieties for the host communities. This was due to the demographic pressures; institutional arrangements could only exaggerate such tensions. As rights of refugees comes in contention with the rights of host communities, embedded in the fight for the share of scarce resources.

### War Refugees and North-East India: Political Conundrum in Host State

The refugee influx prior to 1971 primarily involved the aspirations of Hindu Bengalis to settle in India due to the political developments in Pakistan where the clauses of Nehru-Liaquat pact came to be neutralised by the promulgation of an Islamic constitution and reign of Martial administration in place of a popularly elected government. Wary of possible carnage as witnessed during partition, many Hindus made flight to India in the adjoining states of East Pakistan like West Bengal, Tripura, Assam etc. The watershed moment came with the East Pakistan crisis or the demand for the creation of Bangladesh under the leadership of Awami League's stalwart Mujibur Rahman. In the wake of military repression through Pakistan army's operation searchlight was a strategic move to push East Pakistanis to India along the unmanned and unfenced borders. Although Indian position over the balkanisation of Pakistan was left in moribund state till December 6, 1971, and India did provide assistance to the enduring freedom fighters by letting them to establish 'provisional government in exile' in Indian soil, and took the burdens of refugee influx by providing asylum, protection and essential amenities (Mansingh).

As per statistics, the aftermath of *Operation Searchlight* launched in 1971 led to the refugee movement to the neighbouring Indian borders, approximately 25, 000 moved by the mid of April same year, and by the end of same month those who took refuge in India rose to 1.2 million, and the process went on till December, consequently in the end near to 10 million became officially recorded refugees (Myard, 2010). Among the states of North-East, Tripura's condition was shoddier as at the receiving end, state had to accommodate nearly more than 1.4 million refugees, and this figure was complimentary to the actual population of the state. Tripura's vulnerability increased as it has three sides' porous borders with Bangladesh's districts like Comilla, Chittagong, Sylhet etc (Ghoshal, 2012). And in the case of West Bengal initially people had sympathy for the plight of refugees, and the state alone received 4.5 million helpless refugees, whereas among these 1.5 were rendered without basic amenities like shelter, and

epidemic like cholera which killed nearly five thousand population.

If West Bengal and Tripura were chosen by people fearing persecution and violence in East Pakistan due to similar linguistic affinities and cultural links, their migration to Meghalaya as far as seven Lac could be encapsulated as driven by only aim to secure their lives along with movable property. The rationale behind presenting an exceptional case of Meghalaya owes to the fact that the state is inhabited by tribal population having no ethnic similarity, climatic and terrain restraints were there (Luthra, 1971).

The stream of refugees from erstwhile East Bengal-East Pakistan from partition up to 1971 could be identified into three categories by co-relating with various governmental sources; first category were the people displaced by the communally defined partition of 1947 and went till 1950, second category begun from 1954 to 1956, with a two year gap restarted from 1964-65 induced by the severe human rights violations on Hindu minorities, third category were the war refugees of 1971. Scholars have been critical of the data available due to three principle possibilities of error. First is the dearth in sources to estimate the return of refugees to Bangladesh, second factor being the non-registration by refugees and their mode of entry whether legal or illegal, third is the crucial one where the scholars observed probability of refugees being double counted due to the nature or crossing and re-crossing between both borders in varying time frames. Due to Indian governments diplomatic strategies, 10 million refugees could be repatriated to their newly formed independent Bangladesh State by the year 1972, additional 30,000 were left behind till the year 1973 (Spitler & Kramer, 1982). As far as UNHCR is concerned, they have assisted India and Bangladesh in the successful repatriation of refugees.

Another political upheaval in the early decade of Bangladesh's formation came up with the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Much before partition from the perspective of social geography, Bangladeshis (Bengali speaking Muslims) inhabited the plains and Tribal population were concentrated in the hilly region across Chittagong Hill Tracts. Social cohesion existed between both communities, only to be severed after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. In subsequent years Dhaka administration made several attempts to change the demography of the CHT by settling Bengali speakers in the region, such governmental actions infuriated the tribal's and waged insurgency against the state. For long Bangladesh has accused India for abetting the insurgents of *Shanti Bahini*, on the flip side India had to accom-

modate Chakma refugees fleeing state led repression (Bhardwaj, 2008). Faced with marginalisation and violation, Chakmas near to 70,000 sought asylum in the Indian state of Tripura, and arrangements were borne by the funds of Central and state government, whereas six camps were sanctioned for them. Within a short span, the presence of Chakma refugees began to create demographic and environmental pressures on the state with limited resources and financial constraints. Moreover a new form of social disequilibrium erupted between the local and refugee population (Ghoshal, 2012). From 1992 onwards India engaged in various diplomatic agreements for a phased repatriation of Chakmas to their state or origin, within two years nearly two thousand were deported. With the successful conclusion of 1997 Peace treaty by Bangladesh government by granting greater powers for self-governance and amnesty for the insurgents could bring peace for the region.

### **Infiltrators or Refugees: Intensification of Resistance against Indian State by Insurgency in North-East India.**

From a global perspective, the refugees, as well as associated insecurities in the Cold War period, were diluted as issues pertaining to the ambit of geopolitical concerns, and then security was conceptualised having external origins or threats that emanate beyond its territorial limits and solution laid with military actions. Thus refugees were scrutinized as either assets or burden in accordance with the bipolar Cold war superpower equations. Migration was not identified till the end of Cold war as a security issue for the home or host state (Loescher and Milner, 2006). The situation has been different in the Indian scenario. As it could be best understood by analysing Weiner's three propositions on international migration, according to him international migration affects the relations between states on the basis of their actions or inactions towards the concerned process, second depends on the rules and norms initiated by states for the entry and exit, and third is the rise of migrants as political force (Weiner, 1985).

In the whole conundrum of population movement across borders of East Bengal/East Pakistan to India till 1971 were voluntarily received by India into two categories existentially, i.e. partition refugees (old migrants) and war refugees (new migrants). Such a voluntary acceptance of transnational movement in the first case was provided with citizenship as well as resettlement in India, in the second scenario under the bilateral understanding both India and Bangladesh repatriated war refugees. Right from 1947 onwards Assam has been wary of the presence of Non-Hindu migration or infiltration to the state due to the surmounting demographic pressures.



And in the later stage, Tripura's tribal population were determined to drive out Bengali speaking migrants. Assam embroiled in resistance against the Bengali settlers whether Hindus or Muslims right from 1950's in the form of famous *Bongal Kheda*, Nellie Massacre, ULFA led violence, and to the politicisation of National Register of Citizens. The momentum of movement of xenophobia has remained intact although intensity has varied in accordance with the state intervention and the geo-politics that has prevailed.

Began as a protest for the recognition of Assamese as the state language, such demand was objected by the Non-Assamese population of the state. Till the mass exodus of East Bengali refugees to India the Assam's demand for check on illegal migration was governed by the introduction of 'Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan Scheme' in the wake of 1962 Indo-China war where the government was made aware of the possibility of Sino-Pak incursion to India via Eastern wing, given the porosity of borders. Although the scheme found to be futile at a point when East Pakistan crisis was flared up in the opening year of 1970s with the entry of war refugees as explained in the previous section. The Indira-Mujib agreement of 1972 agreed to consider the population that entered Indian territories before 1971 as non-Bangladeshi. Such a decision was not acceptable for states like Assam, Tripura due to shifts in the demography and fight over limited resources (Mantoo, 2012).

It was the census figures of 1971 that showed the increased population growth in the state as against the national average; this raised alarm in the politics and set the tune for political turmoil. From the year 1979-1986, Assam witnessed spurt in violence and protests for the expulsion of illegal migrants from East Pakistan. Soon the government through channels of negotiation reached for a settlement with contending party that is All Assam Students Union through the agreement known as '*Assam Accord*' in August, 1985. As per the clauses envisaged in the accord, illegal migrants who entered the state between the years 1966 and 1971 stands to be disenfranchised for 10 years and infiltration after 1971 would mean deportation. Along with this, citizenship act was amended, according to which in the above said category of citizens would enjoy all rights as legal citizens not the voting rights for ten years (Baruah, 1986).

Nevertheless Assam accord could establish peace for a short duration as the state was plunged into insurgency orchestrated by United Liberation Front of Assam. For the rise of insurgency in Assam was has

its history to that of Assam movement, and armed struggle was headed by ULFA or United Liberation Front of Asom in the year 1979. ULFA's militancy was organised with a dual purpose i.e. to reinstate the Ahom Kingdom of pre-colonial period through the integration of various indigenous groups and secondly its concerns were raised from the increased instances of infiltration from Bangladesh from 1971 onwards (Sharma & Behera, 2014).

When Jaideep Saikia comprehends the roots of North-East insurgency through his application of alienation by New Delhi has few fallacies to be taken into notice. Primarily his arguments attracts the attention of the reader to the influx of Bangladeshi migrants to the region as a demographic conquer, while he fails to mention the period from 1947-1971 when it was a constituent unit of Pakistan. The migration flow was a continuous process, and the trumpet of insurgency in Nagaland was not blown due to mere alienation rather the demands has colonial roots. Secondly, author makes a reference to the urgency for fencing across India-Bangladesh borders; it is a well-recognized fact that out of 4,096 Kms long borders, 900Kms could never be fenced due to the topography (Saikia 2009).

The most critical element in the North-east insurgency is the fact of ethnic explosion, where during the colonial and pre-colonial period tribal conflicts were fought with traditional weapons like bows, arrows etc, after formation of India simultaneously the region witnessed the sprouting of bands of guerillas having access to sophisticated weapons, whereas the principle targets number of casualties and fatalities increased ever since.

Insurgencies orchestrated in North-East as a violent movement against the state could not be relegated to have similar patterns or features, as the context varies in asymmetric ways. As Tripura in 1947 comprised tribal population at ninety three percent, by the census of 1981 saw their numerically weakened position to that of 28.5 percent, sending panic among the tribal population and relative dominance of Bengalis in the political-social-and economic space. This was in concurrence with the adoption of Bengali as the state language. The foremost clarion call for the protection of indigenous tribal rights came from the formation of Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti in 1967; succeeded by Tribal National Volunteers in 1978, later the latter reached for an accord with the government.

Nevertheless, the end of 1980s saw the emergence of two insurgent organisations namely All Tripura Tiger Force and other being National Liberation

Force of Tripura, intended to flush out the Bengali settlers in a drive to prevent land encroachments.

Politically embedded project of partition in the North-East sparked sub-nationalist aspirations that are relevant till date, one of the salient features of the changing patterns of insurgency is the deviation of the militant organisations from their respective goals and their involvement in transnational crimes like drug trafficking, arms smuggling and extortion business (Sharma 2014).

North Eastern insurgents earlier comprised as a threat to internal security, their spurt in forging alliances with violent non-state actors in the neighbouring states of Bangladesh, and Myanmar has forced the central government to increase their counter insurgency operations. Protracted low intensity conflict in the region could not have thrived, if it could not have procured assistance externally. Despite the support and aid from neighbouring countries, with an exclusion of ULFA, rest of all major insurgent groups have been harbinger of their stated ideologies.

To cite few examples, Naga rebels received financial assistance and procured weapons from China, although they remained committed to their dogma of 'Christ for Nagaland' or ATTF's bases in Bangladesh (Bhaumik, 2009). While critically evaluating the history of insurgency in the North-East was spear headed primarily as a reaction to Bengali infiltration since independence, meanwhile the ultras have sought sanctuaries in East Pakistan or later Bangladesh. This question challenges the very essence of their stated objectives.

Meanwhile Insurgency in the North East has acquired significance owing to the fact that the violent non-state actors were reinforced with active support from external state actors in covert manner. The external support could be in the form of financial assistance, tactical training, as well as most relevantly safe havens. Cross border sanctuaries have acquired prominence in those insurgent movements where the counterinsurgency operations of state are in stronger position (Byman et.al 2001). Bangladesh or East Pakistan (till 1971) has proved to be significant in geopolitical terms of conflictual dynamics. One scholar on border studies has drawn a link between the routes for infiltrators as the one utilised by insurgents for transit to seek asylum in Bangladesh, in essence infiltrators tend to migrate through illegal channels to India for economic opportunities, whereas insurgents move for safe havens. In the past as well as in present to large extent Indian insurgents have sought safe havens in Sylhet, Khagrachari, Chittagong districts of Bangladesh.

Historically there are three phases when the territory of Bangladesh had operationalised insurgent safe havens. First was during the period of East Pakistan in 1958 when first camp for Naga rebels were established in the Sylhet region in which guerrillas were provided training in the usage of arms and ammunitions, in the later stage other camps were facilitated in Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is estimated that nearly three thousand guerrillas of NNC were trained to wage insurgency against India. Apart from NNC, Mizo rebel group known as Mizo National Front were sponsored and trained in CHT from 1967 to 1971.

The liberation war of 1971 between India and Pakistan gave strategic manoeuvre for Indian forces to destroy insurgent camps in the bordering areas and there was a long period of north eastern insurgency being forced into moribund state. The second phase was established after the assassination of Mujibur Rahman in 1975, as this was the period when India began sponsoring tribal guerrillas in CHT who were fighting for their rights and aspiration with Bangladesh state. Chakma tribal guerrillas received training from Research and Analysis Wing of India, proved fruitful when MNF training camps in CHT were destroyed by guerrillas (Bhaumik 1996). Eventually India's sponsorship to Chakma insurgents brought bitterness between India-Bangladesh relations. The strategy to counter Indian involvement, Zia-ur-Rehman's regime began its colossal relations with United Front for Liberation of Assam (ULFA) since then (Riaz 2016). Third Phase began in the 1990s through military operations uprooted Indian insurgents from their soil. For India this phase has new threats to be dealt with as the insurgents were found to have reached nefarious networking with Islamic fundamentalist groups operating in Bangladesh.

### **Transnational Threats of Trafficking**

The fate of dwellers living across the borders were defined by the Radcliffe Line, the colonial constructed territorial limitations divided the existing ethnic and cultural linkages interwoven through traditional economic exchanges. The new frontiers required a prolonged process to establish new avenues of trade and commerce. Differences in the core and periphery's development mechanism left the latter as of least concern for the centralised ruling power circles. This factor could be taken as a precursory notion that has translated the territory into a hot bed of trafficking activities.

The complex nature of India-Bangladesh 4,096 Kms long international borders could be ascertain by the fact that it passes through topography characterised

by hills, rivers, and woods, making the fencing as a difficult task for the Border management authorities. Adding more woes to the precarious situation, approximately nine hundred kilometres of borders are porous and possibility for fencing is near impossible.

The only identification for the international boundaries is the border pillars erected by respective governments of both countries. From the perspective of human geography, dwellers in this region have cross cutting ethnic linkages or belong to same ethnic stock.

The debate on the commodities being traded through illegal channels could be divided as licit and illicit goods. The clandestine exchanges of licit goods include cattle's, textiles, agricultural products etc. The question of why the border dwellers engaged in the smuggling activities is well captured by Willem Van Schendel in his work, whereas he identifies three major reasons for the same. First it could generate employment opportunities for the population, especially in the off-seasons of agricultural production in a year. Secondly, there has been relative increase in the overall wage level in the prescribed area due to stride in the income generation through smuggling. Thirdly, it has uplifted the standards of living as the general prices of goods have reduced. If smuggling is a form of trade against the will of the state, nevertheless could change the life of people and helped in escaping from poverty (Schendel 1993).

The above mentioned activities have its origins in the weak economic structures and underdevelopment to a large extent, although the trafficking of illicit goods have posed as a challenge like the smuggling of drugs, weapons, women across the borders. Indian insurgent groups whose sanctuaries are operational in Bangladesh are found to be running fake currency rackets, and such fake currencies are pushed into Indian markets through borders of North Tripura, and Dhalai districts. Whereas small arms proliferation in the border regions were detected multiple times like the one in 2003-04 period when fifty cases of arms and drugs trafficking cases were reported and seized. The Naga insurgent group like NSCN (IM faction), Assam insurgents like ULFA with their bases in Bangladesh have significantly engaged in procuring arms from Cox's Bazaar. In all these cases Bangladesh government's attitude has remained dismissive (Hussain 2006; Goswami 2012).

Apart from the insurgent activities, there has been a consistent political cry from different quarters of electoral politics to weed out the refugees turned migrants and the latest infiltrators from the Assam state. In the insurgency infested states, there had

been occasional clashes between indigenous tribal population and Bengali speaking Muslims, where the former questions the nationality of the latter being that of Bangladesh's illegal migrants. In a highly charged riot that took place in 2002 in Khokrajara district of Assam state, approximately 400, 000 people were displaced overnight. And mostly right wing organisations have bandwagon the idea of termination of illegal migrants, among them Bharatiya Janata Party has from 1990 onwards emphasised on the project. It was echoed extensively during 2014 Lok Sabha elections, where a xenophobia was entrenched in the political campaigning's across Assam state and later in the State Assembly elections that saw the emergence of NDA led BJP's victory in the state.

The legality of the Muslims of Bengali origin residing in North-Eastern states has been raised from time to time in political and non-political activism. Meanwhile the potential question is to be established as responsible? And in the year 2018 the long cherished demand of the publication of National Register of Citizens was released that claimed 40, 00, 000 as alien to the country. The puzzle is all about how state will address the plight of stateless, whereas at receiving end there is no state for them to claim. Another debate that has been churning in the national and regional politics of North-East is over the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 that would grant citizenship to migrants of illegal nature on the basis of their non-Muslim origin. The bill was received with much opposition particularly from North-East states, as its borders are inherently vulnerable to the movement of populace from Bangladesh putting demographic pressure largely on the inhabitants' outreach to scarce resources.

Bringing all the concerns together North-East pristine natural beauty is marred with a prolonged history of bloodshed that has its remnants from GOI's policies on migration. At one level, the open and insecure borders have provided as a gateway for refugees, migrants, and illicit actors to move hassle-free, and on another level, political regimes in the centre have remained least concerned on the plight of dwellers in North-East India.

Academic literature has branded North-East India as 'Troubled Periphery', 'Fragmented Borderlands' etc, seven decades of independence from colonial exploitation could no longer generate a cooperative security framework for the region to check unlawful movement of people and goods, that have plunged the region to be exposed to transnational threats. Thus, the Indian state requires identifying the limitations in its role as voluntary and non-voluntary host state to migration or population movement.

## Conclusion

A prolonged insurgency in the North-Eastern states of India could be singled out as the major political force in the region that has engulfed the politicians in the states and centre to craft their policies accordingly. The whole state of affairs has its roots in the colonial administrative set up with its ignorance of ethnic cultural realities, and its repetition by the successor Indian state. In the official discourse on refugees, till 1971 war was classified as a humanitarian concern for the state, the successful culmination of India-Pak war created a new state of Bangladesh, since then India has repeatedly calculated the movement of the population as a threat to national security. Such ideational deviation could be assessed from the fact that East Pakistan's operational bases for insurgents despite being dismantled by Indian armed forces during the liberation war became active after the fate of Bangladesh was entangled in the political instabilities and military coups. For the state whose imagined demarcated boundaries became legitimate overnight, although socio-cultural realities haunted the essence of the notion of nation. From the situation of North-East, one could extract the basic information that state should endeavour to construct policies through a federal structure with a holistic vision, and coercion as the foremost resort to be usurped, where the ideas of human security prevail for durable peace.

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Every year's independence celebrations often eclipse the partition memories, as remembrance is painful. Moreover, within South Asian, the partitioned states have minority populations, whose loyalty towards the nation is questioned due to the presence of the same community in a numerically stronger position in the adjoining country, for e.g., Hindus in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and Muslims in India. Partition could never erase historical communal hatreds, as it surfaces in the political sphere, often religious minorities become victims of targeted violence. Hence, accommodation rather assimilation, persecution rather integration became the identifying features, as the divided paradise could never bring perpetual peace.

The above-mentioned issues continue to haunt the cooperation between both countries, as mutual suspicion has grown over the years, the rise of radical elements have discredited prospects for better ties. More often bilateral issues are used as a political tool during election campaigns in both Bangladesh and India. The former has accused India of being hegemonic in the region, with its origins in the Indira doctrine. Bangladesh is charged for forced migration of its population to India through its borders. Such accusations were earlier economic concerns, now dubbed with security reasons. In an era of globalization, inter-connectedness is taken as a positive sum game. Nevertheless, both countries derive its roots from partition memories, what remains in a moribund state is the will to join hands for prosperity.

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#### Notes

- [\[1\]](#) Assam, Meghalaya
- [\[2\]](#) West Bengal's Northern borders of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North and South Dinajpur etc.

13. Tan, T.Y & G. Kudaisya (2000), *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, New York: Routledge

- [\[3\]](#) West Bengal's Southern borders of Sunderbans.
- [\[4\]](#) Lands formed by the shifting river course that has been a reason for friction between India and East Pakistan and later Bangladesh due to the problems in the identification of International borders.