

Migration and Environmental Disorder in Post-Colonial North Bengal: An Impact on Society

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ABSTRACT

Migration and Environmental Disorder in Post-Colonial North Bengal: An Impact on Society a micro level study. Environmental disbalance and Migration is a fact. Several countries in India have faced this problem. Migration is one of the primary factors of population explosion. The theory of 'push' and 'pull' factor were mainly responsible for migration of people from one place to another. As because, North Bengal is considered as a gateway of India, so migration means did not only indicate the outsiders, migration indicates the internal migration also. However, whether the population increases for internal or external reason, it creates an unusual situation for a common traditional society, economy, politics, administration, socio-cultural lifestyle as well as the environment of North Bengal. Environmental resources were greatly affected by the migration issues in North Bengal. Actually, human migration and population growth in concert with globalization trends, greatly affect the environment and conservation efforts. The concept of the environment and the migration that is "environmental refugee" is particularly earned the attention during 1970s. It can be said that the real purpose of the said paper is to discuss the effect of migration on the environment and on the lives of the people of North Bengal.

Key Words: Migration, Environment, Environmental refugee, Globalization Immigrant etc.

AREA OF THE STUDY

North Bengal includes the areas west of Jamuna river, north of Padma River, Bardhaman, Rajshahi and Rangpur are included in it. Districts of Jalpaiguri Division and Malda Division were included from West Bengal. Parts of Darjeeling Division were also included in North Bengal. But after India's independence, and Redcliffe Award, this demographic picture changed dramatically. Present North Bengal consists of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda and Alipurduar districts. North Bengal comprised about 18.35% percent area under West Bengal. According to census report of 2011, 17.2 million people living in this region. Many Rajbanshi, Mech, Bodo, Rabha, Santal, Munda, Nepali tribals lived in that region with their own folk culture and life far away from the madding crowd of the metropolitan city (Acharya, 1987). Indeed, it is a land of hills, climbing, sharp mostly covered by forest. It is said that North Bengal was known as the gateway to North East India (Mosahary, 1989). Many migrants came and settled in North Bengal due to this geological termination. In fact, there had a major number of migrations to the northern part of Bengal then the other parts of Bengal. Migration belongs exclusively to the Aryans, Tibetan, Burman. The Iranians, the Aryans, came and settled in the region (Acharya, 1987). After 1947 and specially after 1971, many East Pakistani Muslims settled in North Bengal with their own customs. The geographical location of North Bengal was responsible for this situation. Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan in the north, Assam and Bangladesh in the east, West Bengal and Bihar in the south. The Chinese border also played an important role in this context. The region is situated as the center of a network of

connections with different civilizations (Sarkar, 1960). It has greatly affected the socio-economy and especially the environment of North Bengal.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study conducted based on primary and secondary genesis. In this research work different types of methodology followed like, describing, analytical and interpretive. Data's were collected from two major sources, 1. Primary source and 2. Secondary sources. Oral sources also help in preparing this study as it is an important source material. Field work and interview of the aged people in North Bengal were helping to formulate valuable information about North Bengal.

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Environmental studies today have got a new momentum because it is not a problem of a state or a country, but it is a major problem of the whole world and the entire living society. Nowadays we all are aware about the environment and its pollution. There are many reasons behind environmental hazards or pollution and natural disasters in which some natural disasters are caused by natural causes or geographical factors such as earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, volcanic eruptions etc. where men are helpless, they have nothing to do. But many Environmental pollution including natural disasters such as floods, draughts, landslides, air pollution, water pollution, global warming and deforestation due to which the ice on the face of the Earth, especially in Antarctica, is melting, green plants, plants and animals damage is man-made, where man is affecting and destroying nature and natural things for his greed. These selfish people do not care about the interests of the world; they only know how to fulfill their own interests. In densely populated areas, the continuous flow of migration degrades the environment. Not only air pollution is caused by fumes from factories and homes, but also water is polluted due to solid waste from factories, chemical waste and other fumes. Climate, hydrology and topography are also changing due to the continuous growth of migration. These migrations have adverse effects on human society.

Pollutions like noise pollution, air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution etc. (Choudhury, 2012). Population growth and demographic change in the northeastern part of India, like other regions, also increase environmental problems and pressure on its resources. Rapid urbanization in various places has resulted in heavy metals in urban soils of the mentioned regions, especially in hilly areas of the country. The manner, in which townships are being developed, is dangerous to preserve the ecological balance of nature. Earthquakes or landslides can cause serious disasters at any time. Heavy metals are hazardous to human health and are known carcinogens. British thinker Malthus, point out that a growing population puts pressure on agricultural land, causes environmental degradation and forces cultivation on poor and inferior land (Husain, 2011). This environmental degradation ultimately reduces agricultural yields and food availability, causing famine and disease and death, thereby reducing population growth rates (Wikipedia)

Population growth as well as migration is also seen as a major cause of air, water, and soil and solid-waste pollution. The result, Malthus theorized, is a balanced population that enjoys lower levels of both income and environmental quality. Malthus advocated positive and preventive coercive control of human population, as well as the abolition of weak laws. More recent scholarly articles acknowledge that there is no question that population growth can contribute to environmental degradation, but that its effects can be modified by economic growth and modern technology.

During post-colonial period the population of North Bengal mostly increased due to the influx of migrated peoples from neighboring Countries and States, especially from East Bengal. If we review the census report of after 1947 and 1971 very clear demographic variation can be observed. This is one of the reasons for the population growth of North Bengal. Now, trying to highlight some data tools of population growth of North

Bengal, which surprisingly is one of the reasons for demographic as well as environmental change in North Bengal.

Distribution of population in North Bengal – 1951

Name of District	Area (sq. mi)	Person per (sq. mi)	Total population	Male	Female	Percentage of total population in North Bengal
West Bengal	30775.3	372.53	24810308	13345441	11464867	N.A.
Malda	1,407.9	327.29	937580	476794	460786	25.41
West Dinajpur	1,334.8	252.26	720573	383853	336720	19.53
Jalpaiguri	2,378.3	173.84	914538	501090	413448	24.79
Darjeeling	1,159.7	177.84	445260	239018	206242	12.06
Cooch Behar	1,334.1	231.84	671158	361860	309298	18.19
North Bengal	7614.8	226.73	3689109	1962615	1726494	14.87

Source: Census of India, 1951, Volume VI, West Bengal, Sikkim & Chandernagar, Part II-Tables, A. Mitr, Manager of Publications, Delhi, Government of India Press, Calcutta, India, 1953, p.9

Distribution of Population in North Bengal-1961

Division/District / police-station	Area (sq. mi)	Persons per Square Mile	Total Population	Male	Female
West Bengal	34194.1	1021	34926279	18599144	16327135
Malda District	1391.9	878	1221923	621990	599933
West Dinajpur District	2061.9	642	1323797	694372	629425
Darjeeling District	1256.6	497	624640	335036	289604
Jalpaiguri District	2382.9	570	1359292	733339	625953
Cooch Behar District	1313.9	776	1019806	539694	480112
Total in North Bengal	8407.2	660	5549458	2924431	2625027

Census of India, Volume XVI, West Bengal And Sikkim, Part-IIA, General Population Table, Datta Gupta, published by The Manager of Publications, Delhi, Printed by Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1964, pp.88-92

Distribution of Population in the Districts of North Bengal 1971

District/ Subdivision /Police station	Area (Sq. Km)	Persons per (Sq. Km)	Total Population	Male	Female
Maldah District	3733.0	432.00	1612657	827706	784951
West Dinajpur	5358.0	347.12	1859887	967937	891950
Darjeeling District	3149.0	248.26	781777	415442	366335
Jalpaiguri	6227.0	281.06	1750159	927707	822452
Koch Bihar	3387.0	417.53	1414183	737931	676252
North Bengal	21854	339.46	7418663	3876723	3541940

Source: Census of India 1971, Series22, West Bengal, Part-II-C(i), Social and Cultural Tables C-VII and C-VIII, Bhaskar Ghose, Government Press of India, Calcutta,1971, pp.10-18

Distribution of Population in the Districts of North Bengal 1981

District/Subdivision/Police Station	Area In Km ²	Population Per Km ²	Total persons	Male	Female
Maldah District	3733.0	544	2031,871	1042498	989373
West Dinajpur	5,358.0	449	2,404,947	1,241,611	1,163,336
Darjeeling District	3,149.0	325	1,024,269	542,567	481,702
Jalpaiguri	6,227.0	356	2,214,871	1,159,843	1,055,028
Koch Bihar	3,387.0	523	1,771,643	915,461	856,182
North Bengal	21854.0	432.31	9447601	4901980	4545621

Census of India 1981, Series-23, West Bengal, Paper I of 1984, Household Population by Religion of Head of the Household, S.N. Ghosh, IAS, Director of Census Operations, West Bengal, pp.2-43

Distribution of Population in North Bengal- 1991

Name of District / PS	Area (Sq.km)	Density	Total population	Male	Female	Percentage of total population In North Bengal
West Bengal	88752.00	767	68077965	35510633	32567332	—
Maldah	3733.00	69.89	2637032	1360541	1276491	21.91
West Dinajpur	5359.00	583.63	3127653	1620740	1506913	25.99
Jalpaiguri	6227.00	449.74	2800543	1453194	1347349	23.26
Darjeeling	3149.00	412.80	1299919	679323	620596	10.79
Koch Bihar	3387.00	641.02	2171145	11223606	1048839	18.03
Total in North Bengal	218981855	215.49	12036292	16337404	5800188	17.68

Source: Census report of 1991

From the above-mentioned data table, it is clearly observed that how much population is increasing per census year. A huge variation can be observed in its population from the census report of 1951- 1991.

North Bengal is full of traditional history since ancient times. This tradition is centered on the pleasant climate of North Bengal and some of the indigenous tribal people of North Bengal. Those who have the imprint of nature in every step of their life. This variation in socio-economy as well as environment brings radical changes in their lives. Identifying the indigenous peoples of the region is also difficult and controversial due to the lack of primitive source materials or ancient written literature in the region. After using the ancient Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist literature based in Central India, the writings of foreign travelers and of course the archaeological sources and the most important oral sources of the region, it can be said that the people originated from the Indo-Mongoloid race, an integral part of the society and culture of the region. The Indo-Mongoloid human race originating from the tribes, *Koch, Mech-Bodo, Rava, Garo, Toto, Jalda, Tharu, Dhimal*, and many other communities were indigenous to this region (Sutradhar, 2019).

The Rajbanshi communities were one of the major important indigenous communities of North Bengal. One

of the oldest communities of North Bengal. Most of their lifestyle includes nature. Land is an integral part of nature and is one of the livelihoods of people of Rajbanshi community. A review of contemporary British history shows very few Rajbanshi children progressing to education or employment. Most of the people's concentrate on agriculture for their livelihood (Adhikary, 2015). They are generally known as nature lovers and worship nature as their mother counterpart. The Rajbanshi community has several God and Goddess who are an integral part of nature. Water, air, fire, wind, trees are worshiped as God. Teesta Buri i.e. Teesta River is worshiped as their mother. Not only Teesta River but almost all rivers have the same idea. *Bana Durga Thakur, Hudum Deo, Madankam Thakur, Banger Biya, Basumati Thakur, Jal Thakur, TorsaPir Baba, Paban Thakur* etc. is one of the examples of their nature God and Goddesses (Ray, 1999). From here it can be understood how much their dependence on nature. But the constant influx of outsiders and increase in population has created an unusual situation where this change in nature has brought about a drastic change in their lifestyle.

Mech – Bodo community is among the oldest communities in North Bengal. They can never stay in one place for long, after some time they changed their residence. Their way of life, religious practices are all rooted in nature. They believed the nature God Bathaou (Sutradhar, 2013). That religious belief depends entirely on nature. Since their way of life is entirely dependent on nature as a result of harmless nature variation, they did not maintain their old traditions.

Toto community were another indigenous people of North Bengal especially lived in the forest area of Jalpaiguri district. They originated from the Indo- Mongoloid race. Abani Mohan Kusari in his Gazetteer highlighted that the Toto tribes lived in Totopara, which covered in East side with Torsha River and in South side with Titi forest (Kusari, 1981). They also depend on environment.

Rabhas were the major indigenous peoples of North Bengal, originated from Indo- Mongoloid race. These Non-Aryan tribes entirely believed on nature. All their cultural, customs, religious beliefs based on environment.

Garos of North Bengal belongs from the Indo-Mongoloid race. These tribes have their own language, cultural traditions. Their occupation entirely depends on hunting and shifting cultivation. These Non-Aryan tribes do not like the modern cultural and customs. They have their own rules for their own culture.

Due to the migration and population growth a dangerous effect on the environment is created. From the increasing number of people and the development of new cities, buildings, industries and excessive number of vehicles destroy the ecological balance of environment. As a result of which the natural calamities that occurred at different times, affecting the rainfall, erosion, water pollution, and increasing temperature as well. Deforestation is one of the major outcomes of environmental disorder. It has dangerously affected the nature and environment as we all are familiar with the fact that living society cannot survive without trees. It maintains the ecological balance of nature including temperature, rainfall, snowfall, balance of oxygen and carbon-dioxide in the air.

It is unfortunate that despite knowing the dangerous output of deforestation many of us are greedy and selfish and involved in deforestation for financial gain through illegal means. Water scarcity is not only dangerous for the people of the region, water levels are decreasing all over the world due to the unlimited use of water from the earth's ground, especially for irrigation. Kamal Bhawal, former official of Irrigation Department, Government of West Bengal, said that the irrigation process, extraction of water from the earth's ground should be stopped, water should be conserved or conserved through cut off large ponds or canals or swamps from monsoon water during monsoons, otherwise it will be an embarrassment to future generations (Ghosh & Sutradhar, 2018). Water can also be collected from the river using canal system.

Recently it has been seen in different parts of North Bengal like other parts of the country, the level of

underground water is decreasing day by day. It is reported that water level in Siliguri dries up in March to April (Ghosh & Sutradhar, 2018). The same thing is found in other parts of North Bengal. We also observe an effect of population growth on rainfall. Harendra Narayan Chowdhury in his book had highlighted that in 1890-91 average rainfall in Cooch Behar State was 187.42 inches, in 1891-92 average rainfall of Cooch Behar State was 90.71 inches, in 1892-93 it was 179.17 inches, and the highest rainfall in 1878-79 was 194.13 inches (Chowdhury, 1903). But if we move slowly towards present times, we can see that the rainfall of Cooch Behar district has gradually decreased. In 1996-2005 average rainfall of Cooch Behar district is 120.34 inches.

CONCLUSION

This is not only the picture in Cooch Behar, but we can see the same picture all over North Bengal. The amount of rainfall in the whole of North Bengal is gradually decreasing. On the other hand, we see the opposite picture in the case of temperature. Because of population growth, modern technology, industries, development of urbanization, the temperature is continuously increasing not only in North Bengal, but all over the world. During 2008-2012 average temperature of Cooch Behar district was 37°C or 98.60°F. That was in the year of 1948, highest was 99°F and lowest was 47°F. From the above discussion it can be said that the population growth and its adverse impact on the environment is being continuously increased. Society economy and politics have not been spared from this population influx; its impact on the environment is being noticed day by day.

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