



Migration, Conflict and Internal Displacement in North-East India: A Study with Focus on Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis and Bengalis in Assam

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Abstract

In actuality, the term "migration" refers to the process of moving from one location to another; it can be either temporary or permanent, and it is influenced by several determinants, including social, economic, political, and environmental variables. During the colonial and post-colonial eras, a vast number of migrants arrived in northeastern India. At the same time, its effects have been felt in this area's society. In particular, the state of Assam has had numerous instances of strife or ethnic clash, primarily between the local population and migrant communities (Bengali and Nepali) since independence. Ethnic violence has frequently targeted migrant communities, sending them back to their home countries as illegal immigrants or doubtful citizens. Despite having lived in the state for a long time and assimilated into Assam's mainstream multicultural community, they have often been labelled as aliens because of their figures, which have raised concerns in the area. In addition, they have experienced internal displacement and widespread evictions. This study examines the displacement of Bengalis and Nepalis in northeastern India due to war, with a particular emphasis in Assam. The study also examines institutional and governmental perspectives about rehabilitation and aiding these internally displaced victims.

Keywords: migration, Nepali, ethnic violence, internal displacement.

Introduction

The Latin verb "migrare" is from where the word "migration" originates. Moving from one location to another is what it literally means, and it can be either temporary or permanent. Nonetheless, it usually refers to the migration of individuals from one location, community, or nation to another. Undoubtedly, there are determining variables that contribute to this type of migration worldwide; these causes may vary depending on the countries and time. Occasionally it occurs for political, socioeconomic, and environmental reasons. The world has been experiencing migration for a very long time; it is not a recent occurrence. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, there are numerous instances of various forms of migration in the

world, such as the forced movement of slaves under European traders, the enormous expulsions by Nazi Germany, and the migration of Europeans to North America, among others. In addition, a significant number of people have migrated from the colonial system to the current globalisation system. Furthermore, according to the 2010 World Migration Report, there will be 405 million migrants worldwide by 2050. Migration is an ongoing process. In general, the world's history would be incomplete without the history of migration. We acknowledge that India, a nation of migrants, is not mutually exclusive with the northeast. Various ethnic groups have or have migrated into northeastern India from different locations at different times, such as Bengalis and Nepalis.

Some academics have stated that the topic of migration has an impact on a nation's politics, economy, and society; occasionally, it even influences the process of formulating policies. It might be the source of tension between the indigenous population and migrant groups in the area. Large-scale expulsions and evictions of migrants from various South Asian regions occurred at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century as a result of identity claims and upward ethnic conflict. Other recent examples of such evictions and conflicts include the exodus of the "Lhotshampas" from Bhutan and the eviction of Bengalis and Nepalis, who had lived in various parts of Northeast India and Assam state for almost 200 or 150 years, due to anti-foreigner agitation that started in the late 1970s. There were ethnic clashes or conflict situations in the Northeast and the state of Assam. To comprehend the nature of migration, the current study examines the internal displacement caused by conflict experienced by Bengalis and Nepalis who have migrated in northeastern India, particularly in the state of Assam.

To meet the aim of the study, the following research objective are framed:

1. To know the nature of migration of Nepalis and Bengalis into north-east along with Assam.
2. To explore the consequences/impacts arising out of migration issues.
3. To explore the scenario of Internally displaced persons in the north-east as well as in the Assam. And to look at Government attitudes towards rehabilitation/relief for the victims.

Literature Review

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) represent a significant concern and constitute the largest population at risk globally. However, the international community has not been able to establish a formal, legal, and precise definition of the term 'IDPs.' Debates persist regarding the definition and identification of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This conceptual gap has been addressed by efforts that are often either overly broad or excessively narrow, limiting their analytical and operational utility across various situations within the model or paradigm. In 1992, the Secretary General of the United Nations presented a definition of "internally displaced persons" in a report. This preliminary definition omits numerous significant cases, particularly those involving smaller populations or marginalised communities as well as individuals who were expelled rather than having fled (Nath L., 2005). A comprehensive definition of internally displaced individuals (IDPs) has emerged, rooted in the framework of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Consequently, this definition has evolved

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into a more expansive and operational understanding of IDPs. This study will utilise a modified version. This definition characterises internally displaced persons as individuals or groups compelled to leave their homes or habitual residences due to generalised violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters, to evade the consequences of armed conflict, without having crossed an internationally recognised border of a state.

Research Method

Both primary and secondary data served as the foundation for this investigation. The information used in the work was gathered from various sources, including the census, government documents, memoranda, and websites, as well as books, journals, articles, and the internet. This study employed the descriptive approach/method, which is often analytical in nature.

The Primary motive in many postcolonial examples of internal displacement has been credited/ascribed to conflict. Analysts attribute conflict to the reasons of bellow:

1. Differences of identity based on ethnic or religious grounds.
2. Consequences of those differences, when it comes to sharing power and distributing the nation's resources and opportunities.
3. The manipulation of these differences by government authorities for political or military purposes.

Notably, while dealing with the problem of displacement, authorities and state governments are often found to ignore these issues, and resultantly the effects on the displaced people and their families reflect more.

The concept of 'well-founded fear' is often regarded as the basis for determining the status of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The authorities often struggle to translate this fear into a legal framework that provides adequate care and protection. The victims of ethnic violence, along with the justification and causes of fear, are frequently influenced by the indirect effects of such violence, leading to disproportionate treatment and a lack of recognition. The inability of power agencies to address the ethical dilemmas surrounding care, hospitality, and the norm of responsibility has led the international community to seek the identification of internally displaced persons as a distinct category. The objective of identifying IDPs is not to confer an advantaged status upon them, but rather to ensure that their specific needs are addressed in conjunction with those of others in a given context. The Oslo Declaration and Plan of Action synthesise proposals from numerous NGOs and the UNHCR, while the UNDP acknowledges the importance of recognising IDPs as a distinct group to facilitate their return and reintegration. Northeast India, characterised by limited international attention and socio-economic challenges, necessitates a targeted focus on marginalised groups, such as the Nepalis and Bengalis. Recognising victims as internally displaced persons (IDPs) is essential for providing them with appropriate assistance. The internally displaced populations of Nepalis and Bengalis in the northeast and Assam have not garnered sufficient attention due to their relatively small numbers and mobility, rendering them largely

inconspicuous. The plight of internally displaced individuals persists, highlighting the ongoing need for care, hospitality, and responsibility. The victimisation of Nepalis and Bengalis is prevalent not only in Northeast India and Assam but also in regions of South Bhutan and Bangladesh, where it has garnered international attention.

Result and Discussion

Situating Northeast India: An Overview of Migration, Conflict and Internally Displaced Persons:

Background of the study area: The Northeast region is in the northern and eastern corners of India and is commonly referred to as the "Land of Seven Sisters." The portrayal of early North-East India significantly differs from its current state; prior to the 19th century, the region was governed by various dynasties, kings, chiefs, and local chieftains. Following the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), the situation altered significantly, resulting in British control over Assam and Manipur as stipulated in the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826. Subsequently, the British began annexing various parts of the region to expand their authority. Ultimately, the region encompassed the Cachar, Jaintia, and Khashi hills, Naga Hills, Lushai Hills, among others; during the British Raj, the landscapes of this region were designated as "North-East India" and incorporated into the Bengal Province. By the late 20th century CE, the northeastern regions of India had been organised into multiple states. At the time of India's independence in 1947, there existed only three states: Tripura and Manipur, both princely states, along with Assam. Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Meghalaya were historically included within the territory of Assam. Between 1947 and 1987, they became detached to establish their own separate states, a process driven by ethnic and tribal identities. Currently, it encompasses an area of 262,179 square kilometres (Indian culture, Government of India, Ministry of Culture, n.d.). It is characterised by hilly and mountainous terrain. An international border delineates it (refer to the map in figure 1). The region exhibits significant cultural richness due to its diversity, with over 200 distinct ethnic groups, each possessing its own unique culture. Additionally, it is home to a significant number of tribal communities (Goswami, 2012); therefore, it is sometimes referred to as mini-India.



Figure-1: Map of North-East India showing International Border

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Migration: Both the northeast region and India as a whole have experienced migration and have provided refuge to displaced individuals. India's history reveals that it is a nation characterised by migration. The northeast region has a unique cultural and ethnic composition due to historical migration patterns. The British colonial practice of settling ethnic outsiders in various sectors, such as low-cost labourers or farmers in the underused fields of the Brahmaputra Valley, as well as clerks in lower bureaucratic positions, introduced a migrant-native dynamic to the indigenous ethnic composition of the region. The colonial province subsequently transformed into a common homeland for locals, tribals, and migrants, leading to significant alterations in the demographic composition of the area.

Additionally, a new dimension emerged in the postcolonial stage, contributing to the already complex scenario due to the strategic position of India's Northeastern region in South Asia, which rendered it susceptible to undocumented immigration across its porous land and extensive river borders. The region has experienced an influx of immigrants over the past century, including economic migrants, individuals affected by environmental issues, and refugees from neighbouring countries such as Nepal, East Bengal, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), as well as Burmese from Myanmar. Consequently, the population of the Northeast has risen from approximately one million to over 20 million. The Nepalis exhibited a distinct dynamic following the commencement of their migration to Northeast India. According to the 1941 Census records, Nepal accounted for 45% of immigrants to India. The Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950, revised in 1956, along with the Tripartite Delhi Agreement of 1951, granted individuals the rights to acquire property, settle, engage in business, seek employment, and move freely within India. These agreements enabled them to mitigate the economic pressures and underdevelopment they faced in Nepal. Nepali migration to the Northeast has significantly increased.

Table-1. Demography of the Nepalis in Northeast India (1951-1991)

States	1951	1961	1971	1976	1981	1991
Arunachal Pradesh	NA	10,610 (25,000)	30,912 (85,000)	NA	45,508	NA
Assam	101,338*	215,213 132,925*	349,116 353,673	NA	NA	432,519
Manipur	2860	13,571	26,381	(36,604)	37,046	
Meghalaya	NA	32,288 (6000)	44,445 (10,111)	NA	61,259	
Mizoram	NA	2042 (2000)	NA (4000)	NA	5983	
Nagaland	NA	10,400	17,536	NA	24,918	
Tripura	NA	1696	2107	NA	2190	

Sources: Timsina, 1992. Figures in brackets from Dutt, 1981 and figures in asterisks from Sinha, 1982.

Assam, a state in Northeast India, has historically borne a significant burden of migrants as a result of colonial practices. The state comprises individuals of Mongoloid and Austro-Mongoloid origin, who arrived during the early stages of settlement. The Aryan people originated from northern and eastern India. Muslims first engaged with the Kamrup King in

the early 13th century during the state's migration history. Subsequently, a peaceful migration of Tai princes into the region emerged; they arrived in Assam after crossing the Patkai range. Sukapha established the Ahom kingdom, which ruled the region for 600 years. During the Ahom Kingdom, various groups, including prisoners, artisans, and preachers, migrated to this region (Nath, 2021). Nevertheless, their numbers were limited. Conversely, large-scale immigration occurred under British authority, with various ethnic groups migrating to the state of Assam during both the colonial and post-colonial periods. Examples include tea garden workers, Marwaris, Nepalis, Bengali Hindus, and Bengali Muslim communities. This ongoing immigration has persisted even after independence. This study focuses exclusively on the migration of Nepalis and Bengalis into the state, addressing the emerging issues discussed below:

In the early 19th century, a significant number of Nepalese individuals began migrating to the Northeast region, including the state of Assam. A significant number of Nepalis, along with their families, established settlements in the hilly regions of British India, such as Darjeeling and Shillong, the latter now serving as the capital of Meghalaya. The Gurkhas demonstrated remarkable heroism and loyalty, adapting well to the hilly terrain of the northeast. Additionally, their cost-effectiveness compared to Indian armies contributed to the British government's interest in recruiting them for the British army. Consequently, the British Armed Forces enlisted numerous Nepalis, including the valiant Gurkhas. Additionally, British authorities, during the expansion of their rule, required strong labourers for farming, cultivation, and deforestation, with the Nepalis being the only option available. The social and economic conditions in Nepal were unfavourable, marked by caste-based discrimination and issues such as population growth, deforestation, and debt. These factors contributed to the migration of Nepalis to Assam and the Northeast. Devi (2007).

Under similar push factors, individuals migrated to the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam and engaged in animal husbandry. They primarily occupied and settled in wastelands and char lands in Assam, engaging in dairy farming at various locations within the Brahmaputra Valley. Initially, Nepali immigrants settled in three districts of Assam: Darang, Kamrup, and Lakhimpur. Doley (2020). Currently, they are engaged in various formal and informal sectors in Assam and throughout the country. The demographic profile of Nepalis in Assam and its growth rate have been increasing steadily over the decades. Table 1 illustrates the growth of the Nepali population in Assam. In the early 20th century, the Nepali population was recorded at 21,347. However, it increased in 1971, with the figure rising to approximately 400,000 (i.e., 349,116) (Census of India Report, 1901-71; 1991). Historian Amalendu Guha discusses the significant population of professional cattle grazers of Nepali origin in Assam.

Table 2 Growth of Nepali Population in Assam (1901-1991)

Year	Nepali Population in Assam	Percentage
1901	21,347	0.35
1911	47,654	.67
1921	70,344	.94
1931	88,306	1.02
1951	1,01,338	1.26
1961	2,15,213	1.98
1971	3,49,116	2.38
1991	4,32,519	1.93

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Source: Census of India 1901-71; 1991; M. Hussain, 1993: 258.

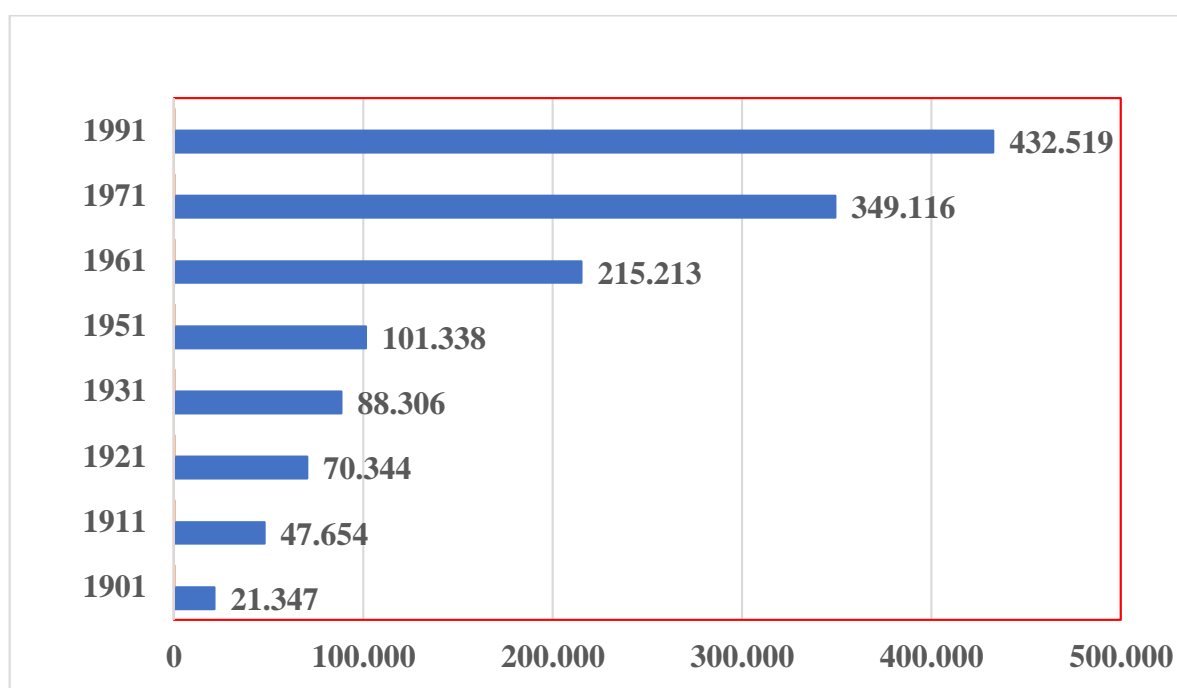


Figure-2 Growth of Nepali Population in Assam(1901-1991)

Bengalis in Assam: The stream of Bengalis (both Hindu and Muslim) have migrated into Assam, a part of North-east India primarily under the following three phases:

First Phase: The colonial government brought in the educated personality only for lower-level bureaucratic, clerical, or other official tasks. The majority of them were Bengali Hindus. Many Bengali Muslims then moved to the state of Assam, primarily from the East Bengal region, when the British began to build the tea business and other industries like roads, railroads, coal industry, etc. In Assam, they needed many workers. At the same time, they examined the state's vast uncultivated area, which was mostly alluvial and suitable for agriculture. The majority of Assamese or locals had been growing just one crop annually and had no desire to work as labourers in construction, tea, or other specialised industries or in expanding land cultivation to fulfil the state's food needs (Doley, 2020). For this reason, the British encouraged skilled Muslim peasants from East Bengal (formerly Bengal) to relocate to Assam and use the virgin land for building labour. Additionally, the "Grow more food" initiative, which was started by the Muslim League ministry under Sadullah, contributed to and promoted the migration of Bengali Muslims to Assam. These migration patterns, which were entirely in the political and economic interests of the ruling class, persisted until 1947.

Second phase: Bengal is divided into two halves, the Indian state of West Bengal and the Pakistani province of East Bengal (formerly known as East Pakistan), just as India was divided into two nations. Due to sociopolitical factors (violence) in the East Pakistan region, the majority of Bengali people moved to India and settled in Kolkata, a city in West Bengal. Many of them then moved to Assam's Barak and Brahmaputra valleys as well as the northeast Indian state of Tripura.

Third phase: Due to a conflict known as the "Bangladesh Liberation War" in 1971, East Pakistan lost its name and became Bangladesh. The sociopolitical climate in both East and West Pakistan was hot throughout this war; there was communal violence between Muslims and Hindus, disputes, political instability, etc., and its momentum put human lives in jeopardy. The majority of these migrants were Bengali Hindus, and many sought asylum in India, particularly in West Bengal and the northeastern regions of Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, etc. Nearly 10 million refugees from Bengal came to India. After the war in Bangladesh, 1.5 million of them might have returned. The remaining refugees never returned to Bangladesh and are now living in India, especially in the northeastern states and West Bengal (Mishra, 2014; Doley, 2020).

Conflict and Displacement: Large-scale migration in northeastern India is on the rise, which has caused a significant shift in the demographics and an increase in the population. It thus resulted in a competition for jobs and resources, since opportunities and land became scarce. Additionally, in practically every state in the northeast, local communities and tribal people have become more anxious about identity crises and associated tendencies. This competition quickly identified migrant groups and communities as potential candidates for deportation back to their home countries. At some point, almost every state in the region has practiced political mobilization. The practice includes organised violence against migrants, anti-outsider movements that cause societies of migrant origin to be victimised and expelled, and occasionally even ethnic cleansing of nonindigenous groups. This "identity politics," which established an exclusive claim to a territory that had developed as a shared homeland since the beginning, progressively came to define the postcolonial Northeast Indian political agenda. The Assam Movement (1979–1985) sharply highlighted anti-outsider politics and provided a model for numerous nativist movements in the Northeast. Since the classes were never precisely defined and may have been purposefully kept vague, this openly organised tension against illegal immigrants also affected some Indian residents. Tribes and the descendants of migrants in the various Northeast Indian states quickly became part of this. Ethnic conflicts, which began as disputes between "indigenous" and "foreign" groups, have transformed into conflicts between individuals who are practically native to the area. To force other ethnic groups to leave disputed territory and relocate to poorly furnished and insufficiently protected displacement camps, rebels and separatist groups typically target civilians with their attacks on villages, Holocaust survivors, and burnt homes (Nath L., 2005). According to Nath's article, throughout the past 50 years of independence, there have been at least seven significant instances of conflict and internal displacement in Northeast India and Assam.

The displacement of the- (a) Na-Asamiya or the New Assamese Muslims, Bengalis, Santhals and Nepalis in Assam; (b) the Bengalis from Tripura; (c) the Reangs from Mizoram; (d) the Nagas, Paite and Kukis from Manipur; (e) Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.

The following figures gives an outline of internal displacement in the Northeast India. The statistics are approximate and computed from bellow mentioned source, but verifiable and cross checkable.

Table 3: Internal Displacement in Northeast India (1947- Present)

State	Year	No. of Displaced Person
Assam	1947-1998	711,097
Manipur	1980-1997	41,600
Mizoram	1967-2001	174,346
Tripura	1980-2001	57,614
Nagaland	1980s	Not Known
Meghalaya	1980-1991	10,000

Source: Nath. L., Migrants in Flight: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis in Northeast India, *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Number 1, January 2005. Note: The researcher used the data/ figures after totalling the all figures recorded in the source, (i.e., it was separated as year-to-year model, but I have calculated and totalled just for minimizing the table).

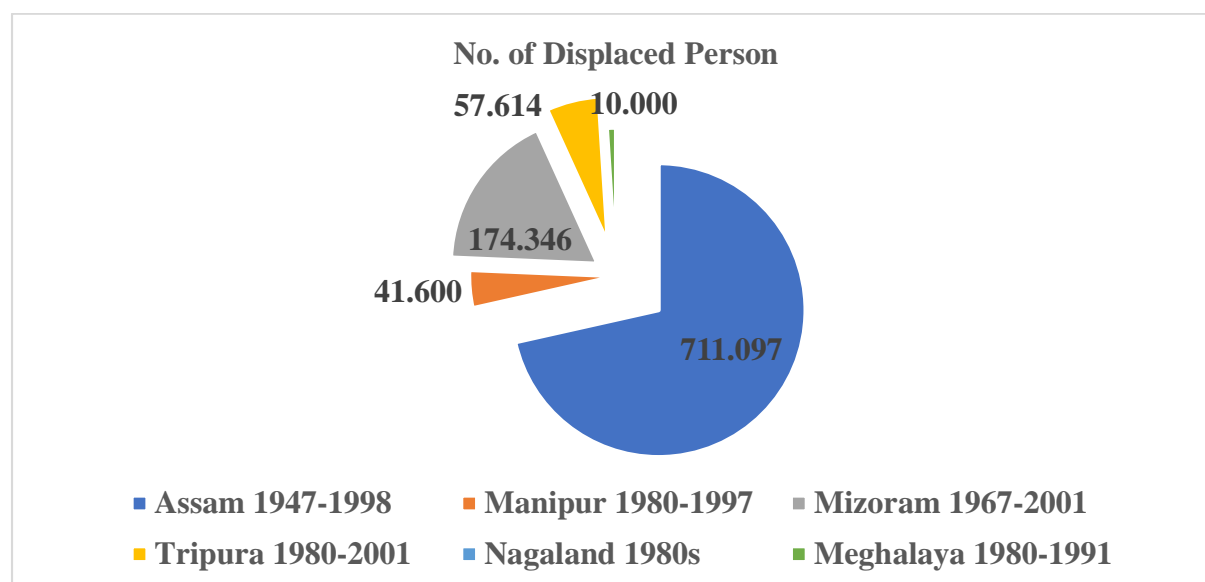


Figure-3 Displaced Person

Source: Calculated from the secondary data

The majority of people in the northeast initially welcomed the migrant community and did not object to their presence in the area. Additionally, it gave immigrants a chance to blend in with the community by taking up the language and traditions of the area in which they had relocated. As an example, consider the Nepalis who coexisted peacefully and worked with the people in the other Northeastern states. There are enough stories in this area that attest to the peaceful existence of the Nepalis as an immigrant group. In 1937, the official report of the deputy commissioner of the Darang district of Assam noted that "the Nepalis freely mix with the indigenous people, adopt their language and mother, and create no trouble." However, the post-colonial era saw the first systematic deportation of Nepalis from this area. Though they were inconspicuous (without the use of violence), there had been a few instances of displacement during the colonial era, specifically from Char-Chapari districts, and again in 1920 from Assam's Kaziranga Reserve Forests. In addition to numerous protests, communal

and collective threats, and sporadic attacks against immigrants, the state of Assam experienced unprecedented violence in various districts starting in the latter half of the 20th century.

First noticed in Assam during the Assam agitation (1979–1985) among the Northeastern states, this anti-immigrant sentiment among the indigenous people began to view the non-indigenous and migrant groups as a result of their identity, danger, opportunity, and hardship. Additionally, several political and contentious remarks made by politically active groups had turned the problem into one that was more emotive. S. L. Shakdar, the Indian Chief Commissioner at the time, brought attention to the issue in 1978, and the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) reaffirmed it in 1980, claiming that the infiltration of illegal foreigners had created a "monstrous problem," according to Nath's article "Migrants in Flight." The Bengalis (or illegal immigrants) from Bangladesh were the primary targets, although the anti-foreigner rhetoric also encompassed Nepalis. The circumstances compelled the Nepalis living in these regions to evacuate their homes. Nearly 500 families fled Assam in various locations after the carnage in Nellie (also known as the Nellie massacre, a tragic event in Assam's history), Chowl Khuwa, and other districts. In his article "Migrants in Flight," Nath states that "many moved back to Nepal or settled in the border areas of Kankarbitha, Biratnagar, Dhulabari, Dharang, etc." despite the lack of official records. Additionally, he mentioned that a large number of Nepalis from Sanitpur and Tezpur made their homes there.

In addition, the Bodo movement posed a threat to Nepalis' status. Notable acts of violence, ethnic clashes, and intermittent attacks against this immigrant minority occurred throughout western Assam during the push for a separate Bodoland. Around the end of the 20th century, the ethnic cleansing of these places led to the relocation of a significant number of Nepalis. Villages such as Amteka, Koila, Patabari Malivita, and others experienced their eviction, leading many families to relocate to other areas. About 15–20 households moved to neighbouring villages as a result of the attack on the Amteka Betini village in the Kokrajhar area. Similarly, the ethnic conflicts resulted in the displacement of roughly 20–25 households from the Khalasi Forest villages and 20–25 families from the Mangalchara Forest villages. The facts and statistics that follow provide an overview of internal displacement in Assam. Table 4 lists the IDPs of Bengalis (both Hindu and Muslim) and Nepalis in Assam along with their causes, which include riots, ethnic conflicts, massacres, and migrations.

Table 4: Internal Displacement in Assam (1947- Present)

Year	Causes	No. of Displaced Person	Ethnic Groups
1947	Partition/Riots	53,000	Muslims
1961-67	Prevention of Infiltration (PIP) Scheme	192,097	Muslims
1960	Asamiya Language Movement	Unknown	Hindu Bengalis
1972	AASU (Asamiya Language Movement)	Unknown	Hindu Bengalis
1980	Assam Movement (Lok Sabha Election), Neille Massacre	1200-3000	Na-Asamiya Muslims

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1984	Choulkhowa Chapori (Darang), Silapather (Lakhimpur), Gohpur (Darang)	Unknown	Bengali Hindus, Ex-refugee/displaced East Pakistan, ethnic Nepalis
1991-93	Bodoland Movement	60,000	Bengalis
1994 (July)	Massacre at Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Bongaigaon	1000 persons (60 villages)	Na-Asamiya Muslim peasants
1995 (Oct.)	Massacre at relief camp at Bansbari in Barpeta	70,000	Na-Asamiya Muslims, Hindu Bengalis, Santhals, Nepalis
1996 (May-June)	Ethnic Cleansing (Bodoland Movement)	2,50,000	Ethnic Santhals, Bodos, Nepalis
1998	Ethnic Cleansing (Bodoland Movement)	82,000	Santhals, Bengalis, Bodos, Nepalis

Source: Nath. L., (January 2005), Migrants in Flight: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis in Northeast India, *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Number 1.

[Note: The data in respect of Assam have been used by the author from the table 1 of above source.]

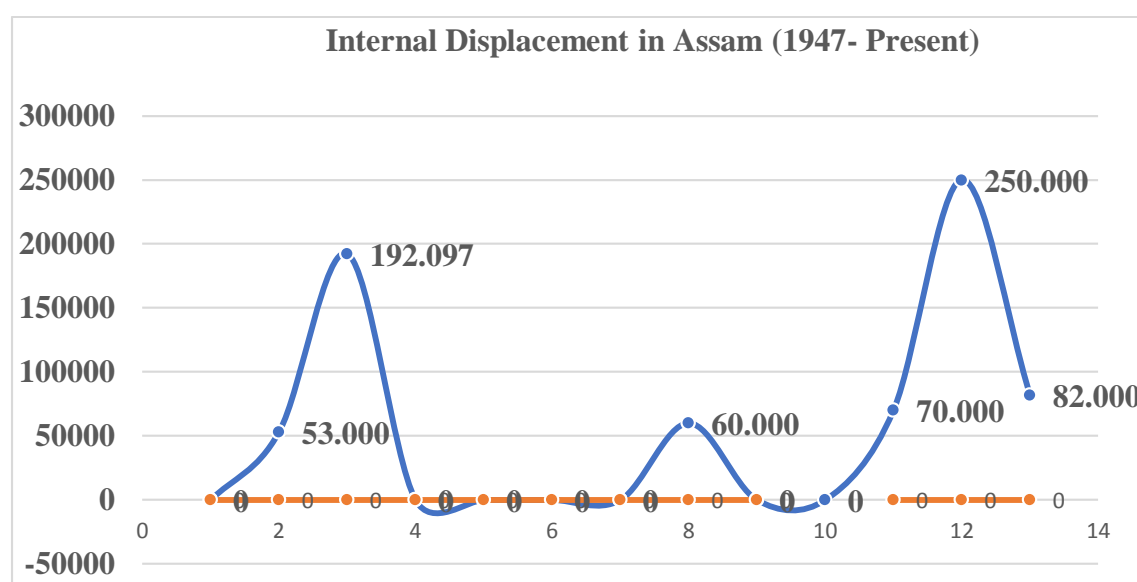


Figure-4 Internal Displacement in Assam (1947-Present)

Source: Calculated from the secondary data

Table 5: Internally Displaced Muslims in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Districts since 1993

Name of Relief Camps	No. of Families	No. of Persons	No. of Deaths in the Family
Malvita	450	1570	8
Jamunaguri	475	1972	11
Ananda Bazar	89	389	1
Patabari	750	3184	2
Jaipur	1244	5696	4
Bhowraguri	550	2554	57
Amteka Bhowraguri	141	622	1
Aamteka Sidabari	47	196	0
Amtka Bazar	21	103	0
Tasuldangi	141	776	2

No.1 Koila Moila	15	73	0
No.2 Koila Moila	81	427	0
Pachim Amguri (Rajapara)	58	382	0
Pachim Amguri (Simlaguri)	52	265	1
Narayanpur	76	511	3
Amguri (Bhraguri)	20	102	0
Kachimari	596	1230	3
Tapatari	276	1140	
Total [18]	5043	20812	93

Source: Memorandum to the Chief Minister, Assam submitted by the Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Saranathi Committee, 1996. See Hussain,2000; Nath. L., Migrants in Flight: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis in Northeast India, *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Number 1, (January 2005).

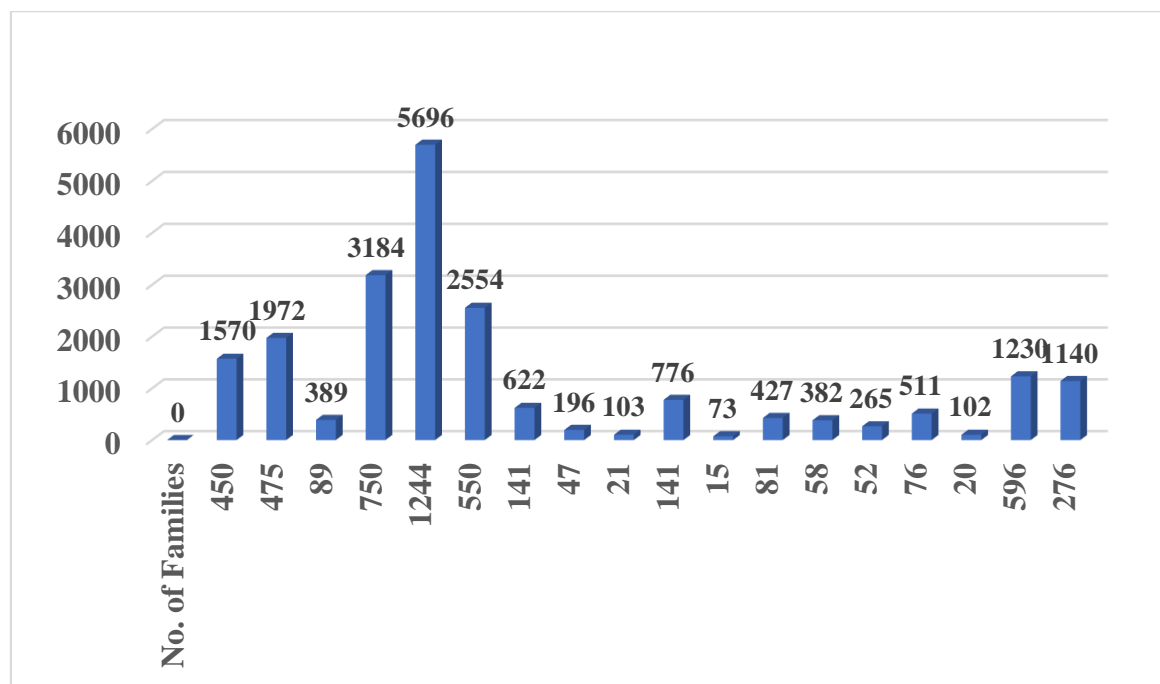


Figure-5 (Internally Displaced Muslims in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Districts since 1993)

Source: Calculated from the secondary data

Notably, according to a source, between 20,000 and 30,000 Lhotshampa refugees escaped to the northeastern region of India. They currently reside in West Bengal (at Jalpaiguri Doars and Darjeeling Hill Council) and Assam (at Kokrajhar and Darrang districts), according to the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies' research. This contingent was unified with the anti-foreigner movement in portions of the Northeast and Assam. The establishments and authorities in Bhutan allegedly employed the Bodo militants and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) militants from Assam to regularly use intimidating methods against the Lhotshampas. This may have caused many recent threats and consequences and sparked an anti-Nepali consensus. However, there were no further instances of ULFA massacres of Nepalis in Assam, with the exception of one incident in which the militants (ULFA) attacked the Nepalis. However, checkgates in Assam currently harass and search all Nepalis who are

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believed to be illegal migrants. The similar problem affects Bengalis as well. People frequently viewed Bengalis as doubtful voters. In 2023, Assamese Lok Shoba member Shri Gogoi wrote to the Ministry of Home Affairs (GoI) regarding the case of a Gurkha member, Shri Jagat Bahadur Chetri, a retired Indian army soldier who was listed as a "Doubtful-Voter" on the 1997 electoral rolls and who was sent to the Foreigners' Tribunal to be tried regarding his Indian citizenship. His message also made clear that Gurkhas in Assam are true Indian citizens and not foreigners.

The other Northeast Indian states also showed a strong anti-foreign sentiment. For example, the Nepali minority residing in Meghalaya (particularly in Shillong, Jowai, and other areas with a population of over 150,000 Nepalis) was the main focus of the violence in 1987. This upsurge also extended to Mizoram and Nagaland, where the Nepalis had been living for years and had seen displacement and violence. Recently, the government of Assam has been evicting many Bengali Muslims, also known as Na-Asamiya, from their homes under the pretext of being uncertain citizens or illegal encroachers (Nath).

Similar to the Lhotshampas, Nepalis in Assam and northeastern India organised against their predicament, despite their lack of strength. When Rajiv Gandhi said in Darjeeling in 1986 that citizenship was not a possibility for individuals who had immigrated after 1950, the Nepalis of Assam were not delighted. Ethnic perceptions were revived, and they united under the auspices of enduring organisations, such as the All-India Gorkha League and the All-Assam Gorkha League (AAGL), which were established in 1944. The welfare of Nepalis is the primary goal of recent organisations like the Tribal People's Front, the Nepali Suraksha Parishad, and the All-Assam Nepali Students Union (AANSU). In a recent meeting, the AANSU demanded protection for their rights. According to proponents of the Greater Nepal concept, Nepalis in Northeast India have frequently looked to the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling for a basis of support. However, they believe that joining the wider Nepali movement would provide them a better base to seek redress for their complaints; therefore, it is more ideological than practical. Additionally, similar to Nepalis, Bengalis of East Bengali descent organised to defend their rights and founded groups like the United Minority Front (UMF), the All-India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), and the All-Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) during the Post-Assam Movement.

Government Attitudes

Relief and Rehabilitation: Despite being a significant problem in Northeast India, the displacement question has not received international attention. Between 170,000 and 230,000 people were displaced in 1998, yet except for a 1998 visit by the U.S. Committee for Refugees, no significant international response was raised. It is true that India, like many other nations, lacks a formal framework, a tool, or a process to cope with internal displacement; as a result, it must take ad hoc measures. For instance, the institutional mindset of the state and union governments in Manipur restricts their responsibilities to the provision of relief blankets, distribution of necessities, payment of ex-gratia, and the establishment of camps. They have not taken any action to assess the situation on the ground or rehabilitate the displaced. Though no real action has been taken, the Kukis have brought their complaints to the government and

filed a public interest litigation (PIL) with the Supreme Court of India, the highest court in India. This has brought some attention to their predicament. The government of Tripura offered assistance. The government of Mizoram made some attempts to give jobs and homes, as well as relief camps.

In west Assam, where the Bodo people predominate, relief camps have been established. For example, camps had been established in the Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon areas to shelter the displaced Bengalis, Bodos, and Santhals. The Human Rights Feature visited Assam and documented health issues, malnourishment, and unhygienic living conditions in the aid camps. More than 161,000 people who were impacted by the ethnic riots in Kokrajhar district in 1996 and 1998 are still suffering in 49 relief camps located around the region, according to a recent report (The Assam Tribune, 2003).

They, too, found themselves in relief camps. According to L. Nath's article, "The Sub Divisional Officer, Kokrajhar, informed us that the Patgaon Relief Camp in Kokrajhar housed approximately 134 Nepali families and a total population of 581 Nepalis." At the Patgaon camp, government assistance was erratic and insufficient. "We are receiving some assistance like rice, lentils, oil, salt, etc.," K.B. Rana, the group leader at Patgaon camp, told USCR. However, the Deputy Commissioner stated that we should proceed from this point on and that he could only help temporarily (USCR, Jan 2000). The Lutheran World Service sent help in the form of rations, clothing, blankets, education, and other necessities from Kolkata. The majority of the Nepalis in the Patgaon camp were from the forest villages and were unable to return because of the horror, although rehabilitation funds of Rs. 10,000 (US\$230) are available to help resettle the victims from where they came. They took advantage of the award and relocated to Golaghat and Darrang, which caused further dislocation as these areas were far from their original residences. In contrast to the Santhals and Bodos who were displaced in Assam; the Kukis and Meiteis in other parts of the northeast; or even the Lhotshampas in southern Bhutan, the small number of displaced people dispersed virtually throughout Northeast India, and the less severe conditions they faced did not allow for much concern and, as a result, interference from national and international organizations (Nath). However, people acknowledge that the effects of displacement continue to disrupt their lives. People frequently attribute their backwardness to internal displacement. The Nepalis are considered rehabilitated because several camps have closed. It has been largely ignored that there is still a risk of additional displacement and that they have not been adequately rehabilitated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the "push and pull" forces are primarily to blame for the migration of Bengalis and Nepalis to northeastern Assam. From the discussion above, it is clear that internal displacement brought on by violence in the northeast and Assam state is a cause for concern. Assamese immigrant communities, including the Bengalis and Nepalis, continue to experience the effects of this displacement. Furthermore, the issue of IDPs will not always remain within the borders of the nation-states, given the strategic location of Northeast India in South Asia and its borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, and Nepal. There is always a danger that,

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as a result of neglect, there could be an overflow across the borders, which would disrupt the calm in South Asia. As a result, the issue of internal displacement in the Northeast and Assam state—using the Nepalis as an example—is one that concerns not just the Indian state but the entire South Asian region.

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