



ICHR Sponsored National Seminar on
**Migration and its Affects on the Rights of Indigenous
People of Northeast India**

**Organized by
Institute of Tai Studies & Research: Moranhat: Assam**

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A Concept Note

Migration to Northeast India, particularly to the state of Assam has been a perennial problem. In fact, there had been a continuous flow of migration into Northeast India ever since the British occupation. At the beginning in order to run the colonial administration, clerks, officers, teachers, lawyers, doctors and other servants familiar with the system of company administration were brought from outside the province, particularly from Bengal (Now Bangladesh). Besides these middle class professions, a number of other people also came within this flow to fill the demands of economic growth and to take the advantage of expanding opportunities of trade and business. It may be noted that once Assam became a part of India, it began to be perceived as a part of pan-Indian economic space. The Britishers saw Assam as a land which needed more settlers. The enterprises that developed during Assam's economic transformation in the 19th century such as tea industry, coal mines, oil fields, construction of roads, railway lines greatly necessitated migrant labourers and therefore the colonial rulers actively pursued the policy to encourage immigration on the other hand. The Assamese peasantry did not show much interest in wage labour.

The colonization of land by settlers from East Bengal began in a big way in the second decade of the 20th century and on a reduced scale continued even beyond the partition of the country in 1947. As such it appears that there was a number spheres where migration was large in numbers with diverse origins as (i) Tea garden labourers and other labourers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu; (ii) Settlers on agricultural land from Eastern Bengal; (iii) Hindu Bengali migrants in service sector; (iv) Marwari migration in trade, business and industry; and (v) migration from Nepal as agriculturist and livestock farmers. These migrants, which had largely been engineered by the colonial state had brought an enormous demographic changes in Assam leading to frequent ethnic conflict.

After the annexation of Assam with rest of India, the traditional indigenous Assamese elite not only lost the political space to the British but also the economic space created by the colonial rule in the field of industry, commerce and business to Marwari immigrants and service sector to Bengalis, as these new areas demanded a different skill unknown to them. Emerging out of new politico-economic conditions, the Assamese middle class hardly found any space in the modern sector to accommodate themselves. Because of their non-entrepreneur background, they aspired for administrative and public services rather than to compete in industrial and commercial field. This brought them in direct competition with the Hindu Bengali immigrants who had already occupied the service sector.

In their bid to fight against the Bengalis dominance, the Assamese elite used the linguistic symbol as a political resource in order to mobilize the Assamese ethnic group by projecting their self interest as the interest of entire indigenous Assamese. Thus it seems obvious that immigration of Hindu Bengalis, mostly to urban areas and to jobs in the modern sector has been a more potential source of conflict in Assam than Muslim peasant migrants from East Bengal. Unlike the Muslims of Bengali descent, Hindu Bengalis are seen as active opponents of lingo-cultural policy of Assam Government led by dominant ethnic Assamese of the Brahmaputra valley.

The problem of migration is still a living phenomenon in the politics of Northeast India. The Assamese Hindu who happen to the dominant group in the Brahmaputra valley feel that continuous influx of people from outside the state, particularly from Bangladesh has been posing a threat to their distinct socio-cultural and linguistic identity. The movement on the issue of 'Foreign National' (1979-85), IMDT Act and the current anti-Bangladeshi foreigner uprising, anti-Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 movement are the manifestation of such a feeling. The lack of a sustainable design to handle the problem of immigration and popular discontent arising out of non-fulfillment of expectation of the nascent Assamese middle class in post-colonial Assam led to eruption of ethnic tension between indigenous people and immigrant population in Northeast India. In view of this, the proposed seminar would seek to focus how continuous process Migration into Northeast India has been affecting the rights of indigenous people in regards to protection of their land, language, cultural property and identity as well as the right of employment, health and so on.

In the light of the above note the following issues may be taken up by the seminar for discussion.

- Who in the Northeast India are Indigenous People?
- Rights of indigenous people of Northeast India.
- Historical legacies of Migration into Assam.
- Causes of migration into Northeast India.
- Socio-political dimensions of Hindu and Muslim migration.
- Migration and social tension in Assam.
- Affects of migration in the maintenance of Lingo-cultural identity of indigenous people.
- Dynamics of affects of Migration on the right indigenous people of Northeast India.
- Migration and regionalisation politics in Northeast India.
- Migration and land alienation of indigenous people.
- Impact of migration on the violation of rights of indigenous people of Northeast India.
- Politicisation of the issue of migration.



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