

# Refugee Crisis: Problems faced by Assam during 1946-57

**Banasmita Sarma**

Research Scholar

Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Email: banasmitasarma@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The term Refugee can be conceptualised in a general perspective as a person, who flees from one place to another because of life-threatening conditions. But refugee, in spite of their unprivileged condition, are more or less, subject to several privileged conditions. For example refugees are eligible to get several types of international assistance, which include material relief, permanent rehabilitation, asylum etc. The paper wants to analyse the issue by understanding the root causes and the circumstances which led to massive and unprecedented movement of people during partition to Assam. At the same time rehabilitation of these refugees also emerged as one of the major threats to the people of Assam.*

*The paper also focuses on the measures which were taken by the leaders like Gopinath Bordoloi to tackle the refugee issue. He played a crucial role with regard to Assam's future. Thus it is clear that the major problem India had to face immediately after independence was the problem of continuous and heavy flow of migration of people to Assam. The paper has included facts and details of refugees came to India in the post independence period from the Government official documents which includes Assam Government confidential file records.*

**Keywords:** *Refugee, Migration, Rehabilitation, Partition, Border demarcation.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The term Refugee can be conceptualised in a general perspective as a person, who flees from one place to another because of life-threatening conditions. Scholars of course give more meaningful and comprehensive definition of refugee-- which identifies the refugee as a person who has crossed an international frontier because of a well-founded fear of persecution. The organisation of African Unity (OAU) defines refugee as --- " The term 'refugee' shall also apply to every person who owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of nationality." But it is at the same time, true that refugee, in spite of their unprivileged condition, are more or less, subject to several privileged conditions too. For example it can be mentioned that refugees are eligible to get many types of international assistance, which include material relief, permanent rehabilitation, asylum etc. It may be mentioned that Andrew E Shacknove, in his article 'Who is Refugee?' argues that refugees are, persons whose basic needs are unprotected by their country of origin, who have no remaining recourse other than to seek international restitution of their needs, and who are so situated that international assistance is possible. After giving a brief introduction to the term 'Refugee', the paper wants to analyse the issue by understanding the root causes and the cause was the circumstances which led to massive and unprecedented movement of people during partition. Partition created such results out of which people had to flee from their own place to another one. It has to be conceded that the communal tension that had existed in the country during the British rule ultimately reached such an explosive point that the partition of the country proved to be the only solution. Massive population exchange occurred between the two newly formed nations.

## 2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:

The concerned study will be guided by the perspective of Political Representation and its implications. The very idea of political representation always faces a kind of paradox in case of Indian Democracy. The institutional designs for filtering claims to representation, devices for popular control over elected representatives, and the mechanism for linking the policy agenda of representative institutions with the needs and desires of the represented have not kept pace with democratic upsurge from below. In the process of focusing upon the questions like "Who is the Representative?" and " What does the representative do?", the attention diverts from the core questions like " What gets Represented?", which is the foundational concern of political representation Substantive representation can be secured in representative democracy when the elected representatives advocate on behalf of certain group of people. Substantive representation is the extent to which the representatives actively work to advance the policy preferences of the represented. It requires substantial commitment of the member's time and resources.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To study the debates on the refugee and rehabilitation issue within the Assam Legislative Assembly during 1946-1957
- To analyse the reasons responsible for massive movement of people to the territory of Assam immediately after independence
- To identify the impact of refugees coming to the state of Assam over the local people and local resources

### 4. LITERATURE REVIEW:

In the book "*Gopinath Bordoloi: Indian Constitution and Centre-Assam Relations*", Nirode Kumar Barooah illustrates the role played by Gopinath Bordoloi during independence movement. Gopinath Bordoloi came under great influence of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was his spiritual and political mentor. He was the 1st who opposed the Cabinet mission grouping proposal.

The book identifies the potential problems faced by Assam and which Assam would face in future years. Regarding the issue of communal problem Bardoloi linked it with politics of power, wealth. He mentioned a special phrase "Sordid psychology" and said that unless this attitude is changed, communalism would never disappear.

The Bordoloi Govt. in Assam was affected severely by 3 major problems--

- Paucity of funds for the states development programme.
- Influx of Hindu Muslim refugees from East Bengal.
- Troubles created by communist insurgents.

In the book, '*Gopinath Bordoloi, 'the Assam Problem' and Nehru's centre*', written by Nirode K. Barooah the author has narrated very particularly the role of Gopinath Bordoloi. Having faith in Gandhian ideology Bordoloi saved Assam from outside encroachers. It was Bordoloi whose initiative saved Assam from the Cabinet Mission's Grouping proposal which included Assam along with Bengal under section C. Moreover Saadulla the leader of Muslim League had craved for including Assam in Pakistan. But because of Bordoloi Assam remains a part of India. After Indian independence Bordoloi became the first chief minister of Assam. He along with his party, worked hard to overcome Assam from financial crisis, in the settlement of refugees coming from East Bengal etc. However Jawaharlal Nehru the first prime minister of independent India was very reluctant to help Assam. Bordoloi was very disheartened in such attitude of the centre. So he took advice from Mahatma Gandhi to save Assam from the centre's domination. His contribution made him champion among the people of Assam.

The book *Assam After Independence* by Mrinal Talukdar, gives a detailed picture of the political scenario of Assam before independence as well as after independence. It talks about the most crucial phase for Assam i.e the period immediately prior to independence. Bardoloi's Second ministry held power during the election in Assam 9 January, 1946. The result of the election was such-- The Congress party grabbed 58 seats, the Muslim League 31, The Europeans 9, Jamiat Ul- Ulema 3 and other 7 seats respectively. Out of the 108 Assam Legislative Assembly seats, the Congress captured all the 40 general seats. The political situation of Assam in the pre independent period was quite disturbed and tensed and lots of issues were responsible for such tensions--failure of 'line System' to provide security, land settlements was one of the important issue. After independence Assam instantly had to face the problem of unabated migration to Assam. The first attempt to encroach India's land occurred in Tripura. During this crucial period Bordoloi constantly requested the centre to pay at least some attention to the Assam's condition but Nehru didn't take much interest regarding the border problem of the state of Assam. Although Bordoloi thought that Assam's problems would be deeply discussed in the Inter-Dominion Conference held at Calcutta from 14th to 19th April in 1948, in reality nothing of such kind happened. In fact the problems of West and East Bengal were discussed at that conference.

Saiyid Sadullah r Pora Gopinath Bordoloi loi (1937-50): Axomor Rajnoitik Itihash, written by Dr. Ranjit Sabhapandit gives a detailed account of the political scenario of Assam ranging from colonial administration to the dawn of independence of India from colonial power. The book mainly covers the period from Sadullah's ministry to that of Gopinath Bordoloi explaining in detail about their role and contributions towards the solution of some crucial problems faced by Assam during that period. The colonial Govt. decided to implement the 1935 Govt. of India act from 1st April, 1937. But many of the leaders reacted against the act. It includes Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose etc. The Bordoloi Govt took the issue of immigration very seriously as well as gave too much importance to solve it. It was done basically keeping in mind the future of Assamese indigenous population Bordoloi thought of distributing land among the assamese first, and only the rest of the land available to the immigrants.

## **5. MATERIALS:**

The study is an empirical investigation primarily based on archival materials and the debates of the Assam Legislative Assembly during 1946-1957. Memoirs, leaflets, communication among the leaders, biographies etc, will be used extensively in this research. Literatures books, articles written during that period will also be used. Secondary data analysis as well as a qualitative analysis of the data will also be taken care of. Secondary data analysis implies analysis of data that has previously been collected by other sources. The secondary data will include data collected from government archival material, souvenir etc.

## **6. METHOD:**

Historical method has been applied in studying this particular topic. Primary sources for this study mainly consist of official records preserved in the Assam State Archives, Assembly Proceedings from the Assam Assembly Library. Secondary sources have also been consulted. The study stands firmly on both historical and political dimensions. It is an interdisciplinary study. It may be stated here that history depicts and tries to analyse the roots of a particular problem, and the political dimension of this study concern mainly with the role played by the state leaders within the state assembly to represent the peoples wishes and for redressing their grievances during the concerned period i.e 1946-1957. Again qualitative analysis is a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in collection and analysis of data. The particular study follows the content analysis method among the other qualitative methods. This method aims at analysis of the content of written documents, books, newspapers etc. In this method the researcher reads between the lines and analyses the hidden meaning significant for the object of the study.

## **7. DISCUSSION:**

The paper wants to analyse the issue by understanding the root causes and the cause was the circumstances which led to massive and unprecedented movement of people during partition. Partition created such results out of which people had to flee from their own place to another one. It has to be conceded that the communal tension that had existed in the country during the British rule ultimately reached such an explosive point that the partition of the country proved to be the only solution. Massive population exchange occurred between the two newly formed nations.

To give a more comprehensive understanding of the term Refugee reference can be made to the Refugee Protection: A Guide to International Refugee Law, Where it is quoted that " Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum for persecution." The year 2001 marked the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention was a landmark in the setting of standards for the treatment of refugees. It incorporated the fundamental concepts of the refugee protection regime. On 28 July 1951, when the Convention was originally adopted, it was to deal with the aftermath of World War II in Europe. Through this convention it is to be recognised that in the passing years the world has been undergoing significant transformations which pose serious challenges to the capacity of States to respond to contemporary displacement situations. The recurring cycles of violence and systematic human rights violations in many parts of the world are generating more and more intractable displacement situations. The changing nature of armed conflict and patterns of displacement and serious apprehensions about "uncontrolled" migration in this era of globalisation are increasingly part of the environment in which refugee protection has to be realised.

The paper wants to seek under what circumstances refugees had to come to India and how Assam was influenced by this issue. Further attempt is also made to focus on the rehabilitation of these refugees and how the matter was discussed within the assembly.

In order to go into the details of the migration problem of people in to the province of Assam, reference should be made to the Sylhet referendum. During that period , Gopinath Bordoloi had a crucial role to play with regard to Assam's future. He even raised the demand before Nehru, to form a separate commission for Assam in order to determine the border between Assam an East Bengal. But Bordoloi was worried about the Commission which was formed under the leadership of British Jurist Sir Cyril Radcliff. The reason of his worry was that it will create serious conditions for Assam because the British Jurist had no idea about Assam's complex geography, population pattern as well as the society and culture of Assam. But it was mainly because of the ignorance on the side of Jawaharlal Nehru towards Assam that Bardoloi's demand for separate Commission was rejected and accordingly, the border was demarcated by the British Jurist, who had little knowledge about India's geography and history. The history of migration is actually a result of the demarcation of the border which was done in May 1947. Three police stations of Sylhet district namely Patharkandi, Ratabari and Badarpur along with half of Karimganj station remained with Assam. Despite that just after India's independence, the Hindus of the rest of Sylhet who got left behind in Pakistan were subjected to inhuman atrocities by the members of the Muslim League. The Hindu Bengalis could not bear the sorrow of the sudden loss of their country India through the referendum and hurled the slander of the accusation on the Assamese people for bringing such a misfortune on them.

But there were Hindu Government employees of Sylhet who sought to come to India. Regarding those employees who were working in Sylhet, the Government of India had already taken a decision before the referendum. As per that decision, the employees were given the choice to decide on their own, whether to come and live in India or stay back in Pakistan. When the Government of Assam asked about this to all the government employees of Sylhet then all the Hindu employees expressed their desire to live in India.

The major and serious problem India had to face immediately after independence was the problem of continuous and heavy flow of migration of people to Assam. Not only migration, the immediate post-partition period was marked by other several problems too. Communal tensions also created problems like Hindu people were attacked while travelling by train. All these tensions were the result of border demarcation decision. Gopinath Bordoloi during that time played a very crucial role in order to solve Assam's tensions. He repeatedly wrote letters to the centre so that Assam can gain at least some attention. But unfortunately, Bordoloi believed that the central government and particularly Jawaharlal Nehru were not even slightly sympathetic towards Assam's border and it was evident in his letter to Nehru on 12th February 1948 where he said "Assam is today completely physically disconnected from India."

"If any person comes to Assam through East Pakistan and brings any item with him, it is assumed as arms and he is immediately arrested...The government of East Pakistan has the facility to communicate with the central government of Pakistan through sea and land. The simple tussle regarding the hill reserve has shown how we have been made to suffer. If all these things continue and we are unable to demonstrate success in safeguarding our border, then the public will lose their faith" he wrote.

It may be stated that it was thought that immediately after independence Assam will remain as a homeland only for the Assamese speaking people. But unfortunately it resulted into unexpected consequences. Refugee problem was one among those. The refugee problem immediately after partition and independence, the downslide of the economy, the influx from East-Pakistan of land hungry, poverty-stricken Muslim peasants, the change in the demographic scenario and the accompanying rise of identity fears of the Assamese, to be followed by similar identity concerns of the other small ethnic nationalities of the region, the disintegration of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh, the northeastern region becoming a theatre of Bangladesh's liberation war and a shelter for the huge influx of refugees, the rise of militant politics and the slide towards secessionism ---- all these and many factors are linked, in some way or other, with partition and its fallout.

The huge influx of refugee was accompanied by another problem associated with it, i.e the rehabilitation of these refugees. It became a kind of responsibility of Assam govt. to accept those refugees and rehabilitate them on its land. In fact, in 1949, the Government of India asked the Assam Government to share half of the land it had kept for its landless people to rehabilitate the refugees from East Bengal. It may be stated here that when the revenue minister of Assam, Bishnuram Medhi, rejected this proposal, the Union Rehabilitation Minister, Mohanlal Saxena, without taking the Assam Government into confidence, made arrangements to rehabilitate hundreds of people in the additional lands with tea gardens of Surma Valley. Following this move, additional lands with the tea gardens of the Brahmaputra Valley were arranged in the subsequent period in association with Indian tea garden Association in order to accommodate 12,000 such people.

Huge number of Hindu people migrated from East-Bengal to the neighbouring Indian states, and the Government of India spent large sums of money for the accommodation and rehabilitation of those persons. It is an important fact to notice that many of those refugees did not try to make themselves an asset to the country of their adoption and were prone to cause trouble. Shri C C Biswas suspected that the problem may be due to a psychological factor. He opined that the refugees from Western Pakistan left their homes forever and there were no possibilities for them to go back to their home. Instead of going back they wanted to build a new world for themselves in India. On the other hand, refugees from East Pakistan were encouraged to go back to their homes, if conditions improve.

## 8. ANALYSIS:

It was the policy of the Government which did not allow the Hindus remaining in East Bengal to stay there as Hindus, enjoying full rights, but seems to be directed towards squeezing them out, unless they choose to be absorbed as Muslims. Here references can be made to the facts of expropriations of Hindu Zamindars and Hindu people and also to the abduction of Hindu women which are still occurring in East Bengal and against which no relief was available. Shri Biswas also said that unless there is a radical change in the outlook of the Government of East Bengal, there is bound to be further migration of Hindus, from East Bengal to India. He also considered it necessary for the authorities of India to be prepared in advance for facing this problem. It signifies the need for early planning to deal with this problem of Hindu refugees who were already in India and also of those who were likely to come to India.

For this purpose it was felt necessary to appoint a new category of officers as the first step to deal with the problem. And these officers were designated as the Refugee Welfare Officers. It is stated in the document that the duty of these officers would be to contact the Hindu Refugees, to advise and instruct them, to help them in their difficult situation.

In this context reference can be made to a letter sent to Shri D.M Gupta, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Calcutta from Shri B Benarjee, ICS, Secretary, Refugee Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal. In this letter it was written that rehabilitation of Refugees in West Bengal takes place under certain handicaps which makes it rather a difficult process. Firstly, because as the refugees are encouraged to return and get their properties restored, they are in an uncertain condition of mind. Secondly, the political parties try to encourage them to agitate for more and more Govt. help. These factors make a section of refugees disinclined to settle and they fall victim to greed. Therefore, to get rid of such problems, certain remedial measures were taken which is clearly given in this document--

- Priority was given to the Refugees in rehabilitation camps first and then they were moved to the camp colonies. It means they were always kept in those sites where Govt. intended to rehabilitate them. This resulted in close contact with the localities for a period of around 4 to 6 months. It gave them the opportunity to be adjusted with the local economic condition and it became easier to rehabilitate themselves in those areas.
- Refugees were given house-building loans and that too in two instalments. The second instalment was payable only after the refugee family concerned has built a part of their house. Apart from this business and agricultural loans were also provided to those people after the construction of their house is complete. These initiatives resulted in creating some assets which are owned by the party and it helped them to be more attached to the place.
- Lastly, it may be mentioned that Welfare Officers were appointed in those places which had more concentration of refugees. They tried to encourage the refugees to take active interest in the general welfare of the place or the colony.

#### **9. Ordinances regarding Rehabilitation loans to displaced persons belonging to urban areas in Pakistan:**

The United Provinces Refugee Rehabilitation (Loans) Ordinance, 1948 published in Government Gazette has included provisions within it to provide for loans of money by the Provincial Government to refugee for rehabilitation. It is mentioned in the beginning of the ordinance that in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section 88 of the Government of India Act of 1935, as adapted by the India (Provisional Constitution) Order, 1947 the Governor of the United Provinces is pleased to make and promulgate the following Ordinance.

- This ordinance may be called the United Provinces Refugee Rehabilitation (Loans) ordinance, 1948.
- It extends to the whole of the United Provinces
- It shall come into force.

In this ordinance, certain specific words are defined. For example, following words are mentioned--

- "Borrower" means an individual, company or association or body of individuals whether incorporated or not, to whom or to which a loan has been advanced under this ordinance.
- "Company" means a company as defined in the Indian Companies Act, 1913.
- "Controlling Authority" means the authority which makes loan under the powers conferred by this ordinance.
- "Chief Administrator" means the Provincial Refugee Commissioner, United Provinces and includes any other officer appointed by the Provincial Government to perform the duties of Chief Administrator under this Ordinance.
- "Refugee" means a person displaced from the territories comprise in West Pakistan who is for the time being resident in the United Provinces and who has been registered in accordance with section 4 of the United Provinces Refugee Registration Act, 1948, before February 1, 1948 or such extended date as the Provincial Government may notify in that behalf in the official Gazette.
- Lastly, " Provincial Government" means the United Provinces Government.

The Ordinance states that for the purpose of granting loans to refugees for their rehabilitation, the Provincial Government may appoint a chief Administrator for the Province. Apart from this, Controlling Authority may also be appointed for such areas. Distribution and allocation of work were specifically done by those officers under the provisions of this Ordinance. The ordinance clearly identified that the Chief Administrator should have all the powers of superintendence, direction and control over the Controlling Authority. At the same time it is also mentioned in the ordinance that the Chief Administrator or the Controlling Authority may delegate any of his functions to any officer of the Provincial Government whether by name or designation. This ordinance also includes certain provisions regarding the amount of loans to be given to the refugees. According to the ordinance, the amount of loan given to the refugee should not exceed Rs. 5000.

The ordinance also included certain provisions just for the benefits of the refugees. For example, it can be mentioned here that the ordinance mentions that any refugee may submit an application to the controlling authority within the local limits of which jurisdiction he resides or intends to carry on business, or any profession. But the application must be supported by an affidavit with a clear statement of the amount of loan desired, the purpose for which the loan is desired and the manner in which he proposes to repay the loan. By following this method any refugee person could ask for loan to carry on his business. All these provisions were made for ensuring welfare to them. Although there were provisions for providing loan to the refugees for their help, at the same time equal emphasis was also given to the methods of repayment of loans too. The ordinance has directed those who required loans to furnish information about two sureties. The applicant and the sureties shall be jointly liable for the repayment of the loans with interest and costs.

Some important questions were raised in the Parliament regarding the status of the refugees on 1st August, 1950. The questions were regarding--

- The numbers of Hindu displaced persons who have returned to India from East Pakistan since the signing of the agreement and Muslim evacuees who left India during the period.
- The number of Hindu displaced persons who have returned to East Pakistan and Muslim evacuees who have come back to India during the period.
- How many of them have actually got back their properties and how many have been rehabilitated
- How many of them went to dispose of their properties and have again returned to their respective places.

As recorded in the Government files, answer to these questions were--

- Number of Hindu displaced persons who have come to India from East Pakistan were 1,91,751
- Number of Muslim evacuees who left India were 37,578
- Number of Hindu displaced persons who have returned to East Pakistan was 32,561
- Number of Muslim evacuees who came back to India was 46,617

Apart from these sources it is also very important to mention here that as per the Government record, some information about the rehabilitation and restoration of the refugees were not available. Therefore, no data can be found regarding those issues. For example, as recorded particularly in this Confidential Government file, it can be stated that no information was available regarding restoration and rehabilitation in East Pakistan. In Assam restoration took place in a number of cases where the land was not allotted. Although restoration and rehabilitation were in progress but no updated figure was available regarding those facts. Lastly, also no information was available about how many of the refugees went to dispose of their properties and again returned to their respective places.

#### **10. Assam- East Bengal border incidents:**

While discussing the conditions of these people residing in the Assam-East Bengal border areas, it can be stated here that these people were termed as tribal people. At the same time, these people of the Assam-Pakistan border were categorised as follows--

- The tribal people residing exclusively in the Pak border districts.
- Tribal people residing in Assam but owning land for cultivation in Pakistan and
- Tribal people residing exclusively in Assam who are dependent largely on Pakistan for sale of their produce and getting essential supplies in return, from Pakistan territory

It is written in the Government documents that the Hajongs and the Garos of the Mymensingh were the first category and the worst victims of Pakistan's oppression. The lands belonged to these people were taken away as well as heavy fines were levied upon them. At the same time these category of people were the victims of large scale oppression such as molestation and abduction of their women and many more cases of oppression against them were recorded. Therefore, to improve their conditions and to help those unfortunate people, asylum was given to the migrants among them who had taken shelter in Assam territory. For example here it can be mentioned that in the Sylhet district, lands were requisitioned from some Khasi people and were allotted to the Muslim refugees to rehabilitate them. On a reference to the Pakistan authorities regarding such cases, it was stated by them that only fallow and waste lands of some people on the border had been taken up by Government for settlement of refugees under the East Bengal Waste Land Acquisition Act, 1950.

Regarding the second category of people, tribal residents owning cultivable lands in Pakistan were finding it extremely difficult to maintain effective possession, cultivate and bring their produce across and dispose of locally. Because in those areas the Pak Muslims adopted a separate technique. According to which those tribal people were allowed to plough and sow but the crops were taken away forcibly when it got ready. As a result, most of such people gave up their cultivation in Pakistan.

## 11. FINDINGS:

Partition of the country created such situations for those who crossed over the newly formed boundaries between the two nations -- India and Pakistan. It is to be noted that some of these people were forced to cross the boundary of their country and others did it willingly. Whatever the reason was, they did not lose their nationalities, but still they were forced to live their lives as refugees. Because of the entry of the refugees into the country which already was overloaded with many other problems, conditions started becoming worse. At this juncture, when the nation was struggling with several other problems along with the refugees, Indo-Pak war broke out in the year 1948. The Indo- Pak war of 1947-48 is also known as the first Kashmir war, which was fought over the issue of princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is true that migration into Assam has been taking place from the dawn of history. However, after the British annexed Assam, large scale population movement from the South (Bengal, East Pakistan and now Bangladesh) has been an ongoing phenomenon for over a century. Initially this movement was for economic reasons only but with the approach of Independence, it started developing both communal and political overtones. After Independence, it acquired an international dimension and it now poses a grave threat to the national security. Migration of people occurred for various reasons. During British rule a huge number of Bengali Muslim peasants moved to the lower Assam basically for cultivation. The Muslim League emerged with a demand i.e partition of the country on the basis of religion. It can also be stated here that the Muslim League and its demand added a new twist to the movement of people. During Sir Mohammad Sadullah's Muslim League ministry, efforts were made to encourage migration of more and more people into Assam and the reason was purely political. It was done to increase the number of muslim population in the territory of Assam. The Viceroy, Lord Wavell wrote in the Viceroy's Journal, "The chief political problem is the desire of the Muslim Ministers to increase this immigration into the uncultivated Government lands under the slogan of Grow More Food but what they are really after, is Grow More Muslims."

## 12. CONCLUSION:

Refugee rehabilitation remains a very important matter in case of India and particularly in case of Assam. A refugee, therefore can be defined a person who would not like to migrate from his homeland but for the reasons beyond his control, political, religious or economic, that might have rendered his life unbearable and unliveable. Migration of outsiders into Assam has been taking place from a long time. The British administration had encouraged migration of thousands of Biharis to work on the tea-plantations and of hundreds of thousands of Bengali peasants to settle on the vast uncultivated tracts of Assam. Between 1939 and 1947, a huge number of Bengali Muslims migrated to Assam. Partition led to a large-scale refugee influx from Pakistani Bengal into Assam. It is true that Assam has been experiencing invidious invasion from many decades. Initially movement of people from outsiders to Assam occurred purely for economic reasons and also contributed to the economic development of the state. At the same time it also started hampering the rights of the indigenous peoples. During independence it acquired political and communal contours.

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