

SHODH SAMAGAM

ISSN : 2581-6918 (Online), 2582-1792 (PRINT)



Rehabilitation and Assimilation Process of Bangladeshi Hindu Refugee Communities in West Champaran District of Bihar

Pareekshit Kumar, Research Scholar (JRF), Department of Geography
Saroj Kumar Singh, (Ph.D.), Department of Geography
Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribag, Jharkhand, INDIA

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Corresponding Authors

Pareekshit Kumar, Research Scholar (JRF),
Department of Geography
Saroj Kumar Singh, (Ph.D.),
Department of Geography
Vinoba Bhave University,
Hazaribag, Jharkhand, INDIA
shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

Received on : 20/07/2022

Revised on : -----

Accepted on : 27/07/2022

Plagiarism : 09% on 20/07/2022



Plagiarism Checker X Originality Report

Similarity Found: 9%

Date: Wednesday, July 20, 2022

Statistics: 201 words Plagiarized / 2251 Total words

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Rehabilitation And Assimilation Process Of Bangladeshi Hindu Refugee Communities in West Champaran District Of Bihar Pareekshit Kumar1 , Dr Saroj Kumar Singh2 1 Research Scholar (JRF), Vinoba Bhave University, University Department of Geography, Hazaribag, India 2 Associate professor, Vinoba Bhave University, University Department of Geography, Hazaribag, India Abstract India got freedom in 1947 with the pain of partition of India as India-Pakistan two nations and cross border migration from both the nations had been seen. After the Partition of India, a large number of Hindu Bengalis migrated from East Pakistan to India mainly in West Bengal.

Outside of West Bengal a large number of refugees were rehabilitated in West

ABSTRACT

India got freedom in 1947 with the pain of partition of India as India-Pakistan two nations and cross border migration from both the nations had been seen. After the Partition of India, a large number of Hindu Bengalis migrated from East Pakistan to India mainly in West Bengal. Outside of West Bengal a large number of refugees were rehabilitated in West Champaran of Bihar also. West Champaran is the largest (in area) district of Bihar situated in north-western corner of the state. This paper mainly focused on the rehabilitation and assimilation process of Bangladeshi Hindu Refugees in different parts of West Champaran district of Bihar. From migration to rehabilitation and assimilation with local society was a long and difficult journey. Assimilation with local society was challenging when they had been rehabilitated in a new space which was socially, economically, and psychologically new but their hardworking nature and getting support of local people, administration they started a new way of life and assimilated with the local society along with practicing their own social customs. At present this community plays a vital role in the socio-economy of the district. The study is based on primary data as well as secondary data. Primary data have been collected by interview method from the old age citizens who migrated from Bangladesh in 1950s and secondary data have been collected from secondary sources like Newspaper, District Gazetteer, District Census handbook etc. The nature of the paper is a descriptive and analytical method.

KEYWORDS

Freedom, Rehabilitation, Assimilation, Partition, Migrated, Refugee.

INTRODUCTION

Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as “Someone who is unable or unwillingly to return to their country of origin owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political option.” As freedom came with partition the immediate anxiety of everyone was about the award of the Boundary commission formed under Sir Cyril Radcliff. In the award, West Punjab, which went to Pakistan received 1,60,579 km² of territory and 15,800,000 people of whom 11,800,000 were Muslims. East Punjab that remained in India received 95,829 km² of territory with a population of 12,600,000 of whom 4,375,000 were Muslims. In the east, West Bengal that remained in India that received a territory of 72,519 km² and a population of 21,200,000 of whom 5,300,000 were Muslims, while East Bengal, which was to constitute East Pakistan, received 1,26,909 km² of territory and 39,100,100 people of whom 27,700,00 were Muslims. The aftermath of partition of India can be seen as a saddest chapter in the history of migration not only in the Indian subcontinent but in the world also. The aftermath of partition can be seen as riot between Hindu-Muslim community, killing and migration.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was followed by the forced uprooting of an estimated 18 million people belonging to minorities who sought shelter across the newly created boundaries in the two nation-states of India and Pakistan. Partition left 11.4 million or 42% of undivided Bengal's Hindu population in East Bengal. In 1947, at the time of partition, only 344,000 Hindu refugees came into West Bengal, and hope lingered among the minorities of East Pakistan that they could continue to live there peacefully. However, these hopes were dashed as the East Bengal minorities increasingly experienced persecution and intolerance. The year 1948 saw an influx of 786,000 people into India, and in 1949 over 213,000 Bengali refugees crossed over the border into West Bengal. In view of prolonged conditions of insecurity, an estimated 1,575,000 people left East Bengal in 1950 to seek refugees in India. The following year another 187,000 refugees came and the figure of incoming refugees stood at 200,000 during 1952. The influx continued throughout the 1950s and even beyond, with 76,000 persons coming to India in 1953, 1.18 lakhs in 1954 and 2.4 lakhs in 1955. In the following year the number of incoming refugees again increased to 3.2 lakhs when Pakistan adopted an Islamic Constitution.

Refugees in West Champaran: Refugee resettlement proved to be a major problem for the Government as the pattern of influx varied across the regions. The GOI immediately established an emergency committee of the cabinet to deal with the situation in Delhi and a ministry of Relief and rehabilitation was set up to look after the refugees. In the series of immigration from Bangladesh into India an influx of migrants displaced from different parts of Bangladesh and rehabilitated in north-western part of Bihar in West Champaran in 1956. According to an article published in Hindustan Times (2018), Bettiah at present there are 1.5 lakhs Bengali Hindu Refugees living in 46 colonies of West Champaran. All of them have been given citizenship of India. Bihar has 4.5 lakhs such population living in 115 refugee colonies. West Champaran has the maximum colonies followed by 38 colonies in Purnea and 13 colonies in East Champaran. West Champaran is an administrative district in the state of Bihar in India. It is a part of Tirhut division which is situated in the north-west corner of Bihar. This is the largest district of Bihar, occupying an area of 5,228 km². This district lies between 26°25' N to 27°31' N latitude and 83°49' E to 84° 45' E longitude. This district lies between the great Himalayan

terrain of the extra peninsular region and Great Gangetic Alluvium plain of India. Indo-Nepal borders make its northern boundary, Uttar Pradesh makes its western boundary, East Champaran makes its eastern boundary, Gopalganj and East Champaran makes its southern boundary. Refugees have been rehabilitated in 12 blocks out of 18 blocks of West Champaran in following blocks Bettiah, Bairiya, Majhauria, Jogapatti, Jogapatti, Lauriya, Chanpatiya, Bagaha, Sidhaw, Ramnagar, Gaunaha, Mainatand, Narkatiyaganj.

Objectives

- To understand the process of rehabilitation in different villages of West Champaran and assimilation with local people.
- To identify the parts of the district where they have been rehabilitated.

Database and Methodology

This research paper is based on primary as well secondary data. Primary data have been collected through personnel interviews from those persons who migrated from Bangladesh to West Champaran in the 1950s. Secondary data have been collected from different secondary sources like News Papers, Research articles, books, District rehabilitation branch collectorate Bettiah, District gazetteer. The study is based on descriptive and analytical methods.

Discussion

Persons who were migrated after 1950 were selected to rehabilitate outside West Bengal and decided to establish a camp in Bettiah, West Champaran, Bihar. According to an agreed arrangement between the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Govt. of India and the State Government of Bihar, it was decided that the state Government would rehabilitate a portion of the population of displaced persons within the state of Bihar. Champaran was one of the districts selected.

Rehabilitation in West Champaran: The first batch of displaced families arrived on the 4th June 1956 at the Bettiah Refugee Relief Camp. By Feb 1957 the population of displaced persons in Bettiah camp came to 28,065 comprising 7,707 families. Arrangements were made to accommodate the batches displaced persons on arrival in transit camps located at Bettiah. The dispersal of families from the transit camps to the rehabilitation centers could follow only after lands had been purchased and preliminary arrangements were completed for the reception and settlement of the displaced persons. There are two transit camps (1958)-one at West Hazari and the other at Kumarbagh at a distance of about 3.5 miles and 7 miles respectively from Bettiah town. The transit camps were under the administrative control of the camp commandant, who was a gazetted officer of the state civil services. For the rehabilitation of the displaced persons blocks of good cultivated lands have been acquired. In Bettiah Subdivision alone 7,400 acres of land were acquired till the middle of December 1958. Some lands have been offered by the Narkatiaganj Sugar Mill and Motihari Sugar Mill within the district of Champarn. There are four colonies of displaced persons distributed over 22 villages within various blocks of the district. The villages are Barwa, Bherihari, Mejhariya, Chautarwa, Kargahiya etc. The colonies are under administrative control of the 5 respective Subdivisional Magistrate of Bettiah and sadar under the direct supervision of District Magistrate. In order to give a start to the displaced persons in the colonies, cash doles and lands are given for the purchase of seeds, agricultural implements, bullocks and the building materials of huts.

Process of Rehabilitation

To know the process of migration from Bangladesh and rehabilitation in different parts of the district and their level of assimilation with locals, some personnel interviews have been taken from some old age persons who migrated from Bangladesh and can remember those circumstances and

share their experiences. Personnel interviews have been taken in 2021 from Gopinath Saha (75 yrs old), Shyamal Prasad saha (80yrs old), Sunil Saha(75 yrs old), Fakirchandra Das (82 yrs old), Sharada Rani (100 yrs old), Subhas Barai (83 yrs old), Ravindranath Poddar (105 yrs old), Ganesh Devnath (78 yrs old), Narayan Mallick (83 yrs old), Kashinath Ghosh (75 yrs old), and wanted to know process of rehabilitation and assimilation with local society in West champaran. And found that they have been migrated from different districts of East Pakistan like Pabna, Barisal, Old Tripura, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Faridpur etc. The main reason of migration was Hindu-Muslim riots, Job insecurity, recognition of Pakistan as Islamic nation etc.

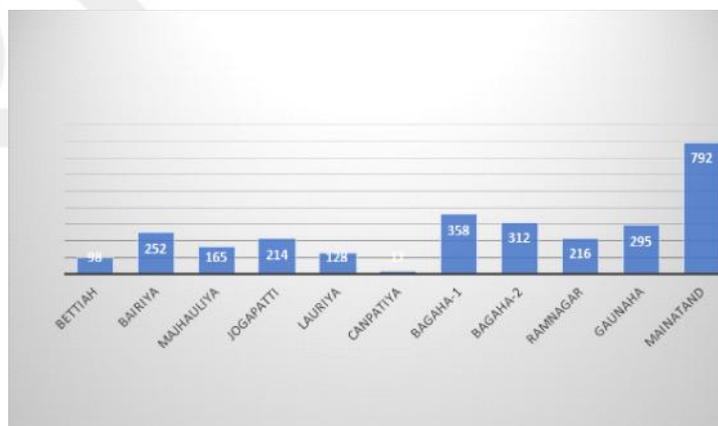
To migrate to India, they had been issued a migration card from Bangladesh. After crossing the India-Bangladesh international border they arrived at Sealdah railway station (West Bengal) and from Sealdah they arrived at Bettiah railway station (West Champaran) by train. They lived in the station for some days and later on they shifted to Hazari and kumarbag refugee camp. In the Camp, the Government provided them ration, clothes and financial aid. From the camp they had been rehabilitated in different colonies. To start their livelihood, the Government provided them a loan of 1290rs, 4 acres of agricultural land (somewhere 5 acres) and 18 decimal homeland per migration card. After rehabilitation they started their new journey of life as citizens of India from zero and now, they have an effective contribution in the socio-economy at local level in West Champaran.

Table: Rehabilitated Bangladeshi Migrants in Blocks of West Champaran District of Bihar during 1950s

S. No.	Block	Rehabilitated households
1.	Bettiah	98
2.	Bairiya	252
3.	Majhauriya	165
4.	Jogapatti	214
5.	Lauriya	128
6.	Chanpatiya	17
7.	Bagaha-1	358
8.	bagaha-2	312
9.	Ramnagar	216
10.	Gaunaha	295
11.	Mainatand	792

(Source: District Collectorate, Bettiah, West Champaran)

Figure: Bar diagram showing number of rehabilitated households in different Blocks of West Champaran.



Assimilation of Bangladeshi migrants with locals: Assimilation is the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. This community assimilated with locals in economic activities and psychologically but they still practising their own Bengali culture like language, marriage custom, festivals etc.

Assimilation based on socio-culture

Socio-cultural Aspects	In Bangladesh	In West Champaran
Language	Bangla	Bangla at home and Bhojpuri-Hindi with local people.
Food Habit	Mainly Fish-Rice and pulse, coconut water, sweets etc.	All local food like Pulse-rice, bread, vegetables, Milk etc.
Clothing	Dhoti-Kurta for men and saree for women.	Mainly pant-shirts but old age persons still wear dhoti-kurta and Saree for Women.
Marriage	Bangla customs	Still in Bangla customs.
Festival	Durga puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja, Dol-jatra (Holi) etc.	Durga puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja, Dol-jatra (Holi) etc. Besides these Bengali festivals few people also practise local festivals like Chhat puja.

Assimilation Based on Economic Activities

In Bangladesh they were mainly involved in the agriculture sector and some people were also involved in jute factories and saree manufacturing factories. At present in West Champaran they are also mainly dependent upon agriculture. Besides agriculture they are partially involved in Business, informal sector, service sector, Government jobs and political activities. The community fully assimilated in economic practices with locals. Their economic activities interlink with locals and contribute to the economy of the whole society.

Economic activities	In Bangladesh	In West Champaran
Crop Production	Rice, Jute.	Rice, Wheat, sugarcane, Jute, maize, vegetables etc.
Fisheries	Yes	Rare.
Animal husbandry	Cow, Ox.	Only Cow.
Industry	Jute Industry, saree Manufacturing industry.	Not involved in industrial work.

Psychological Assimilation

At present this community is psychologically fully assimilated with local society and they are very happy. As being an integral part of the society and nation, they contribute their full effort in the growth of society and nation.

According to Mr. Madan Bannik, Vice President of Bihar Bengal Association this community fully assimilated with the local people with preserving and practising their own Bengali social customs. Their economic activities like agricultural practising, business, private and Government job and politically activeness etc fully assimilated with the local community and they play a vital role in the economic sector of the district.

CONCLUSION

From all above discussion it can be concluded that all these migrants are migrated from East Pakistan due to Hindu Muslim riot and faced a series of challenges from migration to rehabilitation and assimilation. After rehabilitation they have been supported by the Govt. of India as far as possible.

At present these communities are an integral part of the country. Economically and psychologically they fully assimilated with locals except some social customs and contributing their effort in the improvement of society and the country.

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