



# Historical and Demographic Perspectives on Migration to West Bengal from Bangladesh

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**ABSTRACT:** West Bengal shares 2216 km (or more than 54%) of the 4095 km border between India and Bangladesh, and the two nations' populations are linguistically and racially close. West Bengal is so significantly impacted by Bangladeshi cross-border migration while being an Indian state. After Bengal was partitioned in 1941, a large portion of the migrant flow moved to West Bengal, and from then on, various political movements drove Bangladesh's Hindu majority out of the country until 1971. Poor Muslims have supplanted Hindu migrant flows as this political aspect of migration eventually changed to economic migration. This movement has a significant impact on West Bengal's population growth, particularly in the border areas where there is a noticeable distinction between population growth and natural rise. Migration from Bangladesh alters not just the demographic situation but also produces a variety of societal issues. This article examines Bangladeshi migration from India, which the government labeled "illegal" after March 25, 1971, and its nature and effects from 1941 to 2011. As a result, the study on illegal immigrants is based on the works that have appeared in various journals, newspapers, international organizations' publications, and official works from India, Bangladesh, and West Bengal.

**KEYWORDS:** Infiltration, Immigration, Bangladeshi, Hindu, Natural increase, Crime, Border.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of migration across the border especially the undocumented migration is a burning problem along the Indo-Bangladesh border. India with Bangladesh forms 4095 K.M long border line, among this West Bengal shares 2216 K.M which is more than 54% and the people of the both

geographical region are linguistically and ethnically similar. So as an Indian state West Bengal is highly affected by Bangladeshi cross border migration (Dutta, 2005).

West Bengal, the main destination of Bangladeshi, is bounded by Bangladesh in eastern side with ten border district namely North 24 Paraganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Maldah, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Darjelling, Koochbihar and Jalpaiguri.

Bangladesh was under colonial rule for a long period by British up to 1947 and then it was province of Pakistan since 1971 and finally independence come on march 26, 1971. Continues flow of migration to India in general and West Bengal in particular (Datta, Bhattacharya, Sadhu, Majumdar, 2003) began with partition of Bengal in 1947 and consequently 4.5 million Hindu population were compelled to cross over Indian border by Pakistani military (Dutta, 2005). Many went back after completion of the war but a sizeable proportion of undocumented migrants stayed in India and merged with the main stream of Indian population (Roy, 2003). Govt. of India issued citizenship for people who came on and before 25 March in 1971. After this date line migration from Bangladesh is not stopped. According to an estimation of boarder security department, about one thousand Bangladeshi cross the border each and every day and enter in West Bengal (Mukherjee 2003). Nearly 15 million Bangladeshi are living in India illegally (Dutta, 2004) but Bangladesh Government maintained silence on this vital issue and so many times declared that 'there is no any Bangladeshi in India'.



**Historical perspectives and Push-Pull factors:**

Along the Indo-Bangladesh border, migration across the border is a contentious topic, particularly undocumented migration. West Bengal shares 2216 km, or more than 54%, of India and Bangladesh's 4095 km border, and the two nations' populations are linguistically and ethnically close. As a result, Bangladeshi cross-border migration has a significant impact on West Bengal as an Indian state (Dutta, 2005).

Bangladesh shares ten border districts with West Bengal, the primary destination for Bangladeshis, including North 24 Paraganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Maldah, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Darjelling, Koochbihar, and Jalpaiguri.

Bangladesh was a British colony until 1947, after which it became a province of Pakistan until March 26, 1971, when independence was eventually achieved. With the partition of Bengal in 1947, a migration movement toward India in general and West Bengal in particular began (Datta, Bhattacharya, Sadhu, Majumdar, 2003). As a result, 4.5 million Hindus were compelled to cross the Indian border by the Pakistani army (Dutta, 2005). After the war, many people returned, but a sizeable number of undocumented migrants stayed in India and assimilated into the local population (Roy, 2003). Citizenship in India was granted to those who entered on or before March 25, 1971. Migration from Bangladesh will continue after this date. Approximately 1,000 Bangladeshis cross the border into West Bengal each day, according to a Department of Border Security estimate (Mukherjee 2003). The government of Bangladesh has consistently claimed that "there are no Bangladeshis in India" despite the fact that an estimated 15 million Bangladeshis reside illegally in India (Dutta, 2004).

**Impact on population growth in West Bengal especially in border districts:**

Growth of population in border districts as well as whole state is highly affected by Bangladeshi migrants. Population growth of West Bengal computed with natural increase will be helpful to understand the nature of bulk of migration from Bangladesh.

**Table – 1 Growth of Population of West Bengal Since 1941.**

Year	Population (,000000)	Increase of Population from previous decade.(000000)	Percentage decadal variation
1941	232	43	22.9
1951	263	31	13.2

1961	349	86	32.8
1971	443	94	26.9
1981	546	103	23.2
1991	680	134	24.6
2001	801	121	17.6
2011	913	112	12.27

Source: Census of West Bengal.

The rate of West Bengal's population growth (Table 1) decreased from 26.90% (1961–1971) to 23.20% (1971–1981), yet the population was 4.67 lacs greater in 1981 than it was in 1971 due to the difference in birth and death rates. They are therefore immigrants in West Bengal, coming from different states or beyond. 1.3 million interstate immigrants were counted. The remaining 3.37 lacs are primarily Bangladeshi as a result. According to the theory of natural rise, the real growth rate for the same period should be 22.1% rather than 23.20% (Table 2).

West Bengal is a state that has advanced in implementing birth control and family planning. The main reasons for the decline in mortality and birthrate in this state are the expansion of medical services and the expansion of education, which raises social awareness among the general population, even in rural areas. Early in the 1990s, population experts in India estimated that West Bengal would expand at a pace of 20.79% between 1991 and 1992, while the actual growth rate that year was 24.55%. So what makes sense in regards to this unanticipated growth? This is most likely related to immigration from Bangladesh. There may be some promise in the consistent and ongoing decline during the past two decades (1991–2001 and 2001–2011).

**Table 2 Birth, Death rate and Natural increase in West Bengal**

Year	Birth	Death	Natural Increased per thousand population per Year.(Birth - Death)
1981	32.2	11	22.2
1984	30.4	10.7	19.7
1987	30.7	8.8	21.9
1990	27.3	8.1	19.2
1993	25.4	7.9	17.5
1996	22.8	7.8	15
2001	20.5	6.8	13.7
2011	16.8	6	10.8

Source: Sample Registration Survey Report

The West Bengal government estimates that between 1946 and 1970, 44.5 lac people left East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Between 1971 and 1981, West Bengal attracted an estimated 2 million Bangladeshis. In reality, this number is substantially



larger than the estimate because, between 1947 and

District / State	Percentage Decadal Variation of Muslim		Percentage Decadal Variation of Hindus	
	1981 - 1991	1991 - 2001	1981 - 1991	1991 - 2001
Derjelling	58.18	44.71	24.50	22.18
Jalpaiguri	44.58	31.85	22.54	19.29
Koch Behar	37.43	18.76	18.51	12.83
North Dinajpur	33.48	32.07	28.49	21.51
South Dinajpur	36.09	30.68	24.36	17.75
Malda	34.15	28.36	19.55	15.86
Mursidabad	34.49	21.90	28.43	18.62
Nadia	75.47	23.31	24.10	22.32
North 24 Parganas	69.11	34.27	29.92	15.15
South 24 Parganas	53.67	18.76	30.97	12.83

1991, 2.95 million Hindus moved from Bangladesh to India, primarily West Bengal (Table 3). The similar opinion was expressed in a piece about the vanishing of the Hindu population in Bangladesh by prominent Bangladeshi journalist Mohiuddin Ahmed. Between 1974 and 1981, there were approximately 1.22 million and 1.73 million missing Hindus, respectively. Finding out about Hindu migration in India, particularly in West Bengal, will be made easier if the proportion of Hindus in Bangladesh rapidly declines. (It should also be recalled that many Hindus were slaughtered during the fight of freedom and some of them converted to Islam). As the Bangladeshi census administration discovers 8 million missing people during the intercensal period of 1981–1991 there has been a parallel influx of migration from the Muslim community of Bangladesh. Hindus, who number 1.73 million, are also included in this number. Thus, mostly in West Bengal, 6.28 million Muslims from Bangladesh have entered India. Using various sources, it is reasonable to estimate that over 4/5 million immigrants from Bangladesh arrived at that time, a significant portion of whom were Muslims. It is also the reason why the Muslim population in West Bengal's border areas has been growing at an abnormally rapid rate.

Table – 3 Changing Percentage of Hindu population In Bangladesh from 1941 to 2011

Year	Percentage of Hindu Population
1941	5
1951	22
1961	18.5
1971	13.5
1981	12.13
1991	10.52

2001	9.2
2011	8.96

Source: US Census Bureau, International data base

Identification of these illegal migrants is not an easy task because the political parties of West Bengal

Table – 4 Decadal Increase (1981-91 & 91-01) of Muslim and Hindu Population in The Boarder Districts of West Bengal

Source: Census of West Bengal – 1981, 1991, 2001

help them to be registered as Indian citizen to ensure their own vote bank. Among these huge illegal migrants only a small number is recorded. Most of them avoid census enumeration. Apart from that, for an overview about the growth of population (Muslim and Hindu separately) in border district during four decades, I include the figure extracted from census of West Bengal. From these tables (Table- 4 & 5) it is also possible to grow an idea about the intensity of immigration in different inter-census period.

From a variety of perspectives, the border district's demographic development is crucial. Our nation's security, social cohesion, and economic well-being are all seriously threatened by mass undocumented migration (Nath, 2003). Illegal immigration from Bangladesh and the cross-border movement of armed separatist rebels from a number of armed groups are just two of the issues that Border Security Force (BSF) paramilitaries stationed along the border must deal with (Husain, 2003). In the border region, antisocial behavior constantly interferes with daily life. Due to the partition of Bengal and subsequent acts of terrorism by unauthorized Muslim immigrants, Hindu households in this border region in the Nadia district have been forced to relocate twice (Banerjee, 2003). These infiltrators traffic items like gold, sweets, and narcotics. In these border regions, cattle kidnapping is a highly prevalent occurrence (Banerjee, 2003). Natural resources are put under stress by deforestation, land grabbing, trade grabbing, and unlawful migrant occupation of sidewalks and railroad platforms. By increasing the population density in some locations, the ongoing migrant intake has improved the pre-existing slum (Dutta, 2004).

The infiltrators have also brought about some advantageous modifications. The border region's agriculture is grown using the arduous and inexpensive labor of immigrants. They are compelled to work for low pay due to fierce competition from local workers (Pramanik, 2003). People who have been displaced have contributed



significantly to the growth of this state. Some of the sectors where refugees have left their imprint include handicrafts and small industry, primary education, women's education, urban development, roadways, etc. (Kar, 2003).

**Table – 5 Decadal Increase (1991-01 and 2001-11) of Muslim and Hindu Population in The Boarder Districts of West Bengal**

District / State	Percentage Decadal Variation of Muslim		Percentage Decadal Variation of Hindus	
	1991 - 2001	2001 - 2011	1991 - 2001	2001 - 2011
Derjelling	40.98	26.04	22.15	10.42
Jalpaiguri	31.36	20.75	19.29	11.42
Koch Behar	18.59	19.82	12.78	11.53
North Dinajpur	34.43	29.80	22.84	17.41
South Dinajpur	24.81	14.33	20.04	10.81
Malda	30.65	17.00	17.68	26.13
Mursidabad	28.35	26.03	15.82	11.94
Nadia	21.90	18.15	18.58	9.79
North Parganas	24	22.97	19.44	22.31
South Parganas	24	34.17	26.44	15.14

Source: Census of West Bengal – 1981, 1991, 2001

## II. CONCLUSION:

Humans frequently migrate to areas with better economies, but in the case of Bangladeshis moving to India, political and religious considerations are crucial. One of India's most densely inhabited states is West Bengal, with 1029 persons per square kilometer. The illegal migration of Bangladeshis causes a significant land issue in a state that is so densely inhabited. Because most recent immigrants are urban settlers looking for employment possibilities, urban congestion and slums are growing quickly. In addition to the permanent immigrants, there are also transient and seasonal illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who are less responsible to the country. These transient migrants frequently arrange many forms of crimes in West Bengal's border district, including smuggling, theft and related crimes, prostitution, and trafficking in women and children. Security is at danger in border regions when disturbances are so frequent. The Vote Bank is being expanded In West Bengal, political parties had long protected illegal immigrants from the local government because they could not be subjected to harsh law and order. The administration cannot resolve the issue if the political parties do not adopt a new perspective. Even though the most recent two census results indicate a favorable change in the situation, this is

just the beginning. Recent Bangladeshi immigrants currently favor other big Indian cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, etc. since they provide more chances. The Border Security Force (BSF) and the West Bengal administration must cooperate in order to prevent the worst circumstances in this state. Because illegal immigrants can be easily discovered by these services, there should be good and effective coordination maintained between various government offices like Food and Rationing, Census, Electoral Commission, and local governments. The adoption of the biometric "Adhar" card in 2010 and the voter card with a photo ID in 1996 are effective measures in this regard. Above all, the governments of the two nations should start a successful development program, particularly in the border region, to put an end to this scenario right away..

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