

# Socio-Economic Changes in Assam After the Bangladesh Liberation War: A Critical Analysis

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## Abstract

The liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 triggered significant demographic and socio-economic changes in Assam, a bordering state in India. This paper examines the multifaceted impacts of post-1971 migration from Bangladesh on Assam's economy, society, and politics. Drawing on field studies, government data, and secondary literature, the research highlights both the positive and negative consequences of this migration. While migrants contributed to agricultural productivity and labor supply, their influx also intensified competition for resources, altered demographic patterns, and fueled socio-political tensions. The findings underscore the need for nuanced policy responses that balance humanitarian concerns with the interests of indigenous communities.

**Keywords:** Assam, Bangladesh Liberation War, migration, socio-economic change, demography, agriculture, politics.

## 1. Introduction:

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 not only redrew political boundaries in South Asia but also set off a wave of migration that profoundly impacted Assam. As a neighboring state sharing a porous border with Bangladesh, Assam became a primary destination for refugees and migrants fleeing conflict, persecution, and economic hardship (South Asia Terrorism Portal, n.d.). This migration, which began in earnest after 1971, has since shaped the state's demographic composition, economic landscape, and social fabric. The resultant changes have sparked debates over identity, resource allocation, and political representation, making the issue central to Assam's contemporary history (Academia.edu, n.d.).

## 2. Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative approach, synthesizing data from:

- Field surveys conducted in Assam between 2009 and 2012.
- Government census data and reports.
- Academic literature and policy analyses.
- Secondary sources, including historical records and media reports.

The research focuses on the period following the 1971 war, with particular attention to demographic trends, economic indicators, and social dynamics. The analysis is structured to evaluate both the immediate and long-term impacts of migration on Assam (IJCRT, 2021)

### 3. Discussions:

#### Demographic Changes in Assam After the Bangladesh Liberation War :

The demographic landscape of Assam has undergone profound and complex changes in the decades following the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. These changes are the result of multiple waves of migration, evolving policy frameworks, and shifting socio-political dynamics, with impacts that continue to shape Assam's identity, politics, and economy into the present day.

##### A. Historical Context and Phases of Migration:

Migration from present-day Bangladesh to Assam has occurred in several distinct phases:

- **Colonial Era:** The British colonial administration encouraged migration from East Bengal to Assam for agricultural expansion, leading to a substantial rise in the Bengali-speaking population.
- **Partition (1947):** The partition of India triggered a massive influx of Hindu refugees fleeing communal violence in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), further altering Assam's demographic composition and intensifying anxieties among indigenous communities regarding cultural and political dominance.
- **Post-1971 (Bangladesh Liberation War):** The war and subsequent socio-economic upheavals in Bangladesh led to another large wave of migration—both voluntary and forced—into Assam. Reasons included religious persecution, economic hardship, and environmental displacement (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025).

##### B. Recent Demographic Trends and Data:

Recent research and government data highlight the ongoing and significant demographic shifts in Assam:

- The **Muslim population** in Assam has grown considerably, with recent estimates placing it at approximately 40–41% of the state's total population, up from previous decades (Eurasia Review, 2024; Sentinel Assam, 2025). In contrast, the Hindu population has declined to around 57% (Sentinel Assam, 2025).
- The **Bengali-speaking community** has expanded substantially, especially in lower Assam, altering linguistic and cultural dynamics and fueling apprehensions about the preservation of Assamese identity.
- The **National Register of Citizens (NRC) update in 2019** excluded nearly two million people—many from marginalized communities—raising fears of mass statelessness and underscoring the complexities of citizenship, identity, and belonging in Assam (Sentinel Assam, 2025).

### C. Socio-Political Implications

The demographic transformation has not been limited to numbers; it has deeply affected Assam's social and political fabric:

- **Identity and Cultural Anxiety:** The rising proportion of Bengali-speaking Muslims has intensified fears among indigenous Assamese about cultural dilution and political marginalization. This has led to large-scale movements, such as the Assam Movement (1979–1985), and legislative interventions like the Assam Accord (1985) and the NRC (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025).
- **Policy and Governance:** The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 further complicated the debate, reflecting competing narratives of humanitarianism, national security, and indigenous rights (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025).
- **Political Realignment:** The demographic shifts have influenced electoral outcomes and party politics, with political parties mobilizing support around issues of migration, identity, and resource allocation (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025).

### D. Contemporary Challenges

- **Data Reliability:** The lack of reliable and consistent data on migration complicates policy formulation and often leads to politicized narratives that may exaggerate or understate the scale and impact of migration.
- **Inter-Community Relations:** The assimilation of migrants has led to both cultural exchange and tension, particularly in areas where linguistic and religious changes are most pronounced (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025).
- **Resource Competition:** Migration has increased competition for land, jobs, and government welfare, sometimes to the detriment of indigenous communities.

## Economic Impact of Migration from Bangladesh on Assam (1971–2025)

The migration of people from Bangladesh to Assam since 1971 has produced wide-ranging economic consequences, shaping employment, resource distribution, and state finances. These impacts are complex, involving both contributions to Assam's economy and significant challenges for local communities and governance.

Migration from Bangladesh had mixed economic consequences for Assam:

#### Positive Contributions:

- 1) Migrants brought advanced agricultural techniques, introduced new crops such as jute, and practiced multiple cropping, which increased agricultural productivity (Academia.edu, n.d.).
- 2) The availability of cheap labor benefited sectors like agriculture and construction, reducing production costs and supporting economic growth in certain areas (Ilkogretim Online, 2021).

**Negative Consequences:**

- 1) The influx of migrants increased competition for land and jobs, displacing local workers and depressing wage levels, particularly during economic downturns (IJCRT, 2021).
- 2) The state government faced increased fiscal burdens, allocating resources for relief, infrastructure, and welfare schemes targeted at migrant populations, often at the expense of other development priorities (Journal of Aquatic Science, 2021)

**Labour Market Dynamics and Wage Structures:**

Migrants from Bangladesh have become a crucial part of Assam's workforce, particularly in agriculture, construction, and informal sectors. Their willingness to accept lower wages and perform labor-intensive tasks has contributed to increased agricultural productivity—especially in rice, fishing, and dairy sectors—by ensuring a steady supply of labor (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025). However, this has also intensified competition for jobs, leading to wage stagnation and displacement concerns among local workers, especially in unorganized sectors where labor protections are minimal (Barman, 2024; Singh, 2025). Employers benefit from reduced labor costs, but local resentment has grown due to perceptions of economic marginalization.

**Market Competition and Informal Sector Growth:**

Migrants have expanded their presence in small-scale businesses and informal trade, including petty retail and street vending. This has increased market competition, altered local pricing, and sometimes led to friction with Assamese entrepreneurs (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025). In urban and peri-urban areas, the proliferation of migrant-run businesses has reshaped local economies, while in rural areas, the integration of migrants into agricultural labor markets has shifted traditional employment patterns (Singh, 2025).

**Access to Welfare and Public Resources:**

A contentious aspect is the participation of migrants in government welfare schemes. There are documented cases where migrants, sometimes using fraudulent documentation, have accessed poverty alleviation programs, ration subsidies, and rural employment schemes meant for Indian citizens (India Today NE, 2025). This has strained public resources and generated resentment among local populations, prompting calls for stricter verification in welfare distribution.

**Taxation, Fiscal Impact, and State Revenue:**

Many migrants, especially those without legal documentation, work in the informal sector and fall outside the tax net, resulting in revenue shortfalls for the state government (Barman, 2024). While they contribute to economic output, their limited direct tax contributions restrict the state's ability to reinvest in infrastructure and welfare for local residents (Saikia & Hatiboruah, 2025).

**Resource Pressure and Environmental Sustainability:**

Migration-driven population growth has increased pressure on Assam's natural resources, including land, water, and forests. Studies indicate that population density increases due to migration have contributed to deforestation, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss, affecting livelihoods and economic stability for resource-dependent communities (Singh, 2025).

**Recent Trends and Policy Implications (2019–2025):**

Recent political and economic crises in Bangladesh, such as the 2024 textile industry collapse, have triggered new migration waves, intensifying competition for jobs and resources in Assam (The Assam Rising, 2025). The Assam government has responded with stricter border controls and policy debates on migrant integration, labor rights, and resource management (Eurasia Review, 2025). Recent research emphasizes the need for adaptive, data-driven policies that promote regional employment, resource conservation, and socio-economic inclusion (Singh, 2025).

**4. Conclusion**

The socio-economic changes in Assam following the Bangladesh Liberation War are complex and multifaceted. While migrants have contributed to agricultural development and economic diversification, their arrival has also strained resources, altered demographic balances, and generated enduring social and political challenges. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that recognizes both the contributions and the concerns associated with migration. Sustainable solutions must be rooted in inclusive development, effective governance, and respect for the rights and aspirations of all communities in Assam.

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