

Inter-State Migration to Assam: A Study of Street Vendor in the City of Guwahati

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Abstract

The migration of people from one place to another has been going on since ancient times. It has happened in every look and corner of the world. The main reason behind such migration was the food search. The process is continuing all over the world. Migration in Assam is a burning issue that draws worldwide attention. The issue of migration has been discussed from different angles, like transnational, inter-state, inter-state, and so on. However, it has been observed that the issue of illegal transnational migration has stolen much attention comparatively. Though legal, inter-state migration is also an important concern as it has socio-cultural, political and economic significance. The density of the subject of inter-state migration can be felt in cities like Guwahati, Assam, especially in the informal sector. Migrants from outside the state border are basically visible in areas like, tiny trades, door-to-door vendors, low-income earning jobs, mechanics, carpenters, rickshaw pullers, daily wage labourers, etc. There always has an effect of such migrants which needs to be studied for the greater interest of the state. This paper attempts to make a very modest study of the street vendors of the city of Guwahati. It seems that most of the city street vendors are migrants and they have monopolized the informal sector in the city. During study it will be attempted to know their origin, causes of migration to Assam, and choosing the particular business. It is hoped that the study will be able to find out the consequences of such migration in depth and its adverse effects on the growing problem of joblessness and environmental degradation in the city.)

Keywords: *Migration, Burning issue, Illegal migration, Street vendors, etc.*

Introduction:

Migration is a universal phenomenon. From time immemorial, people used to migrate from place to place in search of food, livelihood, and shelter. In today's modern world too, migration is a prominent issue discussed and debated even at the UN level. The recent migration statistics published in September 2020 by the UN reveal that 281 million international migrants are living all over the world. The same source releases data relating to Bangladeshi migrants in India stating India as the "single largest bilateral stock of International migrants". According to another UN Report, India has become the shelter for about 3.2 million Bangladeshi migrants as of 2013. India being the second largest populous country in the world finds migration as a very sensitive issue in the arena of socio-economic and political matters. Assam is the worst sufferer in this regard. The issue of Bangladeshi migrants has created several socio-political unrests and economic instability within the state for the last few decades. However, this paper attempts to throw light on inter-state migration, that too in a specific area of business activity, towards

the state of Assam, which is also an important aspect but hardly bothered both by the government and the public at large.

Indian citizens are allowed to work and stay anywhere within the geographical territory of the country. Therefore, inter-state migration is not specific to Assam only. But, Assam's case is seemed to be special in terms of the nature of economic activities occupied by the migrants. It has been observed that most of the migrated people are concentrated in activities lying in the unorganized sector and lower income strata. In cities like Guwahati migrated people are found doing small trade starting from fruit, tea, sugarcane juice, etc. selling in almost all the central market areas and footpaths to vending several perishable as well as durable household essential goods door to door. Likewise, small but indispensable services of washermen, barbers, cobblers, sweepers, cycle mechanics, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, milkmen, fish selling, egg selling, butchers, gardeners, rickshaw pullers, drivers, porters, tailors, junk food sellers at foot path, loading-unloading workers at business places, workers at shopping malls-beauty parlors-show rooms, security guards, etc. are predominated by the migrated people. During our study, it is attempted to find out the push and pull factors responsible for such migration. The huge problem of joblessness among the youth of the state has also been kept in consideration throughout the project. It is anticipated that most of those interstate-migrated people belong to one single state and that is Bihar. However, Assam has a long tradition of migration from different parts of the country even after independence, especially from Rajasthan, West Bengal, Orissa, Punjab, and other states. Most of them are associated with the big business houses, and trading companies of the state both as owners and workers. An attempt has been made in this paper to go through the activities of the street vendors, their origin, income, cause for selecting this special trade in Assam, and the related issues.

Objective of the Study

1. The paper aims to examine internal migration emphasizing inter-state migration to Assam.
2. The paper attempts to study the reasons for inter-state migration.
3. Consequential effects of such migration on socio-economic and political matters of the state.

Database and Methodology:

For the said study, first-hand data are collected personally based on questionnaire prepared for the purpose. Along with these primary data, the Census Report of the Government of India for the period 1991, 2001, and 2011 has also been collected and consulted as authenticable support for the study.

Census and Inter-State Migration Data for Assam:

Census in India is held regularly in 10 years. It releases data on migration too along with state-wise breakup. In the context of inter-state migration, "a person is defined as migrant by place of last residence if the place in which he is enumerated during the census is other than his place of immediate last residence"(census of India-2001). Up to 1961 from 1872 the migration data were collected based on birth place only. Since 1961 onwards it has started to question regarding the duration of the last residence along with the birth place. The queries regarding reasons for migration included since the 1981 census. The census data provides a migration table for intra-district, inter-district, inter-state, and international migrants. Data indicating rural-urban migration are also included in the census report.

As per the census, the inter-state migration data to Assam exhibited a falling trend during the period 1991-2001 and again rose in 2011. It was 4,87,761 in 1991 which became 4, 07,141 in 2001 and

4,95,321 in 2011. The percentage of inter-state migration out of the total migrated people decreased to 5.99 in 2001 from 9.02 in 1991 and again increased to 9.87 in 2011. The following table reveals the state-wise migration figures to Assam as enumerated during these three censuses:

Table 1: Inter-state migrants to Assam

States	1991 migrants	% of total inter-state	2001 migrants	% of total inter-state	2011 migrants	% of total inter-state
Arunachal Pradesh	8210	1.7	7619	1.9	19487	3.9
Nagaland	9780	2.0	13476	3.3	23707	4.7
Meghalaya	30259	6.2	23399	5.7	40755	8.23
Manipur	6540	1.3	6241	1.5	12203	2.5
Mizoram	2880	0.2	1789	0.4	3157	0.6
Tripura	34443	7.0	29427	7.2	39906	8.05
Sikkim	1230	0.2	847	0.2	1077	0.2
Bihar	170213	34.89	127397	31.29	147742	29.82
West Bengal	90864	18.7	81654	20.1	94724	19.12
Uttar Pradesh	45847	9.4	37791	9.3	35441	7.16
Rajasthan	27269	5.6	23210	5.7	27778	5.61
Total state (all)	487761	-	407141	-	495321	-

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001 and 2011.

The table shows the highest number of migrants from Bihar for all three censuses. Out of the total migrants, it is found to be 34.9 percent in 1991 which has decreased to 31.3 percent in 2001 and again decreases to 29.82 in the next census. Over it shows a declining number which is a bit unbelievable while observing the ground reality of the population features of the state.

The reasons for migration as informed by the migrants are recorded by the census as being for the purpose of employment, business, education, marriage, movement of the family, etc. The first two factors are found to be the dominant factors among all. The educational attainments of the migrated people are not satisfactory. There exists evidences of illiteracy especially among female migrants. More than half of the female and around one-third of the male migrants are enumerated as illiterate by the census of 2001. Nearly 39 percent of the male and 31 percent of the female belong to the category of below metric. The number of migrants with higher or technical degrees is very negligible as indicated in the census. Thus, the migrants represent a low category of human resources in terms of educational attainment.

Migration in Guwahati: A Study of the Street Vendors:

The capital city of Guwahati, being the center of all kinds of government and non-government offices, business, and educational hubs of the region, follows the pattern of migration of other metro cities of the country. Population in Guwahati city has increased from 5, 84,342 in 1991 to 8, 09,895 as of 2001 as revealed by the census report. The latest census of 2011 shows a total population of 9, 63,429 for the city under Guwahati Municipal Corporation. However, this does not include the whole area of Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority. GMC covers 216 square kilometers while GMDA covers 340 square kilometers under their respective jurisdictions. Therefore, the population will be a bit more if

counts for the whole GMDA area. GMDA covers the metropolitan area of Guwahati as a whole. Thus, the population for Guwahati Metro has been estimated to be 6, 46,169 in 1991 and 8, 90, 773 in 2001. The population density has also exhibited a rising trend from 2705 per sq. km. in 1991 to 3741 per sq. km. in 2001. The decadal growth rate of the population for the 2001 census has been estimated as 37.85 % for Guwahati metro as it is 38.6% for the GMC area. This is to be noted that the decadal growth rate for the state of Assam in 2001 was 18.85% against 21.35% growth for all India average. Migration is a significant factor for such growth rate of population and density. Guwahati accommodates different types of migrants. As per census data, a total number of migrants was 276,835 in 1991 which has increased to 378,657 in 2001. The following table exhibits migrants’ statistics category-wise:

Table 2: Migration to Guwahati

States	1991 migrants	% of total inter-state	2001 migrants	% of total inter-state	2011 migrants	% of total inter-state
Arunachal Pradesh	8210	1.7	7619	1.9	19487	3.9
Nagaland	9780	2.0	13476	3.3	23707	4.7
Meghalaya	30259	6.2	23399	5.7	40755	8.23
Manipur	6540	1.3	6241	1.5	12203	2.5
Mizoram	2880	0.2	1789	0.4	3157	0.6
Tripura	34443	7.0	29427	7.2	39906	8.05
Sikkim	1230	0.2	847	0.2	1077	0.2
Bihar	170213	34.89	127397	31.29	147742	29.82
West Bengal	90864	18.7	81654	20.1	94724	19.12
Uttar Pradesh	45847	9.4	37791	9.3	35441	7.16
Rajasthan	27269	5.6	23210	5.7	27778	5.61
Total state (all)	487761	-	407141	-	495321	-

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001 & 2011

Table 2 reveals the same trend of decreasing flow of migrants in regard to inter-state migration. On the contrary, intra-district migration has shown a rising tendency towards Guwahati city. Still, inter-district migration is dominating during the last three decades. The reason behind such migration within the state is very simple and natural too, i.e. employment and business. The pull factor of employment as well as income sources works here to make the people move towards the city. Besides, some push factors like the poor infrastructure of the suburban and rural areas, lack of alternative occupation other than cultivation in the rural areas, etc. are also responsible for such migration. When a person moves from a village in search of a livelihood and succeeds subsequently the whole family migrates towards the destination. Thus, marriage and the movement of the family become two important causes for migration regarding a huge number of migrants within the state. These facts are reflected in the census too. Guwahati is not a center of attraction for the native people only, especially, in the field of trade and commerce. Rather, the city trade has been dominated by the migrated people coming from different states of the country. This has been recognized as a tradition. Employment and business are together found to be the leading factors responsible for such migration to Guwahati. The following table justifies this:

Table-3: Reasons for Inter-state Migration to Guwahati

States	1991 migrants	% of total inter-state	2001 migrants	% of total inter-state	2011 migrants	% of total inter-state
Arunachal Pradesh	8210	1.7	7619	1.9	19487	3.9
Nagaland	9780	2.0	13476	3.3	23707	4.7
Meghalaya	30259	6.2	23399	5.7	40755	8.23
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Rajasthan	27269	5.6	23210	5.7	27778	5.61
Total state (all)	487761	-	407141	-	495321	-

Source: compiled from the data of the Census of India of 1991, 2001, and 2011.

It is visible in the above table that employment and business together become the reason for nearly one-third of migrants (both male and female) from other states to choose Guwahati as their destination. Secondly, marriage and the movement of the family make people migrate to the city. Somehow these two reasons are associated with the earlier reasons of employment and business. In both categories, the numbers of female migrants are more which is very much obvious. The irony of the situation is that Assam has been suffering from the acute problem of unemployment for a long. The native people find it difficult to get employment on their land, whereas people from other states have made it a tradition to come over here and earn their livelihood and finally reconcile here with their family. At this point, it is necessary to carry out an extensive study to investigate the hidden reasons for such an irony.

Migration tables prepared for Assam by the Census of India reveal that out of the total inter-state male migrants, 23.1% in 1991 and 27% in 2001 and 29.3% in 2011 expressed their reasons for migration as to be the business. Assam’s socio-economic history finds a few Assamese people involved in trade and commerce. Therefore, it is supposed that even today the native people spare space for those migrants in the field of trade and commerce. The present study of Guwahati city street vendors, though a modest one justifies this hypothesis to be the truth.

The study was carried out in some center places of Guwahati better known as busy market areas. The places covered the market areas of Beltola, Basistha Charali, Ganeshguri, Bhangagarh, Chandmari, Ulubari, Noonmati, Panbazar, Fancybazar, Machkhowa, Maligaon, Aadabari and Jalukbari. Altogether 111 street vendors both wholesale traders and retailers were enumerated. A set of questionnaires has been prepared for the purpose. Questions ranged from their place of origin, causes for choosing that specific trade and place, cause for migration if he/she was a migrant, family, education, etc. to the problem, income, and future plan. They unveiled everything in a cherished attitude. However, they disclosed their income in a hesitating mood. The following table reveals their identity:

Table 4: The Origin of the Surveyed Fruit Seller in Guwahati

Place of Origin found during the Survey	Total No. of Traders Surveyed	% of Total Traders Surveyed
Assam	18	16.21
Bihar	60	54.06
Uttar Pradesh	11	9.91
West Bengal	22	19.82
Total	111	100.0

Source: Field –Survey.

The table exhibits that out of the total 111 street vendors that have been surveyed, 60 are found to be from Bihar accounting for around 54.06%. The survey has found that 9.91% and 19.82% of traders migrated from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal respectively. Assamese local traders include only 16.21% of Guwahati. The Census Report of India also reveals that 34.46% migrated from Bihar to Guwahati during 2011, which had been followed by West Bengal (18.28%), Rajasthan(0.97%), Uttar Pradesh(0.56%), Andhra Pradesh(0.15%) and Punjab(0.12%). However, the present survey could not reach any street vendors from the states of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab. It seems that migrants from those states are not concentrated in street trading. The Assamese fruit sellers are the inter-district migrants from Barpeta, Nalbari, Dhubri, and Goalpara. The other findings of the survey may be laid down below:

1. Most of the traders run their shop from their own permanent shed. Another section does it from rented sheds in the market areas. A few of them trade from footpaths too.
2. 12.9% of the total traders have their own house in Guwahati. 2.9% possess land but have yet to construct their own house. The rest of the traders stay in rented houses. The family members of the traders range from 2 to 11.
3. The traders surveyed for the study were found to be within the age group of 21 to 52 years. The marital status reveals only 14% as unmarried. Others have their family either in Guwahati or at their places of origin. Most of their family moved in along with them.
4. The wholesale traders are mainly concentrated in Fancy Bazar, Machkhowa, and Aadabari areas. Among them, the survey found a few Assamese traders too. The new generation wholesalers are found to be comparatively more educated.
5. In the study, it was found that most of the rural migrants are of having low skills and lower education so they are compelled to absorb themselves in the informal sectors. The education profile of the traders reveals that most of them have a school education below metric level. Around 19% were found to be matriculated, where as 11.9% reported as graduates and another segment of 11.9% found to be illiterate. Children of the traders attend schools/colleges regularly, either in Guwahati or at their place of origin.
6. Most of the traders are reluctant to disclose their income. They preferred to give an approximate idea relating to their income instead of a clear-cut sum. From such data, it has been observed that their income ranges from Rs. 5,000 to Rs.30, 000 per month. Again it does not give us any idea whether these are their net income or gross one. However, from their attitude, it can be imagined that they are doing well in their business. They are earning good to satisfy the needs of the family and children’s education. Those, with family at their places of origin send money regularly to them. Most of them

replied that they could save with banks regularly after incurring household expenditures. It seems that they are satisfied with their business and income.

7. The traders do not have any dissatisfaction regarding the price of their products. Most of them confessed that the prices are comparatively higher in relation to their state.
8. When asked about their contribution to the society, they reply that by supplying an essential, nutritious commodity for the consumer, they are rendering services to the people of the state. As the price for their business, they pay taxes to the Municipal Corporation regularly.
9. The most relevant question regarding their choosing of this destination has been replied by the migrant traders more or less in the same way that it is like a tradition for them. For most of them, their father's business in Assam works as a pulling factor to come over here and to handle their "traditional trade". A section of them migrated with their friends or relatives to earn a livelihood and settle over here as they failed to find any source of income at their own place. Thus, the "lack of earning source" at their places works as a push factor for their migration. Another pull factor found to be the "profit" as they informed which is higher here than at their own place.

Conclusion:

Though modest, the study has revealed the nature and causes of migration among the street vendors from other states to Guwahati city. A very negligible role is played by the native people. Thus, the city traders have become a part of the burning problem of immigration for the whole state for which the state had to suffer a lot during the last decades. It is not the fault of the traders that they have come over here and grabbed the opportunity of reaping the profits of the business. But definitely, they are contributing up to some extent in lessening the employment scopes for the local people. They helped the city to become overcrowded. They changed the demography of the city and have added to socio-economic problems of accommodation, space, employment, shelter, and so on. The migrated people have adversely affected the distributional pattern of public goods too. It increases demand for socio-economic accommodations like more facilities on roads, banks, schools, hospitals, markets, parks, drainage and sanitation facilities, electricity and water supply, residential accommodation, etc., and creates chaos. This also contributed to the environmental degradation. As most of the migrated people are illiterate, they are less aware of waste management and environmental pollution. As a huge portion of the city migrants represent a specific community, it has created cultural differences with the local people. In that way, it has been associated with the identity problem of the native people and disturbs the cultural harmony of the land. As they exercise their political rights, there exists every possibility of influencing the local politics by the migrated people. Therefore, the issue needs serious attention from different platforms along with the government.

The local youth instead of struggling for government jobs should go for self-employment by starting small trades. If migrated people can support their families with such occupations, there can never be any reason for the native people not accepting such jobs as a source of livelihood. They should initiate such a tradition. Migrated people hardly possess a sense of belongingness in the land of migration without which it is difficult to feel and practice civic responsibility. They are not concerned with the problem of environmental degradation or societal harmony. This can be well observed in Guwahati. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the authorities as well as voluntary organisations and NGOs to adopt necessary action.

The government can utilize these indigenous resources by adopting proper policies and thereby creating scope for self-employment for the local young unemployed persons. Once the opportunity is captured by the local workforce, the flow of migration will be lessened automatically. However, no one can expect an end to migration. It is to be kept in mind that the issue of migration has been discussed and debated at higher levels like the UN and asked to extract the benefits of migration both for the place of origin of the migrants and the place of destination.

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