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Kumar Nagarjun
UG Student 1st Year
BA (Hons.) Political Science
Zakir Husain Delhi College
Evening, Delhi University,
Delhi, India

The refugees and immigration crisis between India and Bangladesh in south Asia

Kumar Nagarjun

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Abstract

The refugee and immigration crisis between India and Bangladesh has been a persistent challenge in South Asia, highlighting complex socio-economic, political, and humanitarian issues. This paper examines the root causes, trends, and implications of migration and displacement in the region, with a particular focus on the Rohingya crisis. Through an analysis of historical and contemporary data, the study explores the response mechanisms of South Asian nations and international organizations, offering recommendations for addressing these pressing challenges.

Keywords: Refugees, immigration, India-Bangladesh, Rohingya, migration, displacement, humanitarian

Introduction

The paradox of the modern world is that it revolves around improvements and fails to provide enough support for ordinary people. However, despite international attempts at putting in place systems to assist refugees and alleviate their plight, there seems to be a problem with the execution. These do not appear to play their expected role as evidenced by some deficiencies within organizations such as the United Nations and other global organizations.

However, the situation is getting worse on the ground as more refugees are becoming desperate. This discourse captures ongoing struggle particularly in South Asian countries which are experiencing massive refugee influxes.

The history from the League of Nations to the United Nations presents a trajectory laden with challenges towards effective management of refugees. Refugee crises and migration have become defining global issues in an age characterized by unparalleled connectivity and interdependence. Millions are displaced amidst geopolitics volatility, economic disparities and environmental degradation thus move from one place seeking solace or better chances elsewhere.

The challenges faced by refugees, who are forced to leave their homes in search of safety and stability highlight the need for actions. Dealing with their protection, support and long term solutions requires effort. At the time voluntary migration driven by hopes for opportunities and social advancement emphasizes how interconnected human societies are.

Understanding the causes, trends and effects of refugee crises and migration is crucial in shaping policies that uphold values like unity, inclusivity and respect for human dignity. It is also important to acknowledge how these issues intersect with concerns such as development, security and climate change to develop solutions.

In essence addressing refugee crises and migration calls for an approach that recognizes the complexities of displacements while respecting the rights and dignity of each person. Through global actions we can hope to tackle these difficulties and build a fairer and more compassionate world.

Who are refugees?

Countless individual's worldwide struggle to meet their basic needs without any support or protection from their home countries. To fulfill our obligations towards these individuals, it's imperative for the international community to step in and offer assistance. To effectively provide aid,

Corresponding Author:
Kumar Nagarjun
UG Student 1st Year
BA (Hons.) Political Science
Zakir Husain Delhi College
Evening, Delhi University,
Delhi, India

we must establish clear criteria to determine who should be eligible and what forms of relief should be provided. One compelling suggestion put forward by scholars and activists is to classify all those unable to meet their basic needs as refugees, thereby extending them the protections outlined in the United Nations refugee convention. This approach would greatly broaden the conventional definition of refugees, ensuring that more vulnerable individuals receive the support and protection they desperately need.

In current conversations, the term "Banjaras" evokes a notion of wandering existence and survival in order to meet basic living needs. Banjaras who are known for covering long distances cleverly see to it that they satisfy their minimal requirements while on the move. Historically, the Banjaras constituted an important group of mercantile nomads who moved from one place to another in caravans known as tandas. These tandas were often made up of hundreds of people including families who accompanied them during their journeys. The Banjaras had cattle such as oxen with which they transported goods mainly grains from areas of surfeit to places where they fetched high returns. They would plan for their movements so carefully that on average they covered only six or seven miles per day and preferred cooler climates.

Despite living distinctly different lives, Banjaras should not be classified as refugees. The difference lies in their capacity to live without perpetual homes unlike refugees whose situation is marked by lack of permanent shelters. This distinction highlights the resilience and adaptability that characterizes Banjara communities.

The south Asia refugee problem (main focus, the Rohingyas)

The Rohingya refugee crisis has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian issues in South Asia. Originating from Myanmar's Rakhine State, the Rohingya Muslims have faced persecution, violence, and displacement for decades. The situation has escalated into a regional crisis, with neighboring countries grappling with the influx of Rohingya refugees. This research aims to delve into the root causes of the Rohingya refugee problem, the challenges faced by refugees, and the responses from the international community and South Asian nations.

Root Causes of the Rohingya Refugee Problem

The Rohingya crisis can be traced back to Myanmar's complex socio-political landscape. Discriminatory policies, fueled by ethnic and religious tensions, have marginalized the Rohingya population for years. The 1982 Citizenship Law stripped them of citizenship, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to persecution. Systematic violence, including military crackdowns and communal riots, has forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.

Challenges Faced by Rohingya Refugees

Upon fleeing Myanmar, Rohingya refugees face a multitude of challenges. The perilous journey across the border often involves risks of violence, exploitation, and human trafficking. Once in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, India, and Malaysia, refugees encounter overcrowded camps with inadequate shelter, sanitation, and healthcare facilities. They also confront legal barriers, as many countries refuse to recognize them as refugees or provide them with basic rights.

Response of South Asian Nations

South Asian nations have adopted varied approaches towards Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh, hosting the largest Rohingya refugee population, has provided shelter and aid despite its resource constraints. However, it has also faced criticism for its limited capacity to support such a massive refugee influx sustainably. India's response has been mixed, with some states welcoming Rohingya refugees while others have sought their deportation. Malaysia has provided temporary shelter to Rohingya refugees, but their status remains precarious.

International Response

The international community has condemned Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya and called for accountability for human rights violations. However, efforts to address the crisis have been hindered by geopolitical complexities and the lack of a unified response. Humanitarian organizations have provided aid and assistance to Rohingya refugees, but funding shortages and access constraints have limited their impact. The United Nations and other international bodies have urged Myanmar to create conditions conducive to the safe and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees.

Prospects for Resolution

Resolving the Rohingya refugee crisis requires a multi-faceted approach addressing both the immediate humanitarian needs and the underlying causes of displacement. Myanmar must end the persecution of Rohingya, restore their citizenship rights, and ensure their safety and security. South Asian nations need to uphold their international obligations to protect refugees and provide them with access to basic services. The international community should increase diplomatic pressure on Myanmar and support efforts to facilitate the voluntary repatriation and resettlement of Rohingya refugees.

The Rohingya refugee problem exemplifies the complexities of forced displacement in South Asia. It is not merely a humanitarian crisis but also a symptom of deeper political, social, and ethnic tensions. Addressing the root causes of the crisis and ensuring the rights and dignity of Rohingya refugees requires concerted efforts from Myanmar, South Asian nations, and the international community. Only through collaborative action can meaningful progress be made towards resolving one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of our time.

India Facing Refugee Problem

If we look at the past around 1947, India faced partition and with that refugee influx started, India still faces the refugee problem.

India, despite not being party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol and lacking a national refugee protection framework, demonstrates its compassion by providing asylum to numerous refugees from neighboring states. It also upholds the UNHCR's mandate, particularly for individuals from Afghanistan and Myanmar. While the government treats different refugee groups differently, it generally respects the principle of providing refuge to those with UNHCR documentation. However, security concerns have led to some restrictions on asylum space, complicating the identification and protection of refugees.

2011-2012 DATA

TYPE OF POPULATION	ORIGIN	JAN 2011		DEC 2011	
		TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHOM ASSISTED BY UNHCR	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHOM ASSISTED BY UNHCR
Refugees	Afghanistan	9,000	9,000	10,000	10,000
	Myanmar	5,000	5,000	7,500	7,500
	Various	1,200	1,200	1,300	1,300
Asylum-seekers	Afghanistan	2,400	2,400	3,200	3,200
	Myanmar	6,500	6,500	8,800	8,800
	Various	600	600	800	800
Others of concern	China	100,000	0	100,000	0
	Sri Lanka	74,000	0	73,000	0
Total		198,700	24,700	204,600	31,600

Fig 1: Planning figure for India

To address this challenge, UNHCR has expanded its registration efforts to support the government effectively. In the absence of a formal legal framework, UNHCR conducts refugee status determination for asylum-seekers from non-neighboring countries and Myanmar. Additionally, UNHCR assists in the voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from its presence in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Despite the presence of a significant population of stateless individuals in India, accurate estimates are unavailable. UNHCR is actively working to identify and map these stateless groups, underscoring India's commitment to humanitarian efforts. The big questions come here, Why won't India sign the Convention or the Protocol? The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) won't officially say why, but the reasons are chiefly security-related. The line of argument is that borders in South Asia are extremely porous and any conflict can result in a mass movement of people. This can have two results: first, a strain on local infrastructure and resources in countries that are poorly equipped to deal with sudden spikes in population.

Who are migrants?

We are facing one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of our time: the plight of "refugees", "asylum seekers" and "migrants." Since earliest times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of new economic opportunities and horizons. Others move to escape armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, terrorism, or human rights violations and abuses. As a nation deeply committed to upholding human rights and promoting peace and stability, restructuring the aid mechanisms for refugees, may ensuring that they receive the support and assistance they desperately need. We are witnessing in today's world an unprecedented level of human mobility. More people than ever before live in a country other than the one in which they were born. Migrants are present in all countries in the world. The vast majority of them move without any difficulties. They topped 244 million in number in 2015, surpassing worldwide population expansion. Nonetheless, there are over 65 million individuals who were brutally displaced, consisting of over 40 million internally displaced people, 3 million asylum seekers, and a total of more than 21 million refugees. of the 108.4 million people who have been forcibly relocated by the end of 2022, 43.3 million (or 40%) are expected to be children under the age of 18. Enormous scale migrants and refugees are frequently in

horrible circumstances. Many people take tremendous risks and set out on dangerous ventures that many may not make it complete. Some people are compelled to perform labor for nefarious groups, such as smugglers, whereas other individuals could become victims of human trafficking or fall victim to such organisations. Even if they succeed in getting there, they face an uncertain reception and a precarious future.

India and Bangladesh

India and Bangladesh are two rapidly developing south Asian behemoths with a collective population of around 2 billion. Their relationship is characterized by historical, geographical and cultural ties.

Map of Bangladesh and the states surrounding it

The international border dividing the nations of Bangladesh and India can be referred to locally as the Radcliffe Line (IB). India and Bangladesh are separated by an international boundary measuring 4,096 kilometers. The border covers five Indian states, with the biggest stretch spanning 2,217 km in West Bengal, India. The border is the fifth longest land border in the world, extending 262 km in Assam, 856 km in Tripura, 318 km in Mizoram, and 443 km in Meghalaya. The long and permeable border connecting the two countries facilitates significant cross-border movement. This may apply to both irregular, illegal migration as well as regular movement for employment, schooling, and family reunification. Additionally, this border acts as a corridor for the smuggling of drugs, food, livestock, and other commodities. Indian border authorities have implemented a controversial shoot-on-sight policy as an approach of upholding border security in response to the difficulties brought on by the influx of undocumented immigrants from Bangladesh. Both governments have been cooperating with acknowledgment of the need for effective administration and regulation of such movement. The main objectives of these attempts is to halt human trafficking, strengthen border security, and ensure the overall well-being of the people who migrate between borders.

Data

According to the 2001 census, 3,084,826 people in India migrated from Bangladesh.



Fig 2: Border Outline

The government's response to migration on both sides

The most commonly recognized amongst the initiatives that were implemented by the Indian government to give recognition to undocumented immigrants from Bangladesh is the Illegal Migrant Determination Tribunal (IMDT), which was established by Parliament in 1983. It was established especially for the state of Assam, where societal instability and ethnic strife have long been dragged about by the issue of illegal immigration. Unfortunately, the IMDT's performance fell short of expectations. From the moment the tribunal became operational in 1983 until the 2000s, it only found 10,000 illegal immigrants and deported 1,400 of them. According to its poor implementation, the Foreigners Act of 1946 is to be enforced across India in order to expel illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, as directed by the Supreme Court of India in 2005.

However, there are issues with removal under the Foreigners Act as well. In 2003, all states were given instructions to deport undocumented immigrants under the Home Minister at that time, L.

K. Advani. A few weeks later, 265 individuals were sent to the border; however, Bangladeshi officials declined to take in them. In reality, the dispute between Bangladesh's Border Guards, previously referred to as the Bangladesh Rifles, and India's Border Security Forces (BSF) deteriorated to the point of violence. Further complicating matters is Bangladesh's constant denial that its citizens are crossing the border illegally. Deporting illegal immigrants becomes extremely difficult due to Bangladeshi authorities' reluctance to cooperate, even in instances when Indian officials recognized them.

The reasons for migration pull factors

Employment: People can relocate in search of greater employment possibilities owing to economic disparities

across countries. Bangladesh routinely struggles to provide sufficient employment opportunities for its citizens given its massive population and limited economic possibilities. India, on the opposite end of the spectrum, possesses a broader range of employment prospects across multiple industries as a result of its bigger and more diverse economy. The perceived economic opportunities and income inequalities could motivate people from Bangladesh to head to India in seeking better living conditions. As an example, the Bangladesh Labor and Employment Ministry recently announced that the minimum wage for workers in Bangladesh is 12,500 takas (\$113) per month. In the meanwhile, an unskilled worker in Delhi, the capital of India, earns 16,792 Indian rupees, or \$202.83. A demand for workers is often the motivating factor behind labor migration.

Better living conditions

India, a larger and more industrialized nation, frequently offers greater access to basic infrastructures such as roads, power, sanitation, and medical services, than certain regions of Bangladesh. Individuals who migrate to more developed regions of India in seeking better living conditions may do so via locating additional facilities and a higher standard of living there. Parents who want to provide their children a better future have to ensure that they are enabled to access excellent educational opportunities. India offers a better-rounded educational system including prestigious universities, technical institutes, and schools. For the opportunity to further their education or offer more educational possibilities for their children, Bangladeshis may migrate to India, especially to the regions and cities recognized for educational institutions. India's healthcare system is highly advanced. Gaining access to high-quality instruction is important.

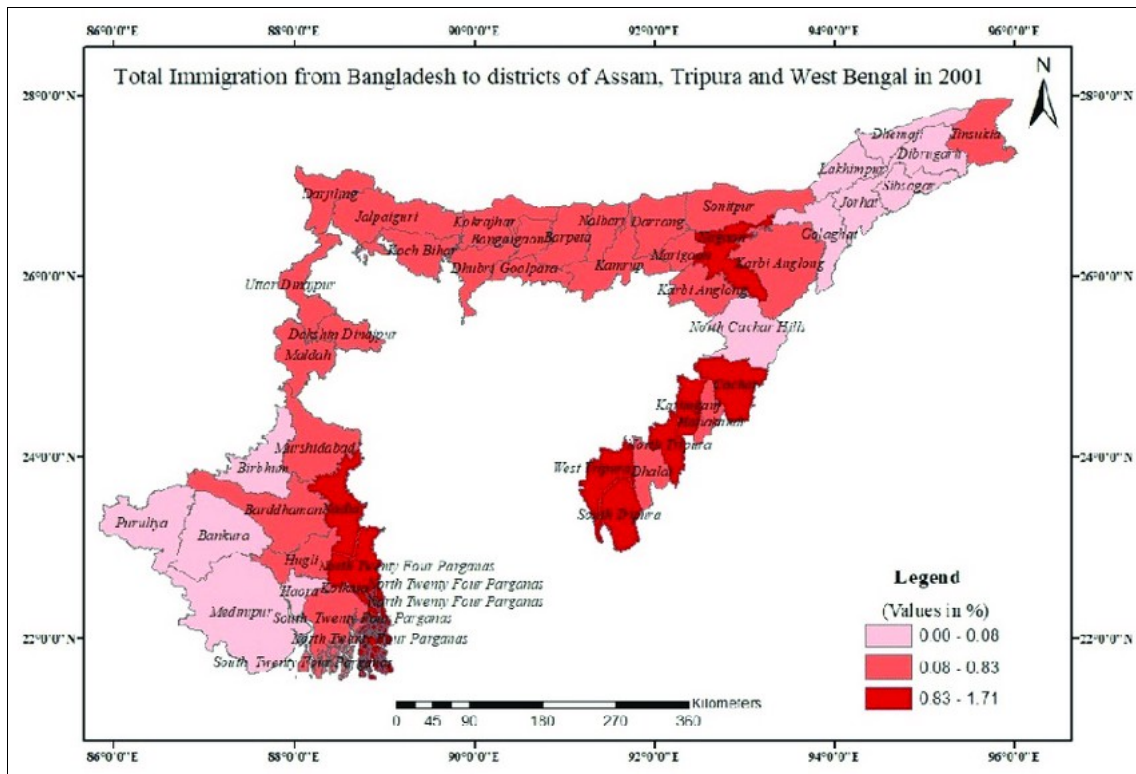


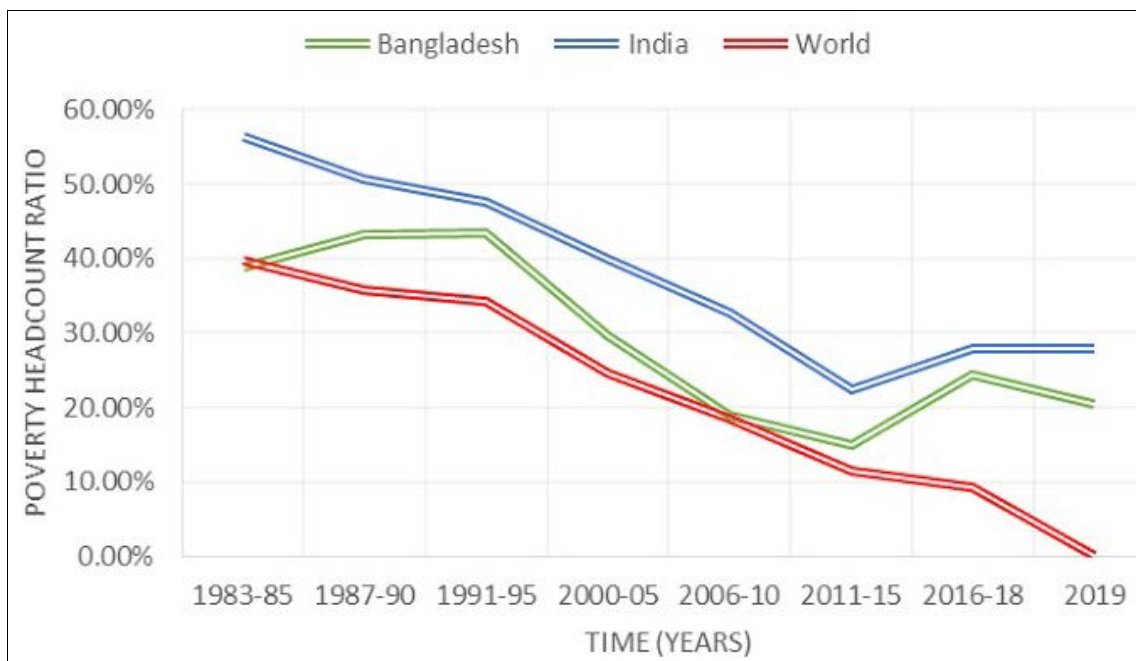
Fig 3: Border Outline

Push factors

Escaping poverty

In Bangladesh, poverty frequently causes it difficult for individuals to obtain secure, lucrative work. People can discover it is difficult to move out of poverty because of a deficit in social assistance systems, low incomes, and limited job possibilities. With its increasingly larger and diversified economy, migration to India can provide possibilities for higher-paying job opportunities, a reliable income, and the possibility of upward mobility. Individuals could leave their homes in hopes of finding

higher employment possibilities featuring better wages as well as promising financial futures. Money sent by migrants to their family members back home is referred to as remittances, which helps contribute to the struggle against poverty. Bangladeshis who emigrate to India might get likely to find better-paid jobs and send income back to their family members in their homeland. Bangladesh has a poverty rate of 18.7% as of 2022, meanwhile India's poverty rate has decreased from 29.17% from 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23



Human Trafficking

In recent years, one of Bangladesh's major concerns is

human trafficking. It is difficult to get precise information and figures on human trafficking because of the complex,

well-organized, and covert nature of the crime in addition to the purposeful refusal and avoidance of the victim's family to report the cases of trafficking for a number of socio-psychological reasons. Nonetheless, a number of studies demonstrate that throughout the past thirty years, more than a million women and children were trafficked out of the whole country. According to a UNICEF estimation, 400 women and children in Bangladesh become victims to human trafficking every month. According to another investigation, in the last ten years alone, nearly 300,000 Bangladeshi women and children between the ages of 12 and 30 were trafficked to India.

Conclusion

As a result, it is essential that the international community take action, acknowledge the pressing humanitarian issues that migrants and refugees are facing, and address them in order to give them the support and protection to which they are rightfully entitled. By providing them asylum from its neighbouring countries and cooperating with the UN High Commission for Refugees, nations like India demonstrate compassion for both migrants and refugees. However, security issues and an absence of legal structure present major challenges to these efforts. Therefore, it is important that the global community works together to address these concerns, protect human rights, and create an inclusive and safe atmosphere for refugees and migrants.

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