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# Push-Pull Factors of Undocumented Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal: A Perception Study

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## Push-Pull Factors of Undocumented Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal: A Perception Study

### Abstract

Movement is an integral part of human existence. While talking about transborder migration from Bangladesh to India, we are, however, aware that this is a controversial subject. The partition of Bengal in 1947 was the cruelest partition in the history of the world and caused forced illegal migration from erstwhile East Pakistan. It is estimated that there are about 15 million Bangladeshi nationals living in India illegally. West Bengal has a border running 2,216 km along Bangladesh. The present study highlights push-pull factors of illegal Bangladeshi migration based on perceptions of respondents obtained from a qualitative survey done on the basis of purposive sampling in Kolkata and 24 parganas and two districts of West Bengal (WB), an Indian State. The economic push factors that motivate people to leave Bangladesh are instability and economic depression, poverty, lack of employment opportunity, struggle for livelihood, forced grabbing of landed property from minority group, and lack of industrialization in Bangladesh. About 56% of the respondents expressed that lack of industrialisation/lack of employment/economic insecurity would be the probable cause of this migration. Among the demographic factors, population explosion in Bangladesh and lowest human development index may be the most important cause of illegal migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Hindu minority group faced problems in connection with matrimonial alliances. Educational curricula, which were framed according to Islamic preaching and curtailment of facilities enjoyed by Hindu minority group, were responsible factor for illegal migration of Hindu minority population. Another cause is social insecurity. Political instability, fear of riots and terrorism in Bangladesh, inhuman attitude and activities of the political leaders, absence of democratic rights, Muslim domination, religious instigation by political leaders, insecurity feeling of Hindus, are the major crucial issues that require to be mentioned as political push factors. About 59% of the respondents are of the opinion that religious fundamentalists/insecurity of the minority group/discriminating law and order against Hindus may be the factors that motivated migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. In terms of ethnic cleansing, one can witness elimination of groups of minorities by dominant ethnic group, curbing their rights controlling their influence in a state's system. Double standards are observed in punishing criminals. Police officials do not record complaints from minority community. According to 85% of the respondent economic opportunity in terms of job opportunity, economic security prevailing in West Bengal worked as pull factors for migrants to West Bengal. Geographic proximity of Bangladesh and West Bengal, the linguistics and cultural similarities, same food habit, homo-ethnic climate, belief of getting shelter, cordiality, fellow-feeling, acceptance power of people of West Bengal have contributed to the movements of population from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

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**Keywords**

Peak Period of Migration, Migration and Religion, Push Factor, and Pull Factor

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*Bengal. Key words: Peak Period of Migration, Migration and Religion, Push Factor, and Pull Factor*

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## **Introduction**

The issue of undocumented migration is one of the burning problems throughout the world. Whenever human conflict, territorial dispute, or poverty occurs people are forced to risk life, family ties, shelter, language, culture in search of better life. The partition of Bengal in 1947 was the cruelest partition ever in the history of the world where the bedroom of a household had been under the geographical boundary of West Bengal, and the kitchen was on the other side of border and caused forced illegal migration from erstwhile East Pakistan. Though the border between Bangladesh and India demarcated, for cultural and historical reasons, free movement across the border is a common phenomenon. Coupled with the under development of Bangladesh, this free movement has resulted in large-scale undocumented migration of poor Bangladeshis to India. The demographers argue that such out migration of people from poorer regions to the neighboring less poor ones are bound to occur like water seeking its own level. It is estimated that there are about 15 million Bangladeshi nationals living in India illegally. Massive undocumented migration poses a grave danger to our national security, social harmony, and economic well-being (Nath, 2003). According to an estimation by the Border Police Department, about one thousand cross the border each day and enter West Bengal (Mukherjee, 2003). In this context, one can cite problem created by U.S.-Mexico migration. The United States and Mexico are currently engaged in high-level discussions aimed at reforming the policies that govern migration between the two countries (Borderline81, 2001).

Bangladesh, the place of origin of Bangladeshis, is center of Bengali culture and heritage. She was liberated after a long and painful rule first by the English and then Pakistanis. Geographically, historically, and culturally, Bangladesh forms the larger and more populous part of Bengal, the remainder of which constitutes the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal. From 1947 to 1971, the region of Bangladesh was a province of Pakistan. As such, its official designation was changed from East Bengal to East Pakistan in 1955. On March 26, 1971, leaders of East Pakistan declared the region independent as Bangladesh (Bengali for "Bengal nation"), and its independence was assured on December 16, 1971 when Pakistani troops in the region surrendered to a joint force of Bangladeshi and Indian troops. Bangladesh is characterized as one of the poorest country in the world with an area of 144,000 Sq. kms having population of 120 million (12 Crores) with 90% Muslims. Its density per square km is 763 as per 1991 census (highest in the world). It is an Islamic country.

Since 1947, Hindu population in Bangladesh has been reduced from 30% to less than 10% because of the terrible religious persecutions and political terrorism. West Bengal, an Indian state and a place of destination of poor Bangladeshis, is bounded by Bangladesh in the eastern side with nine border districts e.g., Kolkata, 24 parganas (north and south), Nadia, Murshidabad, Maldah, WestDinaj Pur (north and south), Darjiling, Kooch Behar, and Jalpaiguri.

Just after partition in 1947, massive refugee migration took place and later all illegal migration was considered legal by Indian government. In this study by undocumented Bangladeshi migrant, it is meant as those who have entered West Bengal, a state of India, from Bangladesh without valid document after 25 March 1971. The cut-off date was decided on the basis of a national consensus arrived at the all-party meeting in New Delhi on March 1980.

Movement is an integral part of human existence. While talking about transborder migration from Bangladesh to India, we are, however, aware that this is a controversial subject; it produces not only nationalist disputes but also disputes within the country, between the right and left, between Hindu perceptions and Muslim perceptions, and between fundamentalism and secularism.

Ever since the partition of the subcontinent and formation of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, their nationals came to India with or without valid documents. Up to 1971, over 4.7 million Hindus had sought refuge in India, mostly in West Bengal. The volume of opposite flow of Muslims to East Pakistan is not however known. The terror let loose by the Military Junta of Pakistan compelled about 10 million more to cross over to India in 1971. Many went back after the Liberation War in 1971, but a sizable undocumented section stayed back and mingled with the mainstream of India's life (Guha Roy, 2003).

India shares 4,095 kilometer border with Bangladesh, the longest among all its neighbours. Of this four north east states---- Tripura, Meghalaya, Mijoram, and Assam--account for 1,879 km while eastern states of West Bengal has a border running 2,216 km along Bangladesh. An area of 6.5 km has not been demarcated yet. The para military BSF (Border Security Force) deployed along the border is faced with a plethora of problems, including illegal migration from Bangladesh and transborder movement of armed separatist rebels belonging to a number of insurgent groups from India's northeastern states and West Bengal (Hussain, 2003).

Wire fencing is in progress along Indo-Bangladesh Border. Under Indo-Bangladesh treaty, neither country can erect a fence within 150 yards of the zero border line. About 3500 villagers reside in this no mans land and have farm land there. This means once the fence comes up villagers living in this zone will find their movements restricted. Gates on the fence will be closed between 6pm and 6am every day (Ganguly, 1999).

Between October and the end of the year 2002, an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 Bangladeshi, Hindu, and other minorities fled to India to escape violence following Bangladesh's national election which brought a pro- Muslim party in power. The previous Hindu supported government was known for its secular policies, and its close relations with India. Soon after the vote in Bangladesh, fundamentalist Muslims reportedly began targeting Hindus and supporters of previous government. Subsequently asylum seeker -- mostly Hindus began fleeing across the border into India, bringing accounts of murder, rape, lootings, house burning, and theft of livestock and household goods (USCR, 2002). Undocumented migration from Bangladesh has been a great concern in the border areas of districts in West Bengal, a state in India. The antisocial activities in the border area have been disturbing normal life and posing security threat to the nation. The Hindu families in this border area of Nadia district are displaced twice, once due to partition of Bengal and secondly due to terrorism by Muslim illegal migrants

(Banerjee, 2003). Communal disharmony has been generated among the displaced Hindus due to attack by Muslim infiltrators. These infiltrators are engaged in smuggling of sugar, drug, gold, etc. Cattle lifting has been a very common phenomenon in these border areas (Banerjee, 2003).

### **Peak Period of Bangladeshi Migration and Reason**

Before 1971, massive migration took place during 1948-52 (Datta, Sadhu, Bhattacharya, & Majumdar, 2003). Main reasons were a) Partition of India and b) Hindu backlash. During 1964-65, migration was due to Indo-Pak war. In terms of volume, migration was highest before 1971, most probably during 1948-52. But later on, all migration was considered legal by the Indian Government.

If the largest single stream of movement is considered, the peak period was during Bangladesh liberation war in 1971, then the 1970's is the peak period. Immediately after Mujibur's assassination on 15th August, 1975, migration took place extensively. About 80% of the respondents (Datta, et al., 2003) hold the view that the main reasons of this massive migration were (a) Political instability in Bangladesh due to independence war in 1971, (b) Lack of safety and securities of the Hindu families mainly, due to war, (c) Religious issue and communal tension affecting mainly Hindus during regime of Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981), (d) Friends and relatives giving shelter in West Bengal to those displaced undocumented migrants, (e) Economic instability in Bangladesh, and (f) Curtailment of facilities enjoyed by Hindu minority group.

But, it should be borne in mind that undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal is a continuous process. During 1990's, the cause of migration was economic needs. Both Hindus and Muslims migrated, but Hindus migrated most. During the regime of Khaleda Zia (1991-1996), Muslim fundamentalism has become more powerful and threatened Hindus. So, out of fear and insecurity, mostly Hindus fled to West Bengal. Illegal Bangladeshi migrants are of 3 categories: 1) Permanent, 2) Temporary, and 3) Seasonal. Some of permanent migrants possess double citizenship and purchase flat in the border area.

### **Migration and Religion**

It is to be borne in mind that Bangladesh is not a secular state. Religion does play a role in migration (Datta, et al., 2003).

- (a) Up to 1971, the political factor was the main reason for migration. Migration caused by political factor enforced Hindu migration most.
- (b) But both political and economic factors were the underlying causes of migration for post 1971 period, particularly the period in 1990's.
- (c) But in the period 1996-2001 (regime of Sheikh Hasina), the flow of migration was minimum and occurred mainly due to economic reason, which caused both Hindu and Muslim migration.
- (d) From mid 2001 onwards, the reason for migration again has been political including insecurity of life and property of the minority community

and this led to the Hindu migration more. When the reason has been economic, the migrants were both Muslims and Hindus.

In recent years, various reports and stories have been published in newspapers and magazines in West Bengal dwelling on what is alleged to be illegal migration from Bangladesh into West Bengal. Often such reports and stories are based on hearsay evidence without support of authentic documents. It is true that presence of common border with Bangladesh all across the eastern side of the state has made it administratively impossible to keep track of such migration.

In a recent study (Guha Roy, 2003), migration survey enquiring residence history of the migrants using network sampling was emphasized. In another study, census data have been used to evaluate migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal (Sen, 2003). Chattopadhyay and Gupta (2003) attempted to measure undocumented population in some areas 24 parganas during intercensal period on the basis of census data using some imputation techniques. Another study pointed that India's Farakka Barrage (Saikia, 2003) has become a disaster for Bangladesh and which ultimately forces people to migrate without any travel documents across the border towards Indian side. One journalist expressed on the border problem in Nadia district of West Bengal due to this undocumented migration. This illegal migration changing geographic maps of Karimpur, Tehatta, Chapra, and Krishnaganj of Nadia district (Banerjee, 2003). Indian Border Security Force with their limited resources was vulnerable to this undocumented migration and this undocumented migration is posing security threat to nation (Nath, 2003). These infiltrators have spread themselves over agriculture based border districts, including 24 parganas, Nadia. Because of strict competition from local labor, they are forced to work at low wages (Pramanik, 2003). According to one sociologist, the displaced persons were playing the role of an asset in the development of this state. Cottage and small scale industry, primary education, female education, urban development, roads, etc. are some of the spheres where the refugees have made a distinct mark (Kar, 2003).

All these studies provide only piecemeal information. Very little is known about the exact and actual underlying and inherent forces that are directing and dominating the process of illegal migration. With respect to the gravity and depth of the issue, it was felt to undertake an in-depth research to study the causes and consequences of the sensitive issue like undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. This necessitated to undertake a qualitative survey to obtain depth and breadth of information of this complex, sensitive, and dynamic illegal migration process. Its main aim was to explore (1) economic, demographic, social, religious, and political motive operating behind this migration process, (2) impact of this process on economy, demography, natural resources, administration, antisocial activity, and public distribution of West Bengal, and (3) some policy prescription for solution of the problem.

In this paper, attention would be focused only on the first objective i.e., to explore economic, demographic, social, religious, and political motive to throw light on underlying forces dominating this migration process. Some policy issues also have been discussed at the end of this paper.

In this study by an undocumented Bangladeshi migrant, it is meant as those, who have entered West Bengal, a state of India, from Bangladesh without valid document



after 25 March 1971. The cut-off date was decided on the basis of a national consensus arrived at the all-party meeting in New Delhi on March 1980.

### Methods

The research proposal on undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal was submitted to the Technical Advisory Committee of Indian Statistical Institute as project proposal. It was approved on the basis of recommendations of experts. The fund was sanctioned by the Indian Government. It was coordinated by project leader Dr. Pranati Datta. Other members were Prof. B. N. Bhattacharya, Prof. P. K. Majumdar, and Smt Swati Sadhu. A series of activities were required in a phased manner. As a first step, qualitative study was undertaken among professionals covering various issues on Bangladeshi migration. The process of pooling different expert opinions on the issue is similar to Delphi method (Jones, 2002) used in market research. As a second step, workshop was arranged to discuss suitable approaches for the study of ill effects of such migration on West Bengal.

Qualitative research (Wolcott, 1990) is generally defined as research that utilizes open-ended interviewing to explore and understand the attitudes, opinions, feelings, of individuals or a group of individuals. Qualitative research can take many forms; typical are focus groups, in-depth interviews, accompanied shops, and workshops. In this project, in-depth interviews and workshops have been organized.

Perception study seems to be adequate for a subject oriented social science research and pooling (Annejillson, 2002) of individual observation brings much more valid understandings about social processes than technically sound questionnaires, which are generally done in quantitative study. Perception study followed by an in-depth interview which is a particular method used in qualitative research has special value for investigating complex and sensitive issues like illegal undocumented migration. It helps to generate very detail information. Open-ended interviewing helps to understand depth and breadth of information. It was useful to explore perceptions, feelings, value judgments, and attitudes of respondents about the dynamic process of undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

In the present study, perceptions of respondents were obtained from a qualitative survey done on the basis of purposive sampling in Kolkata and 24 parganas. Respondents were drawn from political leaders, administrators (At District Level - Sabhadhipati of Zilla Parishad / District Magistrate; at Sub Divisional Level - Sub Divisional Officer; at Block Level - Sabhapati , Panchayet Samiti / Block Development Officer (BDO); at Corporation Level - Mayor/ Mayor-in-Council/ Councilors; at Municipality Level - Chairman/ Commissioner; at Gram Panchayet Level - Panchayet Pradhan), economists, health personnel, demographers, sociologists, statisticians, journalists and teachers at different levels.

As is typical in most in-depth interviews, the interview format used open-ended questions (Bailey, 1978). An instrument of 25 questions served as a guide for the interview to be conducted by investigators. Interviews averaged about one and half hours. The guide consisted of questions designed to gather information on various issues relating to impact and motivating factors of this illegal migration. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their views.

Mainly border areas of 24 parganas and Kolkata were chosen as our sample study. Political leaders, administrators (Sub-divisional Officer (SDO), District Magistrate (DM), Chairman, Sabhadhipati, etc.) were chosen from border areas of 24 parganas. But, economists, demographers, statisticians, and sociologists were selected from research institutions and universities in Kolkata city and 24 parganas since they will not be available in border areas. Journalists, doctors, and faculties were chosen from both city and border areas. Since the objective was to study causes and impact of this migration on West Bengal, we have to select those, who are much aware of this phenomenon. So, purposive sample (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990) was the method to choose.

Accessibility to these eminent professionals was very difficult since they were preoccupied with their busy schedule. They were informed by official letter seeking permission for access of investigators for interview. Then they were pre-informed by telephone and then date and time of interview were fixed. Investigators filled up the open-ended interview guide. It took one and half hour or more. Some times a tape recorder was used. Very often, it required more than one visit by investigators to access the selected respondents. I, myself, often accompanied the investigators, interviewed the selected professionals, and an investigator filled up the questionnaire. Most of the respondents cooperated and spent their valuable time to express their valuable opinion on this hot and sensitive issue. Strict confidentiality was maintained while filling the schedule and transforming the descriptive information into main key words suitable for analysis.

This qualitative research is not based on statistically representative samples. Due to the nature of the information gathered through qualitative research, it was emphasized to ensure whether the objectives of this research are carefully considered. When the number of groups or interviews is determined, a larger number of groups and interviews may not always guarantee more meaningful and pertinent information, far more important is that whether the right respondents are identified. Research samples and methods are always, therefore, developed in conjunction with each other. Information obtained from interviews of 50 respondents was satisfactory since most of the information were converging to the facts obtained in the present literature, besides the very nature of qualitative research limits the sample size. Although a small sample, the usefulness of the information gleaned should not be underestimated. Many researchers are uncomfortable with the "generalizability" of a small sample. However, that shortcoming should be weighted against the greater depth of understanding that is accessible through qualitative research strategies. As Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p. 81) point out, "In qualitative research, an 'N of One' can be just as illuminating as a large sample (and very often more so)." Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the respondents.

**Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents: Perception Study.**

Region: Kolkata and 24 parganas

Respondent	Number
Political Leader	8

Administrator e.g. Chairman, Commissioner, Panchayet Pradhan, Zilla Sabhadhipati, BDO, SDO etc.	8
Economist	4
Demographer	4
Sociologist	4
Doctor	7
Statistician	4
Faculty	6
Journalist	5
Total	50

After initial interviews, the researcher felt compelled to follow-up some interviews by asking for clarification and/or further information from some respondents. The researcher attempted to be as conservative as possible in analyzing the data.

The analysis of qualitative data is one of the most time consuming and tedious endeavors for a researcher (Drass, 1980). This research has proven to be no different. The first step of analysis consisted of scrutinizing the data and then coding (Weber, 1985) it. Data from the guide questions along with other information were coded into categories of responses. This step involved seemingly endless listening and re-listening to taped interviews and reading and rereading transcripts from interviews. This process led to the construction of initial categories of data responses, modification of the coding scheme, adding and collapsing categories, and ultimately the refinement of the coding categories and then transcribed into key words and phrases to serve our purpose of analysis.

There were mainly 16 such key words around, which our main study centered. But in this paper, I would like to concentrate mainly on Peak Period of Migration, Migration and Religion, Push Factor, Pull Factor to illuminate on the issue of motivating factors of this migration.

The keywords and corresponding explanatory phrases and description consistent with the objective of this paper on push-pull factors of undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal are given below.

Key Words	Explanatory phrases
1. Peak Period of Migration:	Peak period of movement of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants to West Bengal - Year(s), Reason(s)
2. Migration and Religion:	Relation between undocumented migration and religion/Variation of religious composition over time
3. Push Factor:	Economic/Demographic/Social/Political/Law and Order
4. Pull Factor:	Economic/Demographic & Social/Political

## Credibility

The present qualitative research can be judged from the view point of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study. Credibility is based on the validity and reliability of the instruments or instruments used and the internal validity of the study. The reliability and validity of this qualitative research is fundamental to its utility. Credibility is supported by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and appropriate selection of respondents. First, the study was performed over eight months period of time. A thorough observation and in-depth interview from the right person also ensure the dependability of the results. Hopefully, the findings are based on the analysis of reliable and valid qualitative information obtained from a few appropriately selected professionals, who are well acquainted with the subject and objective of the study on undocumented migration, and hence, results can be trusted to represent the real world situation. This study is not so concerned with the generalizability of the results; it has tried to achieve in-depth holistic understanding of the process and underlying causes of illegal migration across Indo-Bangladesh border.

Among the three non-probability sampling i.e., convenience sampling, quota sampling, and purposive sampling, this purposive sampling (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990) is the sampling approach mostly used by qualitative researchers with the intention to improve representativeness of the sample by subjective selection.

Though triangulation (Lincon & Guba, 1985; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) in true sense of the term was not possible, but most of the results of the study converge to the information obtained from existing literature, newspaper, and magazine. Hence, confirmability is justified. Multiple listening of audio tape and multiple transcriptions from audio tape has been utilized to justify the validity of the results. Besides extensive quotations from field notes have been used to ensure validity of the results.

From a qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. I have enhanced transferability by doing a thorough description of the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research.

## Summary of the Main Report

Before presenting the findings of this study on push-pull factors, it would be worth while to have an overview of the main report. The main report centers around some key words e.g., peak period of migration, relation between migration and religion, motivation of migration, impact on primary, secondary, tertiary and informal sectors, public distribution of West Bengal, grabbing of natural resources, antisocial activities, housing and health problems, and an illegal vote bank due to this illegal migration. Lastly, some policy issues as per opinion of the respondents have been highlighted.

The main perception study centered around certain key words and phrases. These key words are obtained from the open-ended questionnaire and listed in the following Table 2. There were mainly 16 such key words around, which our main study centered.

Table 2. **Keywords for Main Perception Study**

Sl. No.	Keywords
1.	Peak Periods of Migration

2.	Migration and Religion
3.	Impact on Demography
4.	Economic Problems
5.	Pressure on Natural Resources
6.	General Health Problem
7.	Push Factor
8.	Pull Factor
9.	Administrative Problem
10.	Public Distribution System
11.	Migration and Electoral Process
12.	Migrants and Criminal Activities
13.	Migration and Social Conflict
14.	Migrants and Settlement Pattern
15.	Repatriation and Rehabilitation
16.	Policy Prescription

Though undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal is a continuous process (Datta, et al., 2003), the peak period was during Bangladesh liberation war in 1971. Due to lack of proper employment in the place of origin, working age males migrated for permanent settlement and for earnings. Since single income was not enough for the poor family, females tried to look for a job in unorganized informal sector. Undocumented migration had positive impact on fertility and child population in West Bengal due to a) illiteracy of migrants belonging to lower strata b) migration by family c) unawareness about family planning d) lack of easy access to scientific family planning method and e) sexual abuse and unwanted children.

The settlement of migrants mostly in unhygienic conditions coupled with (1) poor nutrition, 2) scarcity of food, 3) improper medical facilities, 4) insufficient facilities for hospitalization, 5) lack of care, safe drinking water, and sanitation, 6) inappropriate health care facilities, 7) poverty, 8) illiteracy, 9) social unawareness, 10) new environment, and 11) unsettled condition indeed contributed to morbidity and child mortality.

Economic depression, lack of industrialization, social insecurity, demographic explosion, political instability, domination of religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh, cultural similarity, homo-ethnic climate in West Bengal etc. are the main motivating factors behind this migration phenomenon.

Primary sector including agriculture, forest were overcrowded by this inflow of low skilled labor. Agricultural sector was improved wherever migrants have settled. Being hardy and laborious, they helped to improve farming and production of food crops.

Household industry, including Bidi, Pottery, Mat, Candle, Kantha Stitch, Ganjee factory, Shantipuri Tant etc., has been positively affected since illegal migrants provide cheapest labor. Two factors have worked against local workers: a) One is the easy availability and readiness and compromising attitude of the migrant worker to work at a very low wage rate, and this is a challenge and threat to local worker, and b) The other is the general impression that the migrant workers are more hardworking. Besides, continuous inflow of migrants has aggravated the unemployment problem in the unorganized informal sector.

Deforestation, land grab, trade grab, illegal occupancy of pavement, and railway platform by undocumented migrants are creating pressure on natural resources. Continuous inflow of migrants enhanced the preexisting slum, increased the density of occupants in certain areas, which influenced the water supply, health facility, and education with utter inefficiency. Often, slum owners accommodate 10 people in place suitable for one person.

In border areas, disturbances are created so that security becomes at risk. Different political parties in different periods gave them safeguards for which local administration could not impose strict law and order. With the limited resources, fund and administrative officials stated that this problem cannot be solved.

Illegal migrants are illegally enrolled in voter list and used as vote banks. Indian politicians have often encouraged Bangladeshi migration to garner their votes. They are forced to involve in various unconstitutional activities at the time of election. Due to lack of good will of political leaders, it is not possible to separate them from original citizens of India.

Though many people are coming with the intention of permanent job, often circumstances force them to grab the opportunities in any manner and to take shelter in underworld economy to derive livelihood. The main antisocial activities they are involved in are a) smuggling, b) robbery and associated crime, c) prostitution, d) beggary, and e) trafficking of women and children.

The kind of social tension created by migrants in Assam and Tripura was not experienced in West Bengal. Social tension with regard to capturing alluvial land among the old settler and new settler of Bangladeshi is a point to note. Quarrel is created among the local settler and Bangladeshi migrants to grab the banks of river at the time of dissolution and creation of riverbanks.

The circulatory nature of these illegal migrants in the border area has resulted in dual citizenship of these migrants. They are taking part in election and increasing properties in both the countries.

Regarding policy matters, some argue that they should be absorbed on humanitarian ground. Granting special work permit in some cases is also required. Repatriation may be a solution in some cases.

Fencing and Border Security Force can minimize infiltration to some extent with the help of local cooperation. It requires proper implementation and monitoring of fencing with efficiency and transparency, political commitment, and strong will.

Both state and central government consider the issue as significant. This problem hampers not only the overall progress of West Bengal but also India as a whole. About 70% of the respondents do not support granting of resident permit to the illegal migrants since India is already overcrowded with existing population. They should be deported as quickly as possible. Providing support to migrated population is not a solution, though it is needed sometime. Bipartite agreement and policy prescription to improve economic backwardness of Bangladesh may be the solution.

## Findings

### Push Factors Operating in Bangladesh

Factors motivating migration are complex and intertwined. Motives for migration are frequently multiple. People move for a combination of several reasons, and they are not always aware of all the factors motivating their moves.

Migration, any type, whether documented or undocumented, forced or voluntary can be explained in terms of push-pull factors (Datta, 1998). Push factors attribute to the negative characteristics operating at the center of origin whereas pull factors identify the positive characteristics (Datta, 2002) at the center of destination. There are essentially two types of migrants. One is due to persecution for various reasons, and the other is economic reasons. Persecution is essentially either for political or religious reasons. In such cases, the persons are given asylum to adopted country. Since, it would be inhuman to send them back. An economic migrant does not receive these privileges. Religious persecution has special significance for India since Bangladesh is an Islamic state. Hence, Hindu migration remained unabated.

These findings are based on perceptions of professionals, who were interviewed by investigators. Eminent professionals were asked about the factors that motivated illegal migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Respondents highlighted on economic, demographic, social, religious, political, and law and order as probable causes of this migration. These are explained below.

### Economic Push Factors

Economic factor plays a crucial role in any migration process. Bangladeshi migration also follows the same pattern.

As per views of the respondents, the economic push factors that motivated people to leave Bangladesh have been 1) Instability and economic depression in Bangladesh, 2) Poverty, 3) Lack of employment opportunity, 4) Struggle for livelihood, 5) Forced grabbing of landed property from minority group in Bangladesh, 6) Economic insecurity, and 7) Lack of industrialization. The following table shows that about 56% of the respondents expressed that lack of industrialization/lack of employment/economic insecurity would be the probable cause of this migration. Thirty-five and a quarter percent of the respondents pointed economic depression/poverty as economic push factor for undocumented Bangladeshi migrants.

Percent of respondent: Push factor - Economic

Reasons ( Push factors in Bangladesh)	Percent of respondents
Lack of industrialisation/lack of employment/economic insecurity	55.9
Crisis in agriculture and cottage industry/struggle for livelihood	02.9
Economic depression/poverty	35.4

Forced grabbing of landed property	02.9
Not known	02.9
Total	100.0

According to one respondent, "Though there are many reasons for which people of Bangladesh were motivated to leave Bangladesh, the main reasons were economic uncertainty poverty and unemployment of low income group" (Minister, P.W.D).

### Demographic

In the existing literature, it is generally observed that people migrate from high density area to low density area. This perception study supports the view. About 50% of the respondents hold the view that over population in Bangladesh/lowest human development index may be the cause of illegal migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Twenty-nine percent pointed that they do not know the reason. Some respondents (about 21%) expressed that demographic factor in Bangladesh do not have any influence to push undocumented Bangladeshis to West Bengal.

#### Percent of respondent: Push factor - Demographic

Demographic(Push factors in Bangladesh)	Percent of respondents
Overpopulation in Bangladesh/and/or low human development index/religious taboos	50.0
No effect	20.6
Not known	29.4
Total	100.0

As per view of one journalist, All India Radio,

Immediately after independence of Bangladesh, the people did not follow the birth control policy, and it resulted in population explosion in Bangladesh at present. At one time, the religious fundamentalists did not support the birth control policy of the government and, therefore, a part of the people is motivated to leave Bangladesh for population explosion.

### Social

Social factor often causes people to migrate from place of origin to place of destination. The following table shows the percentage of respondents reporting different social factors as causes of migration in this study.

#### Percent of respondent: Push factor - Social

Social (Push factors in Bangladesh)	Percent of respondents
Education/and/or marriage	52.9
Social insecurity	08.8
Religious harassment	11.8
Presence of relatives in West Bengal	02.9



Not known	17.9
Total	100.0

Due to the large scale population movement after partition, the communities were broken up. This has its effect on marriage institution. Hindu minority group faced problems in connection with matrimonial alliances. Educational curricula were also framed according to Islamic preaching. Curtailment of facilities enjoyed by Hindu minority group, which were not suited to minority Hindu population. Another cause is social insecurity.

"Girls were humiliated there. Hindu girls were forced to become Muslim. If Zaminder was Muslim, the husbands were forced to mortgage their wives to get agricultural works. Girls of aristocratic families, however, migrated to West Bengal and took shelter among relatives" (Economist and Professor).

### Political

Political factor has been the major cause to force Hindu minority of Bangladesh to neighboring region West Bengal, a state in India.

Individuals highlighted the following political factors as push factors for illegal Bangladeshi migrants.

1. Political instability, fear of riots, and terrorism in Bangladesh
2. Inhuman attitude and activities of the political leaders: At least on two occasions one in 1990 and the other in 1992, riots broke out into different parts of Bangladesh, following reports of attack on Muslims in India and demolition of Babri mosque in Ayodhya. Huge damages to the property of Hindus in Bangladesh were reported. Allegations of intimidation of Hindu voters and revenge attacks following elections were reported during last two general elections in Bangladesh in 1991 and 1996 and these led to fresh outflow of Hindus from Bangladesh.
3. No democratic rights, no grievance can be expressed, hostility of the majority community
4. Bangladesh - Muslim country, West Bengal - Secular state
5. Religious instigation by political leaders
6. Insecurity feeling of Hindus during the regime of Khaleda Zia

Percentage of respondents expressing different political factors as pull factors of migration can be viewed from this table.

#### Percent of respondent: Push factor- Political

Political (Push factors in Bangladesh)	Percent of respondents
Political instability in Bangladesh	38.2
Political threatening/political terrorism	29.4
Lack of democracy in Bangladesh	08.8
Bangladesh Muslim country/non secular state	11.8
Insecurity feeling	05.9

Not Known	05.9
Total	100.0

About 38% respondents supports that political instability in Bangladesh is responsible for this undocumented migration. Political threatening/political terrorism as another cause have been expressed by 29% respondents.

One journalist expresses: "After the independence of Bangladesh the democratic views of the people were not followed in the general election more over the martial law was being followed there."

According to one Zilla Sabhadhipati, "Political terror and instability and state sponsored terrorism forced people to leave home land."

### Law and Order in Bangladesh

Deterioration and discriminating law and order in Bangladesh need special mention as push factor for illegal Bangladeshi migration.

Percent of respondent: Push factor- Law and Order

Law and order in Bangladesh (Push factors in Bangladesh)	Percent of respondents
Deterioration of law and order	26.5
Religious fundamentalists/insecurity of minority group/discriminating law and order against Hindus	58.8
Not known	14.7
Total	100.0

From the above table, it is clear that about 26% of the respondents hold the view that deterioration of law and order pushed out the people of Bangladesh to West Bengal. About 59% of the respondents are of the opinion that domination of religious fundamentalists/insecurity of the minority group/discriminating law and order against Hindus may be the factors that motivated migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

"Actually, the religious fundamentalists are at present controlling some major political parties in Bangladesh and for this reason, an aggressive attitude come to the minority communities for their political interest. Moreover, an unusual law and order situation is creating violence and insecurity in the society of Bangladesh due to explosion of population" (one journalist in border areas).

Intra-religion and inter-religion conflicts and violence are very common in Bangladesh and create law and order problem. The first category includes violence created by fundamentalists end at both majority and minority (with progressive ideas) communities. Fresh terror began in the October 2001 and thousands of Hindus fled from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Human freedom is at stake. However, minority Hindus are the victim of Talibani mode of operation and forced to leave Bangladesh. Pilfering, robbery, and antisocial activities have increased incredibly. There is no security, and law and order is not maintained properly. In terms of "ethnic cleansing", one can witness elimination of groups, minorities, by dominant ethnic group, curbing their rights controlling their influence in a state's system. Double standards are observed in

punishing criminals. Police officials do not record complaints from minority community, but Muslim criminal enjoy direct backing from the police. State sponsored terrorism has increased during the regime of Khaleda Zia. Due to economic profit, illegal dealing in the border area is gradually increasing.

### **Pull Factors in West Bengal**

Motivation for migration can be explained by mechanical metaphors----- centrifugal and centripetal forces. The centrifugal impulse does not have strong effect if the centripetal impulse is weak. The centrifugal impulse attribute to the push factors operating at the centre of origin, whereas the centripetal impulse relates to pull factors that identify the positive characteristics at the center of destination. It appears that economic opportunities in terms of job availability in primary and informal sectors, political stability, and secularism in West Bengal worked as centripetal force for illegal Bangladeshis. Such centripetal forces have been strengthened by centrifugal forces explained earlier (low level of economic development, insecurity of minority group, domination of religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh) and have possibly caused illegal Bangladeshi migration to West Bengal. These can be easily established from the following opinion of the respondents.

#### **Economic Pull Factors**

According to 85% of the respondent, economic (Thomas, 1975) opportunity in terms of job opportunity, economic security prevailing in West Bengal attracted migrants to West Bengal. “Thousands of means of earning money can be found in the metro city which is not possible in Bangladesh. The generosity of inhabitants of West Bengal as well as India helps them to get job opportunity easily” [Faculty].

Percent of respondents giving their opinion in favor of different economic pull factors can be viewed from the following table.

Percent of respondents: Pull factor- Economic

Economic ( Pull factors in West Bengal)	Percent of respondents
Job opportunity/better economic opportunity/economic security	85.3
Easy absorption in agriculture/small scale cottage industry	2.9
Economic stability in WB	8.8
Not known	2.9
Total	100

"The development in the agriculture and small scale and cottage industry sector has been remarkably made at present in West Bengal; particularly land reforms have been done at the grass root level by the government for the interest of the working and marginal class people. As a result, it increases economic progress and job opportunity for the labor and marginal worker. Poor Bangladeshis can easily obtain job in this sector" (Journalist).

## Demographic, Social, and Geographic

West Bengal and Bangladesh were same before partition. Hence, geographic proximity (Ravenstein, 1885, 1889) of receiving and sending country, the linguistics and cultural similarities, same food habit, homo-ethnic climate, belief of getting shelter, cordiality, fellow-feeling, acceptance power of people of West Bengal have contributed to the movements of population from Bangladesh to West Bengal. The table shows the percent of respondents expressing their opinion on different demographic, social, and geographic factors that worked as pull factors in West Bengal.

### Percent of respondents: Pull factor- Demographic/Social/Geographic

Demographic/social/geographic ( Pull factors in West Bengal)	Percent of respondents
Homo ethnic climate/and/or/cordiality in WB	76.5
Favourable social condition/social security	5.8
Geographic proximity	5.9
Not known	11.8
Total	100

"Easy assimilation of people of both the lands, similar cultural, linguistic and geographic situation and the same food habit and over all great sympathy cordiality, generosity hospitality of the people of West Bengal are important contributing factor to attract them" ( Zilla Sabhadhipati).

## Political/Religious

Politics saw in this human misery a great chance to build up a vote bank. Overnight, Shahul Hameed became Shailesh Kumar and the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) happily testified that he had known Shailesh Kumar as a resident of this place in West Bengal for three generations. It was an act of profane dishonesty. And the Sailesh Kumar got a slum house, a ration card, and finally entry into the voter list. All kinds of dubious elections were held (Seshan, 1998). The above report published in a weekly newspaper confirms the present finding also obtained from opinion of sociologist, doctor, and journalists.

The following table highlights percent of respondents expressing different political/religious factors as pull factors of this migration.

### Percent of respondents: Pull factor-Political/Religious

Political/religious ( Pull factors in West Bengal)	Percent of respondents
Political stability in WB	41.2
easy availability of ration card and easy enrolment in voter list under political patronage	26.4
Secularism/communal harmony	14.7
Prevalence of democracy	05.9
Flexible law and order	05.8
Not known	06.0
Total	100.0

In support of political stability in West Bengal, one demographer and professor points, "Unlike Bangladesh, West Bengal has always been under democratic form of government, and it is properly maintained. Also, it has been peaceful although, communal harmony remains intact despite external provocation" [Demographer and Professor].

Excerpts of sociologist, doctor, and journalist support political patronage as pull factor. "The political parties try to encash migrants' wretched condition by providing patronage from their end" [Sociologist, Kolkata]; "To enrich vote bank political leaders help them to avail ration card. Ration card is the proof of citizenship. So, a number of facilities can be availed after getting ration card, e.g., Govt. jobs, purchasing lands, possessing any article etc." [Doctor, Kolkata]; "It is very easy to get a ration card and then to become a voter. Education and service facilities are available in West Bengal. Not only that, the migrant can become a candidate for the election of three tier panchayet bodies, municipalities, assembly, and even in the parliamentary constituencies" (Journalists).

### **Conclusion**

The study of a sensitive issue like the undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal is a formidable task. The size and diversity of origin and destination, the paucity of authentic information, deficiency of available data, inherent limitation of present qualitative survey, and difficulty in accessibility to eminent personality for interview pose serious problem to conduct the study. In recent years, there has been renewed interest in the undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The discussion may be concluded by making general observation. The economic push factors that motivate illegal Bangladeshi migration are instability and economic depression poverty, lack of employment opportunity, struggle for livelihood, forced grabbing of landed property from minority group, lack of industrialization in Bangladesh. About 56% of the respondents expressed that lack of industrialization/lack of employment/economic insecurity would be the probable cause of this migration.

Among the demographic factors, population explosion in Bangladesh and lowest human development index are the most important causes of illegal migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. Hindu minority group faced problems in connection with matrimonial alliances. Educational curricula, which were framed according to Islamic preaching and curtailment of facilities enjoyed by Hindu minority group, were responsible factor for illegal migration of Hindu minority population. Another cause is social insecurity. Political instability, fear of riots, terrorism in Bangladesh, inhuman attitude and activities of the political leaders, absence of democratic rights, Muslim domination, religious instigation by political leaders, insecurity feeling of Hindus, are the major crucial issues that require to be mentioned as political push factors

About 59% of the respondents are of the opinion that domination of religious fundamentalists/insecurity of the minority group/discriminating law and order against Hindus may be the factors that motivated migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

In terms of “ethnic cleansing”, one can witness elimination of groups of minorities, by dominant ethnic group, curbing their rights controlling their influence in a state’s system. Double standards are observed in punishing criminals. Police officials do not record complaints from minority community.

According to 85% of the respondent, economic (Thomas, 1975) opportunity in terms of job opportunity, economic security prevailing in West Bengal worked as pull factors for migrants to West Bengal. Geographic proximity of Bangladesh and West Bengal, the linguistics and cultural similarities, same food habit, homo-ethnic climate, belief of getting shelter, cordiality, fellow-feeling, acceptance power of people of West Bengal have contributed to the movements of population from Bangladesh to West Bengal.

### **Results- Supporting Evidence from Literature**

Though there is no specific study on push-pull factors of illegal migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal as such, most of the findings from qualitative study converge to facts and findings obtained from literatures (Chakrobarty, Gupta, & Bandyopadhyay, 1997), news reports, and magazines.

Problem in agriculture in Bangladesh as push factor and better standard of living in India as pull factor as observed in this report is supported by a study of Thomas F. Homer-Dixon (1994). Political push factors e.g., state sponsored terrorism, domination of religious fundamentalists, insecurity of minority group, deterioration in law and order obtained from respondents are confirmed from the news reports (Gupta, 2003; Human rights Feature, 2001; Chowdhury, 1998; Hossain, 1997) also. Political patronage in West Bengal as pull factor as obtained from survey can be confirmed by the comments "Indian politicians have often encouraged Bangladeshi migration to garner their votes." made by one researcher (Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, 1994). Some of the following extracts from literature are presented as supporting evidence for the present findings.

"Migrants are fair game of politicians. Bangladeshis find work in India as rag pickers, agricultural laborer, rickshaw puller, domestic help, construction worker etc. --- the so called informal sector (Chatterjee, 1998). One scholar comments “In the names democracy minorities have been marginalized politically, economically as well as culturally" (Mohsin, 1997). In this way, one can provide many proof of evidence in support of the results from this perception study. Hence, knowledge gained from the study supports the literature and reestablishes the existing truth and reality.

### **Limitations of the Study**

No work is perfectly perfect. Hence, as with all research studies, this study is not free from limitation. This research study was qualitative in nature and focused on 50 individuals and centered only on two districts of West Bengal. The other border districts were not covered.

The other limitation is that unlike any quantitative research; these findings from qualitative study cannot be statistically tested or projectable to the population under study. This limitation is created by two facts: 1) sample is not representative since the respondents were not selected randomly, rather selected purposively and 2) the very

nature of qualitative research that necessitates small sample size. The other limitation stems from difficulty in easy accessibility to the eminent professionals for interview.

### **Policy Implication**

The policy, thus, stems from the two major causes of forced migration: political - those fleeing conflict or persecution and economic - emigration to escape poverty, unemployment, starvation. In practice, the causes may be closely intertwined.

Long term preventive measures such as the promotion of human rights protection, protection of the rights of minorities, and the strengthening of democracy, may be mentioned.

Short term conflict prevention measures when a conflict is developing or eminent, such as preventive diplomacy or mediation may be the solution.

Policies should be related to human rights humanitarian assistance, security of minority communities, demographic measures, bipartite agreement with respect to trade, development, cooperation, and exchange programs for certain target groups from countries of origin, and destination.

Both center and state governments of India have expressed serious concern over this continuous infiltration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. The government has come forward with various policy prescriptions e.g., border fencing, issuance of identity cards, granting work permits, etc.

The West Bengal government has decided to issue identity cards to all residents since immigrants were not restricting themselves to specific districts, to stall illegal migration from neighboring Bangladesh. The I cards mooted by the state will bear the photographs, name, age, address, educational qualification, and a caste of bonafide resident blood group and a national number. The card could be used to avail government benefits (Chhaya, 2002). It has emphasized on proper vigilance and wire fencing throughout the whole Indo-Bangladesh border. Economic cooperation through bipartite agreement between India and Bangladesh may be the best solution.

### **Implication for Further Research**

So far, there is no comprehensive study on undocumented migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal. It is expected that this study will establish a baseline of the research from which incisive future might proceed. Illegal migration has disturbed demographic profile and economic harmony of West Bengal. Secondary data cannot address the complex and dynamic nature of the undocumented migration. The duplication of this research in another infiltration affected parts of India and West Bengal would help to confirm the evidence found in this study. In addition, a duplication of this study might reveal evidence that was not obtained in this study. A well designed quantitative survey in conjunction with qualitative survey covering more border areas and other affected states of India, e.g., Assam, Tripura etc., is essential to generate useful information for national policy makers. The suggested surveys should be comprehensive and prescriptive.

No single study, no matter how extensive, can exhaustively cover a typical, dynamic, and complex migration phenomenon, e.g., undocumented migration from

Bangladesh. The full study of migration process requires professional competence in more than one discipline of social science, a requirement to meet except in a team. Undocumented migration, a complex and dynamic process, should be studied as an interdisciplinary approach. It is hoped this study will represent a major contribution to advancing qualitative research in the field of undocumented migration.

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