

by Ram Puniyani

The Assam violence between Bodos and Muslims, alleged by many to be Bangladeshi infiltrators, has a long chain of repercussions. The number of dead is nearly eighty. Killings are continuing and the people who have been displaced have been over 4 lakhs. There is no exact statistics to tell us how many of the displaced are Muslims and how many are Bodos, still roughly some investigators have put the figure of Muslims 80% and Bodos 20%. The few reports which have come out tell us that the condition of the all refugee camps is abysmal, much worse of those where Muslims are living. Meanwhile many a voices have come up to express their own opinions.

The BJP leaders have strongly asserted that the whole violence is due to the Bangla Deshi infiltrators, whose number is estimated as per the flight of one's imagination ranging from 10 million to 20 million or even more. It is alleged that they have encroached, taken over the land of the local natives, which is causing the dissatisfaction and so the hate for them. This hate in turn is at the root of violence. This is one case where displacement overshadows the violence.

The Election Commissioner H.S. Brahma, a Bodo himself, went to the extent of saying that these infiltrators have gone up in number and so have become aggressive and attacked the local Bodos. The other point of view is that despite the formation of Bodo Territorial Council, the Bodos did not surrender their arms, which was one of the conditions for accepting the demand

of this regional council. There are voices from BJP stable that this is an issue of Nationalism, the one of Indians and the other of Bangladeshis. Some of them have voiced that these Bangla Deshis should be disenfranchised and not be permitted to vote. As such already many of them are not allowed to vote by putting them in the category of 'D' voters, i.e. doubtful voters. As per BJP and company it is Congress, which has been encouraging the Bangladeshis to infiltrate so that they can be used as the vote bank by the Congress. Not to ignore that since major number of those in relief camps is that of Muslims, some Bodo groups have warned that the Muslims should not be permitted to return to their original places.

National Minorities Commission in its report has pointed out that there is no infiltration of Bangla Deshis as such and the issue is that between the Bodo ethnic groups, on one side and the Muslims, who have settled here from a long time, on the other. Before we come to the issue whether these are Bangla Deshi infiltrators, Bangladeshi migrants or the Muslims settlers from Bengal over a period of time, lets register that the Assam episode had a very painful after events. There were Hate emails, Hate web sites which warned the North Eastern people that revenge of Assam will be taken against them and this caused a mammoth exodus of North eastern people from all over, more particularly from Bangalore. The Web sites which did this dirty job, many of them have been blocked, it is said are from Pakistan, some 20% of the blocked sites are the one's run by Hindutva groups also. Through leaflets and other mechanisms VHP and other groups are propagating that Hindus are being attacked by Muslims, the Bangla Deshi infiltrators.

Not to be left behind some orthodox, fanatic Muslim groups organized a protest rally in Azad Maidan of Mumbai, in which a preplanned act by a section of Muslims attacked the OB vans of media and the police officials. The restrained and effective leadership of Arup Patnaik was not to the liking of the communal elements and those politicking on the issue within the ruling party and so Mr. Patnaik has been punished by being kicked up, As such secular activists and large section of Muslims are in deep appreciation of Mr. Patnaik's handling of the episode.

Coming back to the propaganda of Bangla Deshi infiltrators, many a researchers have proved on the basis of demographic data of last century in particular that the Muslims in the region are settlers from pre partition Bengal to begin with, later at the time of partition in 1947 and lastly at the time of Bangla Desh war in 1971. Assam accord of 1985 recognizes all those living in this area as the legal settlers, most of the Muslim fall in that category. Not to deny that that some small number of illegal immigrants, the one's forced to migrate for economic reasons is also there.

The change in demographic profile of Assam has taken place over a period of more than a century. It was mainly the British policy to release the pressure from the then Bengal province that they encouraged the Bengalis to settle in Assam. The last major migration has taken place around 1971, the Bangla war. After that the trickle has been there but the alleged infiltration is not there. Assam accord does recognize that all those who have settled before 1971 are legal Indian citizens, which most of the Muslims in Assam are. This is shown by the pattern of decadal growth in the region more particularly from 1950 onwards. The census figures clearly point out that after 1971; there is no major increase in the population of the area. The decadal growth in India, Assam, Dhubri, Dhemaji, and Karbi Anglong from 1971 to 1991 had been 54.51, 54.26, 45.65, 107.50, and 74.72 respectively. While the same in the decade of 1991-01 became 21.54, 18.92, 22.97, 19.45, 22.72 and in the decade of 01-11 it became 17.64, 16.93, 24.40, 20.30 and 18.69 respectively. Shivam Viz in Myth of Bangla Deshi and Violence in Assam

(<http://kafila.org/2012/08/16/the-myth-of-the-bangladeshi-and-violence-in-assam-nilim-dutta/>) shows that the migration has taken place over a period of time and the increase of population stops after 1971.

If we just look at the decadal growth rates of population in two other districts of Assam, Dhemaji and Karbi Anglong, we will see that their growth rates in comparison have been more than twice that of Assam and substantially higher than even the 'Muslim' majority 'border' district of Dhubri.

Yet, the Muslim population in Dhemaji and Karbi Anglong is minuscule. The Hindu population in these two districts is 95.94% and 82.39% Hindu respectively. Muslims constitute merely 1.84% and 2.22% respectively of their total populations, in spite of having consistent high decadal growth rates – Dhemaji touching 103.42% between 1961-71 and Karbi Anglong having a similar high of 79.21% between 1951-61. This should be testimony enough to show that there could be reasons apart from illegal immigration of Muslims behind a high decadal growth rate of population. In Assam there is a decline in the population in Kokrajhar, which is the seat of Bodo Territorial Council. It has the lowest population growth of 5.19%, from the earlier 14.49 per cent in 2001.

Understanding the truth and deeper analysis of the demographic pattern of Assam is very essential to understand the nature of present carnage, which is more of a sectarian nature, a group trying to assert ethnic domination in the region. The underlying causes, lack of development of the region, absence of jobs, is creating more pressure on the land, and the 'sons of the soil' politics is being brought up in a very painful manner. Not only do we need to assuage the present violence, there is a need to bring in amity between different communities with proper development of infrastructure, which gives the opportunities to all the citizens of the area.

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