

Dimensions of
Displaced People
in
North-East India

Editor
C. Joshua Thomas

It has been observed that South Asia has the fourth largest concentration of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants in the world. Many of the refugee issues in South Asia are perhaps well covered but the eastern and north-eastern part of this subcontinent which has experienced substantial refugee flows because of the geopolitical proximity of the host of countries and sub regions in turmoil is, one of the most under reported in terms of refugee problem. In recent times the problem of internal displacement in the region due to sharpening ethnic strife is also becoming a matter of serious concern.

This book is the outcome of a regional seminar organised by the North Eastern Regional Centre of the ICSSR, Shillong. This book offers detailed information related to refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons in northeast India and thereby it seeks to fill the gap created by lack of authentic information from the area.

This book will be of great help to the students, research scholars, administrators, diplomats, policy makers and to the public in general.

C. Joshua Thomas, Deputy Director, ICSSR, North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong, Meghalaya, has written a book on the Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka, jointly edited four books on themes related to North East India and written articles on ethnicity, insurgency and displacement.

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Editor

C. Joshua Thomas



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Displaced People
in North-East India

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Foreword

Human movements have been a recurrent theme in the history and folk memory of the peoples of the seven states that comprise India's strategic North-East. Not unnaturally of course, if the character of the region as a frontier is recalled. But in recent years, apart from the vexed question of migration, the periodic surfacing of problems concerning refugees and displaced persons, even if not causally linked, have begun increasingly to engage the attention of the academia and the public. Our understanding, however, of the ramifications of these developments and indeed our knowledge of their social and economic underpinnings have remained imperfect and even fragmentary. In the summer of 2001, therefore, the North-Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Shillong decided to hold a two day National Seminar on "Human Movement and Settlement: Crisis and Dimension of Displacement in Eastern and North-Eastern Region of India" to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines to explore the core issues of the problem.

The present volume has developed substantially from the research papers presented and discussed at the seminar, generously sponsored by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. It has been built around the themes, migration, refugees and displaced persons. Though certain policy prescriptions emerge from the essays neither their authors nor the editor lays claim to finality or comprehensiveness in the treatment of the subject. Rather their object has been to stimulate further research and debate. We hope this will be realized in some small measure

of not wholly and that the volume will be found useful in India and abroad by scholars, policy planners and administrators and the public.

September 28, 2001
Shillong

Imdad Hussain
Honorary Director
ICSSR-NERC

Preface

This book has its origin in a two day national seminar on *Human Movement and Settlement: Crisis and Dimensions of Displacement in Eastern and North-Eastern Region of India* organized by the North-Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR-NERC) at the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong during July 12-13, 2001.

North-East India comprises seven States, viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura (we did not include Sikkim, which is now part of Northeast India). Located in the northeastern most corner of India, this region has a great strategic importance since it has common borders with five foreign Countries, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma (Myanmar), China and Nepal. The total geographical area of these seven States is 2,55,083 sq. kms. All the seven States have a sizeable migrant and refugee population which are often a bone of contention in the anti-foreigner agitation that sweeps all over northeast India. Added to this crisis is the displaced person due to the various ethnic conflicts and other factors has changed and challenged the demographic profile of the entire region.

The seminar focused on all these three vital issues: migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons. It was inaugurated by Professor Mrinal Miri, Vice-Chancellor, NEHU and Chairman, ICSSR-NERC and Dr. Ranabir Samadhar delivered the key note address at the inaugural session. The seminar had six academic sessions and twenty-four research papers were presented and discussed. For this present volume we have included twenty-three papers after due revision in the light of the discussion and arranged in the proper order. This seminar,

as far as we know, is the first of its kind encompassing all the three vital problems—migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons—confronting the northeast India.

The Seminar and this volume owe much to many persons and organizations who contributed in diverse ways in making them a grand success. We appreciate and acknowledge with thanks the financial assistance received from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) New Delhi. Particularly we would like to put on record the valuable assistance we received from Mr. G.K. Pillai, the then Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

We are grateful to Professor Mrinal Miri, Chairman, NERC-ICSSR and Professor Imdad Hussain, Honorary Director, ICSSR-NERC for their advice, constant encouragement in all the activities of the Centre.

We are thankful to all the resource persons for the efforts that they had taken to come to Shillong to present their research papers personally in the seminar and submitting their papers in time with due revision and modification.

We owe a special thanks to Dr. Ranabir Samadhar, who not only delivered the key note address in the seminar but his active interaction in the seminar added rich dimension altogether to this present volume.

We are also thankful to all our colleagues in the Centre particularly, Cerilla Khonglah, J.M. Blah, Narissa, Rupert, T. Aier, Jimdar Rai, Dinanath Rai, T. Thakuria and Bantiplang Nongkhlaw for unflinchingly extended their cooperation both in the seminar and in the preparatory work of this volume.

Special thanks to Dr. N.P. Goel, Department of Geography, NEHU, Shillong for his valuable assistance in the final preparation of this volume, particularly his skill in getting ready the entire text in the print format is praise worthy.

We appreciate much Mr. Arun Kumar Verma of Regency Publications, New Delhi for his interest in the NERC publication ventures and more particularly to this present volume.

Last but not the least both my wife and daughter—Kalai and Lind—deserves special thanks for cooperating with me during the entire period of preparation of this book.

Having expressed our thanks, however, we must emphasize that all the views expressed in these articles are entirely of the respective authors and the ICSSR-NERC is not responsible for the views and opinions expressed by them.

Despite of all our best efforts it is possible that mistakes of omission and commission may have inadvertently crept in this volume. We crave the indulgence of the readers for the same.

C. Joshua Thomas
Editor

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