**Immigration to North East India**

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**Migration** refers to a movement of people from one place to another on permanent or semi-permanent basis (Lee 1966). **Immigration** is a process in which, the international movement of people took place from one country to another in order to settle as a permanent residents or a naturalized citizens on the destination country, or to get the job opportunities as a migrant worker or temporarily as a foreign worker. In their destination country, they are not a native of that country and they do not hold any citizenship status of that country. In this context, those people who are engaged in this type of movement of crossing international border are called as immigrants in the destination country from the perspective of from which they enter. And in their home country, those people are called as emigrant, from the perspective of the country, from which they leave. An **illegal immigrant** can be defined as a person who crosses international borders by violating the immigration laws of the destination country.

Immigration in North East India has its own history. North East India has been a homeland to various religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups from the dawn of its history. The present population of North East India belongs to numerous ethno-linguistic groups descending from the people who migrated to this region from different parts of the Indian subcontinent as well as from other countries in different historical periods. When one consider the process of migration to the region, one can discern **eleven major streams and waves of immigration**, which has built the present population of North East India. They were as follows:

1. It is believed that the first ever group of people to settle in this region in the pre-historic past is the Mon Khmer speaking Austro-Asiatic, whose descendants are today identified as the Khasis and Jaintias.
2. They were followed by the Tibeto-Burman language-speaking people of the Sino-Tibetan family of Mongoloids, who immigrated from north and north east to this region. Most of the tribes of the hills and plains of the region belong to this group.
3. Then, Indo-Aryan came from the western part of the country. They brought Vedic culture, Hindu religion and a higher technology of sedentary agriculture with them. This group live in this region till the beginning of the thirteenth century. From about 1205 A.D., another group of Indo-Aryan, professing Islam, started settling in this region. They came here as soldiers and craftsmen of the invading armies of the Sultans of Delhi and the Nawabs of Bengal. Their immigration was in a trickle and occasional.
4. They were followed by the immigration of Tai Ahom people from the northern and eastern hill tracts of Upper Burma and Western Yunnan in 1228 A. D. under the guidance of their prince Sukapha. They established a kingdom in the Brahmaputra Valley, which lasted for 600 years till 1826 A.D.
5. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there came in five small groups of Tai people (Khamti, Khamyang, Aiton, Phake and Turung) who are now found to be living in Arunachal Pradesh and eastern Assam.
6. The Ahoms as also belong to Sino-Siamese branch of the Sino-Tibetan family of the Mongoloids came to this region.
7. After the colonizers annexed this region in 1826, they brought some Bengalis, apart from a few lived in the Barak Valley, people from North Indian states, Rajasthan and Nepal, who engaged in the jobs associated with administration, various crafts, trade and commerce and law and order in the newly annexed territory.
8. After the establishment of tea plantation in Assam by the colonizers, they brought people belong to various tribal and marginalized castes from the Chhotanagpur region spanning over the states of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. These people mostly belong to Mundari language-speaking group of the Austro-Asiatic ethno-linguistic family. Their migration started in the 1850s and continued up to 1940. Their descendants today represent most of the tea gardens and ex- tea garden laborers of Assam.
9. Another significant stream of immigration took place in the nineteenth century with the coming of many Kuki, Chin, Naga and Kachin people from upper Myanmar across the international border to Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and the eastern districts of Arunachal Pradesh.
10. From about 1880s, there started a migration stream of landless Muslim peasants of the East Bengal (now Bangladesh) origin, who settled in the islands and immediate flood plains of the Brahmaputra from Dhubri district to as far as Lakhimpur district of Assam.
11. The last major wave of immigration came to North East India following the partition of India in 1947, when thousands of Hindu refugees, having left their hearth and home in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), entered and settled in this region.

The most recent wave of immigration that came to be seen in North East India is the large-scale movement of Bangladeshi immigrants. They are posing serious problems to the economy, political system, demography and society of the northeastern states. In recent decades it is came to be seen that immigration became a major burning issue in North East India due to drastic rise in the numbers of immigrants and most of them enter the region illegally. It became a perennial problem in North East India. They brought a huge transformation in the population composition and a change in social landscape of the region. The population of the immigrant community became more than indigenous people in some of the states, as for example in Assam. It creates a fear among the ethnic population of losing their identity in their own land. In addition, because of their huge population they also influence the political scenario in some of the states. Economically they also posed threat to the indigenous labor force. The people of the immigrant community tend to work for extremely low wages and even for the odd hours also, which hampers the work wage of the local indigenous daily laborer working population.

For finding a better solution to the question of illegal immigration to North East India, we can think for a proper border management system with government initiatives. In addition, it is necessary for the policy makers to address the problem by taking the long-term impact on the region as well as the country as a whole, instead of looking at short-term expediencies of utilizing migrants as a convenient political vote bank. A long-term measured solution is necessary so that both indigenous and migrant communities can live and work together in harmony, and prosper in a socially responsive and environment friendly manner.