Immigration and Internal Security: Global Trends and Lessons for Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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Abstract

Migrations have been a universal phenomenon since the dawn of human civilization. The immigrations and emigrations have shaped the historical dynamics of almost all the major nations of the world and particularly those ones who owe their genesis and have thriven due to the process of migration. In the contemporary times the issue of migration has elicited reactions from subtle to knee jerk from its sympathizers as well as detractors, the world over. The gravity of migration issue in the 21st century cannot be underestimated especially in the light of happenings in west Asia and north Africa with an unprecedented influx of masses from the war ravaged countries of the region to safer havens in Europe and to lesser extent, America. In the Indian context, the sub-continental drifts from the neighbouring countries particularly Bangladesh and Myanmar towards India have long created tensions in the border regions, both between the countries as well the communities. The violence based on ethnic nationalism has often been a logical corollary of such influx in India's north eastern states. Narrowing down to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the strategic bio-diverse sentinel of India with window to the south east Asia, the unsolicited and unchecked immigrations have become serious security as well as socio-economic threat. The menace could attain an altogether different dimension because of the geographical remoteness of these Islands from the mainland India and their proximity to the nations of south east Asia. A concrete immigration policy, hence, needs to be in place so as to differentiate between the infiltrators and the asylum seekers without jeopardizing the fragility of the Islands along with the humanitarian perspective.

Keywords: Andaman and Nicobar Islands, immigration, migration, security, terrorism, refugees, policy.

1. Introduction

The debate on immigration in the global context has, and continues to be, subject to a great deal of controversy in the socio-political sphere and has managed to elicit extensive interest of the researchers and academics all over. As such, thematically, the marking and unmarking of the boundaries and making and fragmentation of societies in time and space too have been impacted by it. In the immigration debate there are arguments from both sides i.e. there are people who support the cause of immigration, particularly undocumented and hideously done, as great security threat. Such type of stealthy done entries came under the category of infiltration, a term loaded with security and terror undertones in today's age. Immigration is a multi-pronged issue and thus need a dispassionate national approach bereft of political expediency. In this article an endeavour has been made to analyze immigration as an issue of national (a comprehensive term for social, cultural, economic and political) securities i.e. there are those who fear a link between immigration and terrorism, and those who disregard it as an exaggeration. The reference point for this discussion is the contemporaneous geo-political scenario extending from Europe to America to north Africa to closer home in Asia and the ramifications implicit in such dynamics.

The point of departure for this essay is the claim which establishes the connection between immigration and terrorism. However the critics construe this as a constructed and perceived threat rather than a real, objective danger. Julia Tallmeister (2013), author of *Is Immigration a Threat to Security*? points out that politician and the media have managed to stir up hostility towards immigrants, legal and undocumented, and therefore create a connection between immigration and terrorism- just as it has been done with portraying immigrants as a threat to societal and economic security. There has been an element of truth in both understandings of migration issues whether they happen in USA, Europe or nearer home in the sub-continental India. I have tried to explain the phenomenon by taking in account the broader challenges afflicting the world and zeroing it down to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (hereafter A&N Islands), a strategic asset enormous importance to India situated nearly 1200 kilometres from the Indian mainland. A plethora of primary and secondary readings on the topic of immigration and its multifarious aspects has been a source for this article along with the primary data and firsthand knowledge of the things happening in the A&N Islands.

2. Immigration Challenge Astound Europe

The migration question has shaped political conversation in Europe, and is expectedly to maintain to shape it. On one side are liberal internationalists attached to fundamental asylum principles or to the vision of a borderless globe; on the other are xenophobic boundary builders who see migration as a modern adaptation of barbaric offensive, threatening mores and civilisation. The latter, for obvious geo-political *raison d'être*, tend to hold sway. There is a contradictory view of what the resurrecting right in the European politics believes. Jef Huysmans (2006)

argues that security policies and responses do not appear out of the blue, but are part of a continuous and gradual process, pre-structured by previous developments. He examines this process of securitization and explores how an issue, on the basis of the distribution and administration of fear, becomes a security policy. Basically, what he suggests is the over estimation of immigration problem and apparent lack of a structured response to the issue.

Certainly, some of the topical crises on the Italian island of Lampedusa, the Spanish enclaves in North Africa, and at the land border between Greece and Turkey all seem to indicate that the borders of Europe are being stormed by desperate migrants and refugees from North Africa, the Middle East and Africa, south of the Sahara (Davies, 2013). The Arab Spring that commenced in 2010, and the sequential response of a breakdown of political order across North Africa and the Middle East, has augmented the pressure on European borders, but the political reaction across the European area (Schengen and non-Schengen EU countries) has signified a broad reaction to immigration that goes well past illegal immigration.

It has been reported that between December 2010 and April 2011, more than twenty thousand migrants (mostly Tunisians) arrived on the small Italian island of Lampedusa, setting off a broader crisis within the EU-Schengen system (Davies, 2013). Italian authorities shifted large numbers of migrants to camps on the mainland, from where many went on to France with the documents supplied by the Italian authorities. The dawn of the Arab Spring, and even before that a crisis like situation has emerged and with the continuous inflow of refugees at the Spanish land borders between Morocco and the enclaves of Ceuta and Malilla the situation has reached to a critical point (Robinson, 2017). In the early 1990s the gravity of situation has reached to the extent that to curb the inflow of refugees and illegal immigrants in 1993 the Spanish authorities decided to construct a network of fences that were enhanced incrementally in 1995, 1998, and again after incidents of 2005. In 2012, Greece has built a 12.5 km of fence along its part of its border with Turkey, and Bulgaria is in the process of erecting a 30 km fence along its border with Turkey (Schain, 2013).

The political question of immigration has focused increasingly on illegal immigrants in Europe, as it has in the United States, but in Europe, the question remains way more convoluted. To estimate the number of undocumented migrants in any country is a formidable task, which always comes with political overtones. The estimate that illegal immigrants make up at most 0.68 percent of the population for France is considerably lower than in Britain (approximately 1.4 percent), and far lower than that of the United States where the 11–12 million undocumented immigrants, which make up roughly 3.8 percent of the population (Schain, 2013;immigration.procon.org, 2013). The crisis have deepen even more in the wake of war against ISIS in Syria, Iraq and other adjoining areas in west Asia and north Africa with an ever escalating number of refugees pouring into Europe whose count has become a complicated task to complete.

Across Europe, a median of 49 percent believe that the large number of refugees fleeing countries such as Iraq and Syria pose a major threat to their country. An even larger median of 59 percent say that refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country. And a median of 43 percent have an unfavourable view of Muslims in their society (Poushter, 2016). This also echoes an underlying aversion in many European nations towards diversity and a persistent belief that the Muslims want to remain discrete with no interest in forging a common national identity with the populace of the country of their choosing.

Europeans generally construe that the refugees bring violence and hostility with them. In the Czech capital of Prague, a refugee centre was recently set on fire with Molotov cocktails. On New Year's Eve in 2016, there was an outbreak of attacks against women by refugees in Cologne. At least 120 women were robbed and sexually molested by around 1,000 young men. The city police chief Wolfgang Albers called it "a completely new dimension of crime," and Cologne Mayor Henriette Reker said it was "monstrous" (Hewitt, 2016). The *BBC* reports that the men appeared to have specifically arrived at the area around Cologne Cathedral with the intention of attacking women. Many of the protesters now carry signs that say "Keep rapefugees out," a reference to the large numbers of rapes taking place. According to *The Spectator*, rapes by foreigners have been increasing in Sweden. However, Sweden has become so politically correct, it reveals, that police officers don't dare release the ethnicity or nationality of suspects or risk being accused of being racist. The Swedish Democrats, which have become the main political party in Sweden opposing the refugees, are now the third-largest political party in Sweden (Arpi, 2016).

The travesty in Europe has boiled down to this: Society has become so politically correct that even though many of the refugees are radical Islamists, Western governments insist on bending over backward to accommodate them, to the detriment of their own citizens. In France, a theory called the "great replacement" has spread to large parts of the right and certainly the far-right. It states that, as a result of immigration, the nation's core population is set to be replaced by non-European outsiders who will wreck the country's identity (Laura, 2017). There are also echoes of this in Germany's Pegida movement, whose full name is "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the west" (Goulard, 2016).

Historically, Europe has exported its population, whether to distant colonial possessions for conquest and domination, or to the New World as a consequence of poverty, persecution or war. Now, it has become the primary attraction and refuge for those who seek protection and a superior life. Europeans are simply much richer and more

stable than many other parts of the world. Christopher Caldwell (2010), for example, carries the open border argument to its logical conclusion, by arguing that Europe appears to be without means to combat this rising "menace," and without the political will to find the means. Europe can neither limit immigration, he wrote, nor is it capable of shaping the lives of those who get past the gates. Instead, Europeans seem committed to protecting the very trends that would destroy European values, European liberties, and perhaps worse. The analysis tends to focus on cultural conflicts resulting from changing population patterns.

3. The American Scenario

In the United States the immigration debate has fetched great deal of acrimonious controversy. The undocumented immigration resonates more strongly with some of policy and opinion makers in US who tantamount it to an issue of national security. They are particular about the context of migrations or rather infiltrations from US - Mexico border which since many years has become gateway to criminal activity including organized illegal drug trade. Some go far in attributing terrorism to unabated immigrations to USA, the reaction ingrained stoutly in the wake of September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Following the attacks, the George W. Bush administration redefined the role of immigration agencies, including them in a strategy to combat terrorism. The then newly created Department of Homeland Security took over jurisdiction of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), thus establishing immigrants as threats to internal security, as well as formulation of Patriot Act. However a December 2001 CBS *News/New York Times* poll found that more than half of Americans believe immigrants contribute to this country, up from 29 percent in 1994 (Toner and Connelly, 2006). According to a June 2002 Gallup Poll, a majority of the public believes that immigration is good for the country (Carroll, 2006). A left wing writer and an immigrant's rights activist Avi Chomsky (2007) argue against the anti-immigrant policy of the US government and debunk the myths associated with the immigration debates viz. immigrants take away jobs, pay no taxes and yet get the benefits of social welfare schemes. There, thus emerge, two camps in USA, equally vociferous but diametrically opposite to each other on the immigration issues and the cacophony has only increased in the recent times following the imbroglio of Afghanistan, west Asia and north Africa.

According to a *Congressional Research Service* report released in September 2012 on *Arizona vs. United States* case on a limited role of states in immigration enforcement, it seems clear that the ruling will have profound implications for state activity in the field of immigration (Kate & Garcia, 2012). What implies from this ruling is that in recent years, several states and localities have attempted to play a greater role in the area of immigration enforcement, in many cases due to perceptions that the federal government had not taken adequate steps to deter the presence of unauthorized immigrants within their jurisdictions. The mood clearly suggests that immigration has become a contentious issue in the land of immigrants and the divided opinion with the Supreme Court's intervention has paved the path for course correction in Trump's tenure.

Priorly, many Republicans in US have criticized the Obama administrations' lackadaisical approach towards the illegal immigrants. Presently (as promised in his election campaigns), the Trump administration is moving towards more stringent norms for entertaining immigrants, legal or illegal. However, like in Europe, many in USA too view the connection between immigration and terrorism is a constructed and perceived threat rather than a real, objective danger. John Mueller (2006), the author of *Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?*: *The Myth of the Omnipresent Enemy*, argues that the absence of terrorist attacks in the United States is not a result of increased border control and stricter immigration policies, and that the threat of immigrants as terrorists has been exaggerated. Daniel Griswold (2002) of the Cato Institute argues that terrorist attacks by foreigners are not a result of liberal immigration policies, but are a result of failure to keep out the small number of foreigners who do pose a threat. In his analysis *Linking Immigrants and Terrorists: The Use of Immigrant*" and a "foreigner," noting that those responsible for the September 11 attacks were not immigrants, but rather people who entered the United States with temporary visas. Such vocal supporters of liberal immigration regime also point towards the arm manufacturing lobby of USA which overstate the fear of immigrations and its fortuitous linkage to terrorism simply to get their weaponry consumed by the government contracts by the way of increased defence expenditure.

4. Case of India

"The Hindu rate of population growth is declining. But the Muslim rate is rising. Most of the Muslims here are from Bangladesh. If this continues, the Assamese Hindus will become a minority soon; we will lose our language, our culture, our identity," Himanta Biswa Sarma, finance minister in the Assam government told the *Washington Post* (Lakshmi, 2016). According to a report of the news portal *indiatimes.com*, 28 June 2016, the 'illegal immigrants in Assam can buy an Indian citizenship for as little as Rs 10,000!'(Bhonde, 2016). The Supreme Court of India in November 2014 took a serious view of the "cultural and political" conflicts due to presence of "illegal" Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam, and ordered the Centre for taking steps to deport them (DNA, 2014). The Supreme Court passed the judgement on challenge to Section 6A of the Citizenship Act. Besides, referring the matter to the constitution bench, it passed certain directions with regard to implementation of the Assam Accord

with respect to border roads, flood lighting and fencing. The apex court observed that the illegal settlers could have been given refugee status instead of granting citizenship rights (*ibid*.). The above reports succinctly sum up the enormity of malady prevailing in the India's once fragile north eastern region and the apparent political apathy.

India, historically speaking, has always been an attractive destination or rather a refuge for the people of unstable and economically shaken countries of south Asia. Even if we move beyond the contemporary times, we have the examples of giving respectable shelter to the communities driven by persecution like Parsis and Jews. Refugees or illegal immigrants or asylum seekers from Tibet, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have found shelter in India. While refugees coming from places like Tibet, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Myanmar—have been dealt with in a relatively systematic but *ad hoc* manner, the influx of refugees/illegal immigrants from Bangladesh has largely been left unattended. This neglect has adversely impacted the interests of natives in the areas witnessing such mass influxes of illegal immigrants as well as India's national security. The absence of clear cut refugee laws and the blurry distinction between the refugees, asylum seekers, illegal economic immigrants and infiltrators has complicated the issue.

The problem of illegal immigration is wanton in other parts of north east India and not only the state of Assam but the volatile state of Nagaland is also facing the problem as many from Bangladesh have acquired illegally the coveted Inner Line Permits (a government sanction to visit the interior areas of the region). It may be mentioned that the powerful All Assam Students Union (AASU) had launched a bloody campaign to push Bangladeshis back to their land along with several other similar drives by the sundry militant bodies (Das and Talukdar, 2006). The indigenous people who panicked that they could be reduced to minority in their own land massacred thousands of Bangladeshis, including women and children, across the state (Assam). The government as well as various indigenous vigilante groups in Assam and other states of north east, of late, have resorted to registration and deportation effort known as "detect-delete-deport." The government has now woken up to the challenge of Bangladeshi Islamic terrorist organizations to be in cahoots with the likes of Islamic State which can infiltrate India by posing as illegal immigrants. The cattle smuggling across Assam-Bangladesh and West Bengal-Bangladesh border has added another dimension to the problem (Das, 2016; Deka, 2011& Kumara, 2003).

4.1 The Strategic Andaman and Nicobar Islands

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, geographically a remotest of the regions, politically patient, socially, a conglomerate of race, religion and language but strategically the most vital of all the geo-political regions of India has gradually woken up to the issue of illegal immigration. Saving the tribal, the ex-convicts of different religious dispensations and their descendents are the earliest settlers of these Islands or in other words the immigrants that were forcibly transported and settled. Thus, in pre-independence India an assortment of people from diverse communities was brought from different parts of India, both as convicts as well as free settlers.

Historically speaking, at several specific junctures in the historical timeline of these Islands the influx of Hindus and Muslims was the greatest. First instance came in the aftermath of Moplah rebellion in the Malabar region of south India from 1921 to 1923 (against the British rule and the Hindu landlords) when large numbers of Muslim Moplah convicts were incarcerated to Andaman and lead to a big surge in the Muslim population. The second major surge was led by the deportation of the members of Bhantu community, mainly Hindus purportedly of Kshatriya lineage. The third upsurge came immediately after the Partition of India when the displaced Bengalis (majorly Hindus) from East Pakistan were rehabilitated in the Islands in 1949 followed by a Five Year Colonization plan that begun in 1952. (Sinha, 1952) The migrations that followed the Partition of India, especially from East Pakistan and the next big influx, though somewhat illegal, came in the wake of the formation of Bangladesh in 1971-72 wherein many Muslims apart from the Hindus managed to get permanent shelter here. In addition to the above mentioned, various settlers from South India like from the erstwhile princely state of Travancore-Cochin and Madras have contributed towards the demographic fulfillment of ANI. The continuous process had startled the locals and engendered a sense of anxiety of being marginalized and of being rendered unimportant. The victim of such unpleasantness has been the communal harmony and inter-faith relations.

The post independence period too has seen the large scale and unabated influx of immigrants. The biggest ethnic chunk that immigrated came from the Bengali speaking regions, Indian as well as Bangladeshi. And that is when the predicament started building. The A&N Islands is fundamentally a cosmopolitan society comprising of migratory people of all hues and thus migration has never been perceived as problematic ever since 1858. But the recent national and global geo-political developments and its repercussions have casted its shadow on these sleepy Islands also. To be specific, the illegal Bangladeshi issue which has caused widespread acrimony in the north-east, West Bengal and elsewhere in India is becoming a cause concern for the local populace. Most of the illegal Bengali immigrants hail from the districts of Malda and Murshidabad of West Bengal who in all probability have sneaked in from the neighbouring Bangladesh post the Tsunami of 2004. Basudev Dass, a member Electricity Consumer Grievances Office, A&N Islands who also happens to be associated with the Local Born Association (an association of local born people of Islands) attributes the trigger point such influx to the construction contractors in the Islands who in the aftermath of Tsunami resorted to large scale importation of labour from the states of

Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand for reconstruction and rehabilitation work. As these immigrants provided for easy and cheap labour and many of them linguistically sound similar to the local Bengalis, therefore instead of going back after the end of construction work, they stealthily managed to absorb themselves in the local society. Of late they have engaged themselves in the economic activities ranging from fruit and vegetable vending to becoming a domestic help and other lowly sundry economic activities. The arrangement of identity proofs like electricity bills, Aadhar, ration card and ultimately a voter card via questionable means to strengthen their claim to Islands, has never been a problem in the mainland India; the same applies to the Islands.

Not only the Bangladeshis but the illegal Myanmarese particularly the Rohingiyas too has alarmed the locals of this impending menace in making. In an incident in the not so distant past, more than 400 illegal migrants departed from Chittagong in six mechanised boats to enter Malaysia. The boats were intercepted and detained at high seas by the Royal Thai Navy for about four weeks for preliminary investigations. Subsequently, these migrants were transferred to a non mechanised boat with some bags of rice and were released on high seas off the coast of Thailand. After 12 days, about over 100 of them landed at Little Andaman coast (Hut Bay) and were finally apprehended by the Indian authorities (Kukeraja, 2013& *The Hindu*, 11 Feb., 2011). By securing bogus identities these immigrants have managed to a large extent to legalise their status in these Islands.

The issue so far has not elicited any viable research due to lack of formal institutional data either from the governmental side or from the side of any academic research body. If at all there is at all data or perspective available, that only comes from the civil society who is helplessly watching the ghettoization of their Islands by familiar sounding aliens with the mannerisms uncommon to the Island society. The Nicobar Islands, a tribal enclave where the entry is highly regulated under the Protection of Aboriginal tribes Regulation of 1956, illegal settlers abound. The influxes of illegal immigrants have become a pressing concern for Nicobarese too. Post Tsunami the demand for the ouster of these illegal immigrants has gained ground as the tribal want their land ownership rights to be recognised and protected (A&N Islands Development Report, 2008, p.104). Even though the intelligence agencies have been keeping a keen watch over such dubious immigrations but tangible result on grounds are yet to be seen. The vacillating attitude of the authorities has aggravated the issue much to the detriment of Island's demography which is increasingly showing the trends of communal (religious) skewness.

However, in the recent years the burgeoning significance ANI in strategic as well as ecological sense has stirred the government at the centre from inertia. In 2014, while on a visit to the Islands the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju had said that illegal immigration into the strategic islands of Andaman & Nicobar would be curbed (PIB, 2014). He favoured effective regulations in allowing people from outside the Islands in restricted areas. Seeing the geopolitical situation prevailing around the globe with national and international repercussions, a few steps have been taken by the immigration authorities and the security agencies to deter the illegal influx. A personal interview of the author with Janniffer Danieal, an Inspector with Immigration, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, reveals the conjoined efforts by the way of increased vigil and checks at the entry and exit points at airport and seaports with the newcomer visitors being specially monitored along with the sharing of intelligence inputs between the central and the local agencies have been, for the most part, streamlined. She further states that the community involvement, especially, the coastal dwellers have been sensitized to the menace of illegal sneak in and are told to stay extra vigilant and the fishermen watch groups have been created. The coastal security patrolling has been revamped with modern speed boats and night vision devices. And most importantly, the scrutiny of existing population has started to figure out the illegitimate residents.

5. Conclusion

Even at the charge of sounding xenophobic, it has to be maintained that the Islands should not go the Assam or West Bengal way. The strategic importance of A & N Islands, its geographical distance from mainland India as well as the environmental concerns makes it far more fragile and succumbing than any other part of India. Any such situation cropping out of illegal immigration would eventually become hard to contain. It is to be understood that an asylum seeker and an infiltrator are two different people and they deserve different treatments. A stouter filtration mechanism needs to be in place at different entry points which could effectively curb the unwarranted sneak in. The country has seen the consequences of a politically correct approach while dealing with illegal immigration problem in, Europe, USA as well in India and this should serve as a lesson for the kind hearted and complacent. Of late the central government has taken the note of this issue and the recent visit of Indian home minister to the islands generates optimism. But more responsibility lies on the shoulders of the local inhabitants who have be more vigilant to the happenings in their backyards lest the Islands fell prey to immigration fatigue. After all, not the governments but the people pay the price of ignorant smugness associated with the 'all is well' syndrome.

It would be apt to finish this research narrative with an excerpt from a Facebook video posted by 16 year old girl teenager in Germany in the aftermath of pernicious attacks on women at Cologne, Germany (as discussed previously), on the eve of New Year in 2016 by the Muslim immigrants sheltered in Germany after the exodus from west Asia and north Africa.

... Thank you, Angela Merkel, for killing Germany! I have no more respect for you, Merkel. I do not think you know what you have done. You do not see how our lives have changed. Open your eyes! Is this normal? Should I, a 16-year old who is almost 17, be so scared to walk outside my house? No, it is not normal. You have killed Germany!

The A&N Islands does not deserve go that way.

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