A Critical Appraisal of Cross-Border Migration into India using the Push-Pull Theory

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ABSTRACT

Cross-border migration is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by economic, demographic, socio-cultural, political, and miscellaneous factors. The push-pull theory effectively explains this dynamic, highlighting the drivers that compel individuals to leave their home countries—such as poverty, political instability, and environmental crises—and the attractions of destination countries, including economic opportunities, safety, and cultural ties. India, as a prominent South Asian nation, experiences significant migration flows from neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar due to shared cultural heritage, economic growth, and geographic proximity. India manages migration through a robust legal framework, including the Foreigners Act (1946), Passport (Entry into India) Act (1920), and Citizenship Act (1955), which regulate the entry, stay, and departure of foreigners. Undocumented migrants are classified as illegal and subject to deportation or detention, with the Foreigners Tribunal playing a crucial role in determining citizenship in sensitive regions like Assam. However, India also adopts a humanitarian stance, offering protections to groups facing persecution, such as Tibetan and Tamil refugees, and implementing policies like the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) to provide a pathway to citizenship for religious minorities from neighboring countries. India's approach exemplifies the balance between national security and humanitarian obligations, underscoring the importance of regulated migration policies that address both push-pull dynamics and ethical responsibilities in a globalized world.

Keywords: push-pull, migration, cross-border, india

I. INTRODUCTION

The important factors which motivate people to move may broadly be classified into five group: economic factors, demographic factors, socio-cultural factors, political factors and miscellaneous factors (Kumar, 2005). Cross-border migration is a complex phenomenon driven by various economic, political, and social factors, which can usually be explained in the push-pull theory. The push-pull framework analyzes what pushes people out of their country—poverty, political instability, or environmental crisis among others—and what attracts them to a particular destination: economic opportunities, safety, or cultural ties. India is a significant South Asian country with shared cultural heritage, economic growth, and ease of accessibility. Migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar would therefore be drawn easily to India. It's essential to recognize those push-pull dynamics to analyze India's migration flows and the ways in which the country responds to these movements.

If global order is to be maintained, states must agree on who and what may cross national borders, and how (Parkes, 2015). India has approached cross-border migration with regulated laws and special protections. The laws controlling sojourn and entry, as well as departure of foreigners, include the Foreigners Act (1946), the Passport (Entry into India) Act (1920), the Registration of Foreigners Act (1939), and the Citizenship Act (1955). Undocumented immigrants are those whose documents are not valid, or they have overstayed. In the case of India, it deals with them as illegal migrants and deports or detains them under this law. The Foreigners Tribunal also acts as an important instrument in determining citizen status, especially in states like Assam where migration has always been a sensitive issue.

While some countries like India place much emphasis on regulations and national security, it still maintains a humanitarian necessity for certain communities battered by substantial push factors, such as religious persecution. For example, protecting Tibetan Refugees and Tamil Refugees and also India's Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 which offers persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan a way to citizenship, thereby respecting India's

commitment to those in need. This approach is about finding that middle ground that seeks to serve national interests while being compassionate towards people's plight with dire circumstances.

II.　WHAT IS THE PUSH-PULL THEORY OF MIGRATION?

Push-pull theory was initially developed through the works of theorists such as Everett Lee and Ernest Ravenstein. This theory poses a framework for understanding why people should relocate from one region or country to another. According to this theory, migration decisions are usually prompted by "push" factors, often bringing forcibly a person out from his place of origin, and "pull" factors, attracting him or her to a new destination. The push factors are common in the benefactor's country, while pull factors are found in the host country (Kanayo, 2019). Typically, the push factors involve the opposing forces of political instability or poverty and lack of economic opportunities.

In contrast, the pull factors are often the attraction factors in the form of better employment prospects, safety, and living standards. This approach pushes and pulls as a strong lens to look at migration, especially across borders, by capturing the reasons precipitating the "exodus" from a place and the "magnetism" of the destination. Systematic investigation into drivers of migration can be accomplished in virtually classical terms by classifying sources of socio-economic, environmental, and political factors sparking movements into flows.

III.　IMPORTANCE OF PUSH-PULL THEORY IN UNDERSTANDING CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION

This model is especially apt in the study of cross-border migration since it captures the interaction of conditions both in the origin and destination countries. In international migration, push-pull factors point to a pattern, assess the dynamics of migration pressures, and address root causes of migration. For example, when crises in a country force people to migrate, the push-pull model draws attention to how better employment opportunities could intuitively attract these migrants to destinations.

The push-pull model also assists in immigration policy design and cross-border relationships. Since it can be ascertained what "pulls" people into any given country, then governments would measure possible impacts on social and economic areas, thus guiding decisions regarding resource allocation, labour markets, and international aid. By recognizing "push" factors, for example, foreign policies can be designed to have better conditions in the countries of origin, thus reducing eventual pressures to emigrate.

IV.　CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION INTO INDIA: MAKING SENSE OF THE PUSH AND PULLS

The decision to immigrate may be influenced by a range of political factors in the homeland and host country (Doerschler, 2006). A unique combination of economic, cultural, political, and geographical factors has placed India at the top of the list of destination countries for cross-border migration. They decide whether to move based on which place they deem more favourable, considering all the relevant forces (Reuveny, 2008), and while considering, India is placed in top priority in the region. With its rapid economic development, coupled with political stability compared to some of its neighbours, India has remained an attraction to several South Asian migrants, mainly from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Myanmar. India's push-pull factors have led to complex migration dynamics where economic opportunity and the established familial bonds and proximity facilitate inflows.

Still, political and social tensions underscore a restrictive immigration policy. Thus, these migration flows are intertwined with immediate economic necessities and longer-term socio-political needs that give the push-pull model an extremely appropriate framework for cross-border movements into India. The cross-border movement of people necessarily creates social and political frictions, where demographic changes in these states become strongly felt. Citizens may find some competition with migrants for jobs and other resources creating friction and, at times, determining discriminatory rules. One of the chief reasons for conflicting relations of migrants and locals is in the sphere of employment (Rao, 1981).

4.1 Push Factors Driving Migration to India

Poverty and unemployment are one of the persistent issues in many of India's neighbors. In Bangladesh, high population density and fewer resources created severe job competition; many are crossing the border for employment. Nepal's economy, which relies much on remittances due to limited domestic industrialization, made the citizens of this place seek employment in India, where economic opportunities are relatively easy to access.

Political instability or ethnic conflicts sometimes make people move to more secure regions. The political upsurge in Myanmar, more particularly after recent military coups, has compelled many thousands of refugees, mainly from ethnic minorities such as Rohingya, to seek refuge in India. Decades-long crisis and instability in Afghanistan have pushed thousands of people out of the country, and many have chosen India as their destination for relocation. Bangladesh underwent phases of political turbulence which were bound to push people towards the stability of India. People of certain religions or ethnicities face persecution in their countries, such as Minority communities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan and come to India for refuge, where people have been protected as refugees throughout history for humanitarian reasons.

Moreover, South Asia is the worst possible victim of climatic change, with a rise in the sea level, floods, and erratic weather patterns, which threatened the livelihoods of millions, mainly along coastal lines. Bangladesh is a classic example of the loss of arable land, severe flooding, and river erosion, which have forced many more people into migration in search of stable living conditions. Environmental degradation thus becomes an increasingly significant push factor in cross-border migration trends, where flows intensify into India from affected regions.

4.2 Pull Factors Attracting Migrants to India

The economic growth, urbanization, and an ever-growing labour market attract large numbers from neighbouring populations in India. Most recent migrants are mainly from Bangladesh, Nepal, and other communities who find work in agriculture, construction, and domestic services. The same informal economy of India provides a similar opportunity for the migrant worker, who can work with minimal documentation or formal education. Cultural and historical links are essential factors in choosing India for cross-border migration. Bangladesh and Nepal share a cultural heritage that simplifies the process of assimilation of migrants in India. For instance, linguistic and cultural similarities reduce social friction among Bangladeshi migrants in West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. At the same time, Nepalese citizens, through long-standing treaties, have imperative rights to work and settle in India. Such common cultural ties ultimately reduce psychological and social barriers to migration and make India a more sought-after destination than other culturally distant nations.

India has broad but sometimes porous borders with Nepal and Bangladesh, so geography can give access to her. Border control can be challenging, particularly in areas with much informal border-to-border movement. The open border policy between India and Nepal under the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship permits free movement of people and goods, thus making migration between these two nations convenient. The long, porous border has also facilitated movement for Bangladeshi migrants, though India has recently tightened up security. The Bangladesh-India migration corridor is one of South Asia's largest cross-border migration flows. The movement is influenced by complex push-pull factors, where economic opportunity in India contrasts with socio-economic disadvantage in Bangladesh.

Economic hardships, high rates of unemployment, and environmental vulnerabilities, such as flooding and land erosion, have been the key push factors of migrants from Bangladesh. West Bengal and Assam in India have traditionally been destinations for Bangladeshi migrants who acquire employment in agriculture, construction, and other labour-intensive sectors. Although there are difficulties and constrictive policies, the migration flow continues because the economic gain is immediate for migrants and because the informal sector of India requires low-wage labour.

The political movements of East Pakistani Bengali-speaking people led to the making of a new sovereign nation curving out from Pakistan, known as Bangladesh. Before achieving independence in 1971, the modern state of Bangladesh was part of a larger, non-contiguous Pakistan (Pant, 2007). During the British colonial period, the present Bangladesh was part of Bengal as well as the Assam Province by bringing Sylhet into Assam. The people of Bengal origin relocated and settled across many provinces back then. One such province was Assam. The British's Tea industry and Agricultural policies had attracted hundreds of thousands of people from Erstwhile East Bengal who came over to Assam and settled here permanently. This factor has led to the socio-cultural connection and network between the origin society and the host, contributing significantly to post-independence unregulated cross-border migration, be it for any reason.

Cachar District of Surma Valley was annexed by the British in 1832. Soon after its annexation the possibilities of tea cultivation in the valley was explored in February 1834…..ble. Tea plantation in Cachar began in 1855-56 and by 1858 planters began to feel extreme difficulties, as local labourers were unwilling to work in the plantation. At that point of time, Cachar was very much thinly populated and they were self sufficient with their own means of livelihood….. Cachar had acute shortage of labour. In order to maintain the steady growth and prosperity of the newly built industry, the planters felt that there is no other alternative but that labour has to be brought from outside (Biswas, 2005).

The Surma Valley and Brahmaputra Valley were the hubs of tea cultivation, which witnessed migration inflows during the British period. These two valleys also experienced inflows of Illegal Immigrants in Independent India, coming from the same place as the colonial period. The early settlers primarily work as agents of hope and a guiding force in settling the new batch of immigrants. This helps smooth shifting, adjusting and building networks in the host society. Migration to a new society without a prior network is troublesome for any immigrant, especially in acceptance and settlement in the host society. However, in the case of Bangladeshi immigrants to Assam, Bengal and Tripura, it's not a completely alienated society; the aspiring immigrants always look for the existing networks in the host society and then approach the crossing border. The cross-

border migration from Bangladesh to India has happened in this manner, and it has made it easy for the immigrant to assimilate into the host society in no time, which makes it almost impossible to trace any illegal immigrants if not caught on the crossing.

4.3 India's Policies towards Cross-Border Migration

The forcibly uprooted from the social and political community -refugees, stateless persons, IDPs, escapees from violence and natural and man-made disasters - are configured by the international state system as the alien, the marginalised and the 'rightless (Manchanda, 2004). India has always sought to protect the persecuted while ensuring its national security. India has maintained a complex and layered system of controlling cross-border migration, with one hand conveying national security concerns and the other hand - humanitarian concerns. India exercises a framework of legal instruments in regulating entry, stay, and departure of aliens. Indian policies are aimed at regulating inflows of aliens effectively, preventing unlawful immigration, and ensuring special protections of migrants from persecution.

4.3.1 Legal Frameworks for the Control of Entry and Exit of Aliens

India's policies about the entrance and exit of foreigners are governed by a number of laws which purported to supervise and regulate flows of migration: i. The Foreigners Act, 1946-It is a general enactment whereby the government may make law and control the entry, stay, and departure of foreigners in India. The rules by the government under such Act are based on considerations of national security and public order. Such rules might even prescribes deportation or detention of foreigners who fail to respect residence laws. ii. The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 This law mandates the existence of a valid passport of all foreigners entering the country and provides legal authority to the country to refuse entry to anyone without proper travel papers. It also prescribes the procedure for deporting those admitted to the country without proper travel documents.

iii. Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939: This act requires foreigners to register with the concerned authorities on their arrival in India. Thus, this act allows the government to maintain the records of foreigners staying within the territory. It helps identify and keep track of foreign citizens residing temporarily or permanently in India. iv. Citizenship Act, 1955: The Citizenship Act deals with the acquirement, determination, and loss of Indian citizenship. It clearly defines under what circumstances a person can acquire Indian citizenship by birth or otherwise through descent, registration, or naturalization from a foreign state. It also lets foreign nationals apply for India citizenship in particular conditions of acquiring citizenship from a foreign state as a controlled way of integrating into Indian society.

Under Indian law, illegal immigrants include undocumented immigrants who enter the country without proper documentation or who overstay their permitted duration. Such individuals are subjected to deportation and legal penalties. The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 as well as The Foreigners Act, 1946 officially categorize them as illegal immigrants. Under this provision of the Foreigners Act, an individual can be reasoned out to ascertain his or her legal status in India. The rights reserved under the Foreigners Act and the Passport Act grant Indian authorities the power to detain and deport illegal immigrants. The border guarding forces have some major responsibilities, as assigned by the BSF, in the identification and sending back process of the illegal crossing without permission. Although detention centers are offered as a temporary holding place, deportation still stands as an activity that is relatively challenging because of the eventual presence of diplomatic activities and also the unending number of illegal immigrants.

4.4 Recognition of push factors and protection policies

Although India has and continues to take a hard line against undocumented immigration, it has taken and is continuing to take measures to protect some groups who are being persecuted due to recognized "push factors." One of the most recent examples of this approach is found in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019-protection of specific communities that are being persecuted in adjoining countries. It would apply to citizens of the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities who had entered India before December 31, 2014, due to religious persecution. Under the CAA they were not branded as illegal immigrants, so they are now empowered to qualify for Indian Citizenship upon completing certain residencies. Here it brings down 11 years of normal requirement to 5 years for mentioned categories to expedite faster acquisition of citizenship and integration along with stepping up the process of integration into the Indian mainstream. More fundamentally, India here recognises the humanitarian need and allows victims of persecution to start new life under a legal umbrella of protection.

V.   CONCLUSION

India's cross-border migration policy manages the immigration of aliens, control of unlawful aliens, and humanitarian aspects by balancing the enforcement of regulatory actions with push-pull migration forces. The push-pull framework clarifies factors such as economic strain, political instability, and environmental degradation, pushing migrants from neighboring countries toward economic opportunities, social stability, and cultural commonalities being important pull factors from India. This inflow has made it imperative for India to have a strong legal framework guiding the entry, stay and exit of foreigners

which are now put into key acts like the Foreigners Act, the Passport Act, and the Citizenship Act. All these laws also empower the state to regulate migration, control undocumented immigration, and deal with the socio-political complexities of cross-border flows.

Again, India's policies are not a callous indifferent response to humanitarian concerns, as well, especially with legislations such as the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019. The CAA provided fast-track citizenship to certain persecuted religious minorities from neighboring countries; it indicated India's interest in providing shelter and protection for that vulnerable community with extremely gushing push factors. In this dual approach of balancing the national security-related approaches with the kind of humanitarian concerns, India's response to the South Asian realities of migration is nuanced. Looking ahead, continued engagement with regional partners, regulated pathways of migration, and responsiveness to emerging pressures will be key factors for India. This approach not only reinforces India's role as a responsible neighbor in South Asia, but it also lays the foundation to approach related challenges of migration in a sustainable and effective manner, allowing national interests to be balanced by compassion for the human rights and regional stability of its neighbors.

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