

## **Notion of Spaceor Imagination of Space in Migration Study**

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The process of migration has implications upon multiple aspects in society. Although there has been discussions about the impact of migration on culture, economy and politics yet the information is still very less. Concept of migration has affected imagination of political space. Migration is the movement of a person or a group of people, to settle in another place, often across a political or administrative boundary. Migration happens for a range of reasons. Migration can be both internal and external. Internal migration tends to be travel for education and for economic improvement or because of a natural disaster or civil disturbances. The process remains understudied, undermeasured, and misunderstood. It leads to a major force redistributing the population. While, external migration is when a person moves from one country to another. It mainly refers to those who have been found to have migrated into or out of the Demographic Surveillance Area and is distinct from internal migration of registered members remaining within the DSA. External migration can happen for many reasons just like internal based on economic, social, political and environment.

Post modern critical theories like Edward Soja have contested the apparent depoliticised nature of space. Instead, scholars like Soja has sought to look into the political characteristics of space as a geographical category. Inherently, in the idea of spaces is also the imagery of "boundary". "Space" is the territorial arena in which citizens can claim their citizenship and affect governance processes. These spaces for participation are not neutral, but are themselves moulded by power relations, which both surround and enter them. Using the idea of boundary, power is understood "as the network of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible actions". Consequently, politics shapes the various imagination related to spatiality.

What follows is a brief overview as regards the way the discourses on migration have moulded the imagination of political space in Assam. For this purpose, three political development has taken up for consideration- Line system, the Assam Movement and National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The Line System in Assam was a system introduced for the first time in 1920 under which Muslim immigrants from East Bengal, present Bangladesh were required to settle in certain areas of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam. The line system was the result of the personal initiative of a few British district officers, and not a clear cut policy of the colonial government, which used to encourage immigration for better cultivation and thus to augment agricultural revenue. But, later on some important demarcations were made exclusively for the indigenous communities. It was a mechanism to segregate the immigrant Bengali speaking Muslim population from the indigenous communities of Assam. The purpose of the line was to protect the locals against possible disturbance of demographic and social balance and eventually against social conflict. Though there was no set principle under which the line was drawn. Consequently, the line system induced a process which led to imagination of space in parallel terms through markers of communal segregation.

Basically, political space of Assam during the period of the Assam movement was seen as place that is exploited by the mainland or foreign capital for resources. Exploitation in the extractive industries of oil, tea, jute and forest products. The population growth has been unusually rapid, due to migration into Assam of tea garden labourers, herders from Nepal, Muslims from West Bengal, and migrants and refugees from Bangladesh. It is also affecting the urban areas not only in the growth of industries and the expansion of commercial activity but also the tendency of many of the immigrants- particularly those from Bangladesh- to live near towns. This leads to the loss of Assam's social structure involving the loss of the familiar, including language (especially colloquial and dialect), attitudes, values, social structures and support network. Through the process of migration Assam is having a Deculturation. The ethnic and the indigenous people or the communities of Assam is experiencing a loss of cultural identity, alienation and acculturative stress, leading to ethnocide.

Prior to the National Register of Citizens (NRC), its purpose is to identify illegal migrants residing in North eastern state and to determine the citizenship of the applicants who have applied for inclusion of their

names in the NRC thereafter making the states immigrants free. Inclusion will be a shield against harassment and a ticket to enjoying all the constitutional rights and safeguards and the benefits of government schemes. (Though the announcement of NRC has divided civil society and public opinion vertically. The members of the civil society and political opinion have pointed out that the exercise itself was faulty and the rhetoric that pushed it was divisive in nature. It has disrupted relationships and forced people and organisations to revisit old colonial debates about autonomy and social justice). And in order to be a citizen of India, one need to be a registered citizen of Assam through the process of NRC. Consequently, as Anupama Roy has pointed out NRC has introduced a notion of hyphenated citizenship. While earlier, everyone could just be Indian citizens, now that is no longer sufficient. Rather, one needs to first become an Assamese citizen by being included in the NRC before the person could make claim to be Indian. Thus, the NRC has introduced the notion of chronological space wherein first, one's ancestry needs to be traced back to an Assamese pedigree in order to be a citizen of Assam and thereafter, only if one is a part of NRC, Assam, then only the person can claim his belongingness to the larger Indian national space.

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