

Book review

**REFUGEES, BORDERS AND IDENTITIES: RIGHTS AND HABITAT IN
EAST AND NORTHEAST INDIA BY ANINDITA GHOSHAL**

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Book Details

Title: *Refugees, Borders and Identities: Rights and Habitat in East and Northeast India*

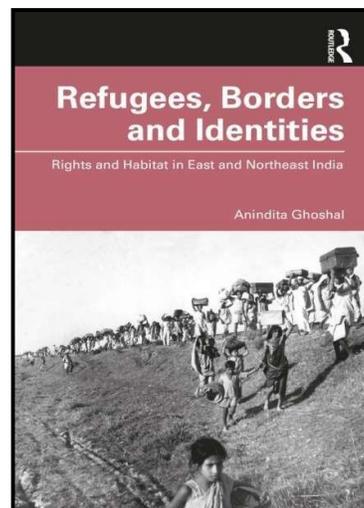
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This book brings a continuous evolution and preservation of refugee community identities, transformation of cultural values and Politicization of linguistic nationalism in Assam and Tripura in postcolonial India. By using primary resources such as central and state government archives, official records, census data, extensive field survey, along with contemporary literature author aims to portray the resistance of refugees for collective community identity and official recognition as a citizen of India.

Author tried to question the categorization of refugees' as a fragmented cultural and ethnic identities and present a biased and discriminatory politics of state towards Bengali refugees' in Assam and Tripura during refugee rehabilitation programme. She also highlighted interlinkage of refugee issue also with the identity politics, dispute on boundary demarcations, land resource management and allocation along with preservation of tribal ethnicity and collective community identity values.

The first chapter focuses on the improvisation of nationalist policies along with secularism and socialist approach by Central Government after 1947 in order to solve problems of refugee migration issues in Assam and Tripura. How far process of transforming complex political identities, ethnicity and cultural domain along with legal issues regarding refugee community was prevalent at this period is a matter of discussion of this book. This chapter also deals with the issues of Identity crisis of refugees as a collective social unit is becoming critical during post partition era. This chapter also criticised issues of citizenship, and government's futility to deliver economic reform, rehabilitation, social justice and security of lives of people.

The second chapter focuses on the discriminantory and biased policies regarding the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement for the people of Bengal and Punjab along with Assam and Tripura. Central Government try to promote their socialist ideology to protect religious minorities but why Bengali refugee dominated States did not get equal attention from the government is a controversial idea that requires further research. The statement made by the author, "Bengali refugees' were entitled only (to) repatriation not rehabilitation" (p 84) raised several debates regarding the effectiveness of the Congress government and it's approach towards Bengali refugees' that can be analyzed to some extent in the upcoming chapters of this book. These issues of failure in refugee relief programme somehow indicate futility of the government to properly execute and implement the policies at the regional level and lack of cooperation and coordination that failed to distribute land resource management economic rehabilitation and protection of million lives.

According to the author, the influx of Bengali refugees' in Assam and Tripura led to the rise of a conflict through linguistic exclusivism and conflict of community identity politics. Shifting towards management of border areas and allocation policies after 1947 and changes in communitarian values from religious category two linguistic or three categories can be

seen as a determining factor for this transition in Assamese society. The third chapter focuses on aspects that are responsible for the politicization of refugee identities and how their claims for separate cultural and political identity established in North East India. Changes in the rehabilitation policies, government attitude towards Bengali refugees' and promotion of Bengali community as a separate linguistic identity led Assamese people into an existential crisis in their own state.

In recent times, controversies regarding land rights occupancy, issue of economic rehabilitation of refugees' settled in Southern Assam made the issue of migration rehabilitation program much relevant in national politics. However, the author should try to discuss more on, to what extent failure of Government's rehabilitation and settlement policy management in Tripura left an impact on the tribal's individual political autonomy and their cultural exclusive identity.

The fourth chapter talks on the politicization of refugee "community identity" in West Bengal leading to the emergence of refugee political movement that somehow challenged the federal structure of post independent India. According to the author shift in the nature from policy based politics to strategy based politics somehow indicate ideological conflict between proclaimed secular identities of a new India based on visions of nehruvian socialism ideology. This chapter also emphasizes on the role communist ideology and leftist government in organizing several political organization and agencies to secure political rights and economic justice of the migrant people. Why did refugees' need to politicize their struggle and search for an alternative cultural identity in order to assimilate and incorporate themselves into an urban post modern society can be understood from the contradictory policies of Central Government towards them.

It is interesting to mention that how far Bengali's and Assamese regional cultural identity and class structure got affected by the incorporation of refugees is still a matter of controversy and require for the research.

The fifth chapter focuses on the role of cultural hegemony and linguistic identity as a critical issue to discover and situate refugee identities in Assam and Tripura. Attempts to preserve Assamese ethnicity with the emergence of socio-political movements against the onslaught on their cultural identity, geographical territory, class structure via the discriminatory policies of partition is the central idea of the chapter. Rise of Assamese regional patriotism, community-based identity along with the linguistic nationalism during the period of post partition phase, somehow, present an idea of composite Assamese nationalism. This book discussed the role of Assamese intelligentsia community along with the press and literature that can be seen as a crucial element in the emergence of social institution, political agency and voluntary organisation to situated distinct cultural identity.

Apart from this, the loss of the idea of tribal autonomous community identity, political space and cultural exclusivism seems to be an attempt to move them towards an existential crisis after the arrival of the Bengalis as refugees in Tripura that to some extent according to the author led towards assertion of dominance by the majority community and persecution of minorities.

Author should try to focus more on the socio- economic reasons and international political pressure behind the critical aspects of policy making by Central government in Assam and Tripura. Several arguments put forwarded by the author, sometimes, seems to be based on her preconceived notions of post partition refugee violence tragedy and emotional trauma. However, Author's observation on the futility of bureaucratic policy management, biased political agenda's behind economic rehabilitation program and complexities of refugee identity formation in Assam and Tripura was a praiseworthy attempt which made this book a pleasure to read for person's interested in Migration studies, Identity politics, Politicization of Community Identity and Post partition politics of Independent India.