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**UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROBLEMS IN
COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL**

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ABSTRACT

Migration as defined by Manglam is “a relatively permanent moving away of a collectivity, called migrants, from one geographical location to another, preceded by decision making on the part of the migrants on the basis of a hierarchically ordered set of values or valued ends and resulting in changes in the interactional systems of the migrants. Though people can voluntarily take decision to move, still in some cases, people move from one place to another just to avoid physical torture and extinction. When these cases of movement and dislocation occur in a collective manner involving groups like families, communities, or nations, it is called migration. It can be voluntarily as well as involuntarily. The basic difference between the two kinds is that in the case of voluntary migration, the migrants have the scope to make their own decisions whether or not to move, but in cases of involuntary ones, the migrants do not retain any scope of independent decisions. Involuntary migration can be called forced migration in political terms. Any kind of migration occurs because of certain reasons. Battered against the natural urge for survival, ‘nation’ and ‘border’ are easily marginalized in the minds of the people who have received continuous threats to their existence from persecution and discrimination in their country. In such circumstances they find ‘illegal’ ways to tackle this obstacle in the path of their well-being. When people cross the borders without any legal authorization then it becomes illegal migration.

“Early analyses focused on factors which could ‘push’ people out of one area and factors which could ‘pull’ them to other areas. The push factors or the causes of migration may range from natural disasters to socio-political upheavals like war, revolution or pogrom and even to planned changes like dams, atomic experimentation or urban renewal programs.



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Forced migrants of one state are generally refugees in the other. A classical definition of refugees is found in the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. The convention, which was later extended by the 1967 Protocol, defined a refugee as: any person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his formal habitual residence, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. This well-defined regime ensures objective refugee status determination and disqualifies other people from obtaining refugee status, such as people simply seeking better economic or social prospects. Asylum seekers found to have committed crimes against peace, war crimes against humanity; serious nonpolitical crimes outside the country of refuge, or are guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, do not qualify for refugee status under international law. “Refugee status need not be permanent, it ceases when the refugee voluntarily avails the protection of his/ her country of origin; voluntarily re-acquires nationality or protection of the country of origin or any other country, or when the circumstances in connection with which the person has been recognized as a refugee have ceased to exist thereby enabling safe return. A refugee is legally entitled to the basic human rights like right to life and liberty, equality, sustenance, work, healthcare, primary education, etc.

“A migrant is not necessarily a refugee. If one is speaking in economic or ecological terms, you have ecological and environmental migrants. ‘Refugee’ remains a political term. Yet a refugee can be a migrant.” A migrant is not always evicted forcibly. It can be his or her personal choice also. “Myron Weiner separates the concepts of refugees and migrants by classifying two categories of people who moved across international boundaries: rejected peoples and unwanted migrants. The category of unwanted migrants embraces those groups, which have crossed international and domestic provincial boundaries in search of economic benefits, or those who have moved as a result of economic and environmental factor.