

The Indian state of Assam has the largest population of Bihari migrants in India. It has been estimated that about 42 percent of Assamese speak Hindi as their first language, which is not surprising - there are many cities with Bihari migration like Barpeta, Guwahati and Dhubri (although some dispute this figure). It is estimated that more than 10 million people living in India today speak Hindi as their first language. The first settlements were made by migrant Bengali Muslims during the thirteenth century; they intermixed with indigenous Assamese people, and eventually became known as "Biharis". The Biharis constituted a large percentage of the total immigrant population in British India and British Burma. In 2011, the Indian government decided to provide citizenship to the 100,000 Bihari immigrants living in Assam as a means to address its concerns over illegal immigration from Bangladesh. However, this decision was met with widespread protest from the Assamese people. Biharis have been established as a significant influence on Assamese society and culture since colonial times. The presence of Biharis in Assam is well known, but their impact on Assamese society and culture has been downplayed by many scholars. In the early years of British colonial rule in Assam, Bihari migrants were typically agricultural laborers. These immigrants were designated to a lower position in society due to their low socioeconomic status and lack of English language fluency. Biharis in Assam faced a great deal of discrimination from the prevailing Anglicised society. The majority of these lower class immigrants were brought to Assam by the colonial government to work on tea plantations during the 19th century. Post-colonial Bangladeshi Muslim migration from neighbouring Bangladesh into Assam has been largest since the Partition of India in 1947. It is difficult to establish the number of migrants because of the absence of documentation. It is estimated that around 42% of Assamese who live in Assam speak Hindi as their first language, which shows that there are large scale migration from Bihar to Assam. According to the 1961 census, there were 1,169,000 Biharis living in India. By 1981, the total figure had risen to 3,336,000. According to 1991 census there are 4 million Bihari population in India today. Assam is the only Indian state with a significant number of Biharis. There is sizeable Bihari population in the neighbouring states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh although their numbers are not as large as they are in Assam. The third largest concentration of Biharis is in Mumbai, which is home to around 45% of all people of Bengali origin outside Bangladesh. Language has been a distinct cultural marker between the two ethnic groups. The differences in economic and social status gave rise to a form of rivalry between Biharis and Assamese.

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