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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FROM “DUNKI TO DHAKA”- DUAL ANALYSIS OF INTER AND INTRAMIGRATION IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

No country today is immune from migration with global migrant numbers rising from 214 million in 2010 to 281 million in 2020. The papers focus on illegal migration – by examining a dual analysis of inter (migration from South Asia to abroad) and intra migration (migration within South Asia) focusing South Asia. The paper highlights that migrants become desperate to leave their home due to the inability of their countries to provide better living standards and opportunities to them creating a state of helplessness and vulnerability that compels them to leave their homeland. Inter migration is driven by a lack of opportunity and low living standards pushing them to seek better prospects in Western countries. It is often fuelled by the aspiration of NRI identity and craze to go abroad. The study highlights the Dunky route as one of the most dangerous & longest illegal routes, with many South Asians largely, Indians risking their lives to seek for the “American dream. Whereas, intra migration is rooted in regional socio-political dynamics. It is shaped by economic inequality, ethnic, religious conflict, and civil unrest. A key focus of this study is the continuous influx of illegal Bangladeshi migrants into India since the 1971 war.

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Introduction:-

Illegal migrants who cross rivers, deserts and mountains to come to an entirely different world, but why do they put their life at risk? It is not because they wish to, rather they have no other choice. People call them illegal but failed to understand that they are desperate to find a home and a better life. Many travels in search of good and dignified life, what their country is unable to provide them; unfortunately, they find death. “Many leave but not all arrive”. The paper reflects the plight and hardship faced by these migrant- which time and again ignored by the media. Migration is a part and parcel of human life which plays a pivotal role in shaping human world through exchange of culture, ideas, technologies, and remittances across the region. There is no country, no state immune from migration. Migration can be classified into legal and illegal migration. The paper focuses on illegal migration, where individuals resort to unauthorized, undocumented and illegal methods to cross the border. These migrants do not leave their homes willingly but hopelessly due to inability of their countries to provide them with better living standard and opportunity creating a state of helplessness and vulnerability that compel them to leave their homeland. The paper’s regional focus is on the South Asia. South Asia is a hub of sending and receiving migrants. Sending migrants to abroad and receiving migrants mostly from their neighbouring countries. As of 2020, approximately 17.5

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million migrants from Asia resided in Northern America (IOM, 2021). On the other hand approx. 20 million undocumented migrants reside only in India (Mayilvaganan, 2019), which are largely from Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, Myanmar and other neighboring countries. Thus, refugee crisis, deportation of illegal migrants from abroad, managing asylum seekers along with human trafficking and smuggling cause a major issue in the region. To examine the trend of sending and receiving migrants of the region, the paper presents a dual analysis in the form of "Inter migration" (moving of illegal migrants to abroad) and "Intra migration" (receiving migrants from the neighbouring countries). While discussing the inter migration, it is presented how people in the South Asian countries are driven by lack of opportunity and low living standard which push them to live a life in the western countries. The illegal migration routes are full of dangers and threats. It has multifaceted menace, highly lined with human trafficking, terrorism, narcotics and other unsocial activities. There are various illegal migration routes for South Asians to move abroad such as Balkan route, Sea Voyage route, Dunky route etc. However, to give a more focused view, the study goes deep into one of the most dangerous & longest illegal routes i.e. the Dunky route, which has claimed countless lives. In this route, migrants have to cross multiple borders, jungles, and seas. The desire to live the "American Dream" lures many South Asians into embarking on this hazardous journey, describing it as a frightening and nightmarish experience. The observation is made that the inter migration was more about the craze for living abroad where they create a delusion that living abroad will provide them a sense of pride by achieving the tag of NRI. Whereas intra-migration within South Asia is influenced by regional factors like economic disparity, ethnic diversity, religious and linguistic conflicts, which sometimes lead to civil unrest or persecution. A key focus of this study, is the continuous influx of illegal Bangladeshi migrant who entered India since 1971 war. In conclusion, we can imply that both inter and intra migration in South Asia are driven by a common factor: the lack of opportunities and the desire for a better life. However, the routes and challenges vary.

Literature Review:-

Scholarly interest has been stimulated on illegal migration across the globe. While many claim it to be a global crisis, some scholars emphasize on the plight and hardship faced by these homeless migrants; and advocate for the protection of their human rights. UNHRC's study named *Trapped in Transit: "The plight and human rights of stranded migrants"* conducted by Rebecca Dowd introduced a new term "stranded migration." The term refers to a helpless situation where migrants are unable to continue their journey to the intended destination or return back to their origin country due to unforeseen reasons such as closure of borders, exploitation or trafficking, legal issues etc. (Dowd, 2008). Similarly, to highlight the plight of irregular migrants and the need to cater their human right, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in its journal titled "International Migration Policies: Government Views and Priorities" stated that despite the protection granted by international law, migrants continue to face many difficulties in their migratory process. The process of obtaining refugee status has become increasingly complicated. There is a need to establish comprehensive, rights-based approaches that address the root causes of irregular migration, especially those related to labour market demands. A one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate, as migrants are increasingly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and abuse (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013). The UNODC, in its report titled "Combating Violence against Migrants," highlighted that migrants are serious victims of grave human rights violations. This report was a response to the General Assembly's Resolution 67/185 on "Promoting Efforts to Eliminate Violence against Migrants, Workers, and Their Families." The General Assembly report outlined three key guidelines for states to follow: the obligation of states to place human rights of migrants above law enforcement and migration management objectives; no individual shall be excluded from the protection of human rights on any grounds, including refugee status or any other classification; and the third one underlines the need to place the rights of all victims, irrespective of their status, at the centre of efforts to combat violence (Crime, 2015). The haunting image that once went viral on the internet, serves as a stark reminder of the dangers migrants face. A tiny toddler wearing a bright-red T-shirt and shorts, washed up on a beach, lying face down in the surf not far from the Turkish resort Bodrum. Turkish media identified the 3 years old boy as Alan Kurdi who met this tragic death, while 12 Syrians drowned to reach to the island of Greek encapsulated. From here a famous hashtag emerged - #KiyiVuranInsanlik (humanity washed ashore) (Guardian, 2015). All these aforementioned works disclose refugees and irregular migrants become homeless not by choice but out of desperation. However, the reluctance of host countries and the failure of international law often result in either tragic death or miserable living condition. Therefore, the world must recognize that no human is illegal, and crossing the borders does not strip migrants of their fundamental human rights. The migrants and refugees' rights are also human right. Once people migrate – whether legally or illegally – one thing remains constant that is formation of a certain community, formation of diaspora that need to be studied. In the context of South Asian diaspora, Shahid Javed Burki in his paper titled: "South Asian Diasporas: Agents of Change in a Poorly Integrated Region", examines how diaspora of South Asia scattered all around the world not only influence those who migrate but also those who

stays. A widely cited estimate places the South Asian diaspora, dispersed across various regions of the world, at approximately 50 million. If this estimate is correct, then the share of South Asians in the global migrant population would be approximately 25 percent, which is proportional to the subcontinent's share of the world population. In 2009, the total population of South Asia was 1.75 billion, or 25.7 percent of the global population which is about 6.8 billion. The contributions made by the South Asian diaspora are now being widely recognized. Members of these communities contribute to both the countries in which they live and work as well as their countries of origin (Burki, 2011). "A key point that emerges from this discussion is that this dispersed population, living away from their homeland and often referred to as NRIs in India, plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of the "American Dream." They often serve as conduits of Western ideals, lifestyles, and success stories, which, in turn, shape aspirations among individuals in their homeland. The central theme of this paper is to present a dual analysis of inter- and intra-regional migration in the context of South Asia. A plethora of scholarly work has been conducted on South Asian migration. For instance, Viresh Kumar Bhawra, in his journal article "Irregular Migration from India to the EU: Evidence from Punjab" explains how natives of Punjab, particularly young men, leave their villages to travel overseas. This migration is driven by both push factors (such as an unprofitable agricultural sector, underemployment, unemployment, and social restrictions) and pull factors (such as better educational and employment opportunities, a higher standard of living, and the presence of family members and relatives abroad). The lack of opportunities in their home country, combined with the lavish display of wealth by NRIs when they visit India, fuels the "craze" to go abroad (Bhawra, 2013). The craze to go abroad, driven by a glorified vision of foreign land creates a delusion that somehow if they manage to arrive in Western hemisphere their life will be lavish and work opportunities will line up without being aware of the consequences they might face. South Asia, a developing region lagging far behind in progress, economic opportunities, and fair wages compared to the West, has become a hub for migrants who take perilous routes each year in pursuit of a better life that their home countries fail to provide. The Vice president of India Jagdeep Dhankar emphasized on what he calls as "Forex Drain" which refers to a new disease these days - the disease to go abroad. Forex drain is particularly, about those students who wants to study abroad without the objective evaluation- in which institute they are enrolling, which country they are going, they keen to go as they think of abroad as heavenly land. This does not only turn out as a significant financial burden but also it is draining India's foreign exchange reserves (India, 2024). In certain region, migrating to abroad has become status symbol, with family taking loans, sometimes selling assets to send their children to foreign land. According to the UN Migration Report, South Asia is home to over 40 percent of the world's international migrants. Since 2020, migration from South Asia to the Western Hemisphere has increased considerably. For instance, in 2020, the number of South Asian migrants in North America reached 17.5 million, rising from 17.3 million in 2015. In Europe, migration from Asia stood at 23 million in 2020. The high unemployment rates and underdevelopment of SAARC countries compel individuals to seek better job opportunities abroad (Migration, 2024). The illegal migration routes, their danger and threat that migrants face throughout the journey also require a deeper study. For instance, Times of India in its recent article "Indian immigrants deported: The big business of donkey route" disclosed the ugly reality behind the so-called glorified "American Dream." A U.S. military aircraft landed in Amritsar, India, carrying 104 deported Indians who had illegally entered the U.S. This incident underscores the persistence of human trafficking routes from India via Latin America and Mexico into the U.S., The "donkey route" starts with migrants reaching Latin American countries like Ecuador, Bolivia, or Guyana, where they can easily obtain visas on arrival or tourist visas. From Latin America, agents transport migrants to Colombia, which is closer to the U.S. border than Panama. From Colombia, migrants enter Panama through the dangerous Darién Gap, a dense jungle with no roads or bridges and home to wild animals like jaguars and anacondas. Additionally, migrants face robbery and sexual violence at the hands of criminal gangs. A record 96,917 Indians were caught or expelled in 2023 while attempting to cross into the U.S. border, a sharp increase from 30,662 in 2021. This data highlights India's growing role as a top source of illegal migration through the "Donkey route" (India, 2025).

Intra-regional migration within South Asia has its own unique characteristics and circumstances. Sitakanta Mishra, in her exceptional work "Illegal Cross-Border Migration in South Asia: Impediments to Regional Peace and Stability" highlights that common history, geographical proximity, cultural ties, and kinship linkages were major reasons for early undocumented cross-border migration. However, today, such migration has become a serious concern due to its socio-political and strategic implications. The absence of a structured legal framework and the inability of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to address this issue have allowed it to pose a significant challenge to regional security. Mishra notes that while ethnic diversity exists across South Asia, it has often become a source of separation, animosity, and persecution, forcing many migrants to seek refuge outside their home countries (Mishra, 2018). According to the Migration Data Portal, political instability and historical events continue to be major causes of large-scale displacement and migratory movements in South Asia. Some

notable events that have influenced inter-and intra-regional migration trends include the 1947 India-Pakistan partition, the 1971 Indo-Bangladesh war, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the ongoing Rohingya crisis. (Portal M. d., 2025). In a study done by World Bank titled "Migration & Remittances Overview" says there are some key drivers of migration including significant income gaps between high-income and low-income countries, which persist across both low- and high-skilled occupations. Additionally, widening income inequality within origin countries, particularly in low-income regions, serves as a powerful push factor. For those individuals whose only asset is their labor, migration to a wealthier country offers a crucial opportunity to escape poverty (Bank, 2025). The influx of illegal migrants on Indian Territory remains a major concern as illegal migrants across South Asia migrate to India without proper documentation. M Mayilvaganan in his paper "Illegal Migration and Strategic Challenges: A Case Study of Undocumented Migration from Bangladesh to India" argues that while migration can bring positive contributions, illegal migration poses serious challenges to receiving states. India's total number of migrants is estimated at 314 million, out of which Bangladeshi migrants constitute approximately 10–20 million, many of whom cross the border undocumented. The issue gained prominence when people from Northeast India and West Bengal expressed outrage and brought the matter to the Supreme Court. In defense, Bangladeshi migrants claim that their lives are threatened in their homeland and that, due to cultural and linguistic ties, relocating to India remains their only viable option (Mayilvaganan, 2019). The paper deeply examines the case of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants.

In conclusion these literatures highlight the global crisis with scholars emphasizing both the hardship faced by migrants and the need for the protection of their human right. The central argument of these literatures attempt to presents a dual analysis of Inter and Intra migration in the context of South Asia. While, the push and pull factor remain a common cause of migration in both the cases, they also share a unique and distinct feature. The intra migration is more driven by the ethnic, linguistic and cultural factor, where cultural diversity often becomes a threat to minorities, such as Bangladeshi Hindus. On the other hand, inter migration to Western countries is largely fueled by the pursuit of the "Western dream"—a glorified perception of life abroad that many aspire to, often at great personal and financial risk. However, dangerous routes like the "Dunky route" expose migrants to life-threatening risks. Illegal migration is often viewed negatively as a crisis for destination countries, but this perspective overlooks the fact that undocumented migrants are often among the most vulnerable—displaced, threatened, and compelled to leave their homeland due to crisis and insecurity.

Understanding Illegal Migration

The human population reaches at every corner of the world by moving from one place to another. This process of "moving" from one place to another is the fundamental aspect of human existence. With the advent of modern state system and creation of border, collectively each state developed the legal mechanism to regulate the movement of people across the border. It was estimated in 2010 that 214 million migrants from all over the world reside outside country of origin, (Mayilvaganan, 2019). Within 10 years in 2020 raised by 67 million that is increasing up to 281 million population (BBC, 2020). The illegal migrants also term as irregular migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented/unauthorized settlers and illegal aliens. The illegal migration is a big threat for any country as not only does it exhausts the resources and opportunity by increasing the population but it destabilizes the state governance. Natives many times protest and show their aggression by demanding the government to detect and expel the aliens. The illegal migration has multifaceted menace since it is highly linked with human trafficking, terrorism, narcotics, drug smuggling and other such unsocial activities.

Inter Migration in South Asia

The history of migration from South Asia to western nation can be trace to the colonial period for filling the labour requirement in the west. It is one of the biggest migration corridors formed by the South Asians moving towards the West since 20th century. The South Asia collectively faced number of undocumented migration issues across the region, such as millions of Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan for India, and about six million Muslims moved to Pakistan from India in 1947, and the Halabja crisis in the late 1980s. Moreover, after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, an estimated six million people left the country from 1979 to 1989, and 3.2 million moved to Pakistan and 2.2 million to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Tibetans and Bhutanese in India and Nepal, the hajongs in India and the Rohingya crisis are another such tragic incidents of migration. (Portal M. D., 2019). For South Asian migrants, migration is a form livelihood strategy. South Asian migrants choose their destination mostly in western world due to vast availability of opportunity, better wage standard, secured livelihood and education opportunity. (News, 2021). In fact, the United Nations in 2020 estimated that between 2000 and 2020, the largest growing migration corridor was that between Central and Southern Asia to the North African and West Asian countries

which grew by 13 million migrants in this decades. This is directly attributed to the increase of labour migrants, primarily from the countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh(Rajan, 2023). The phenomenon of international migration continues to rise pressure on nations like the USA, UK, France, Germany, Canada and some other western countries. Below is the data highlighting South Asians migration towards Western countries.

United States	As of 2020, approximately 17.5 million migrants from Asia resided in Northern America, which includes the United States and Canada. (IOM, 2021). As of 2022, approximately 1.7 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. originated from South Asia, accounting for about 15% of the total unauthorized population in America (Institute, 2022).
Canada	Between 2016 and 2021, 62% of the 1.3 million immigrants to Canada arrived from Asia, totaling approximately 823,205 individuals. The South Asian community has become one of the largest ethnic groups in Canada (Canada, 2024).
Australia	As of June 2023, it is recorded that Australian population included 8.2 million people born overseas & those born in India record the largest since 2013(Statistics, 2023).
Europe (France,U.K)	As of 2020, Europe hosted approximately 23 million migrants from Asia, an increase from nearly 20 million in 2015. (IOM, 2021). Only in France, as of 2023, had a total immigrant population of 7.3 million, representing 10.7% of its population. Among these, immigrants from Asia, (including South Asia) have been increasing. (Pascual, 2024). In 2017, France had an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 unauthorized immigrants. Although exact figures for Asian nationals are not specified, France has seen diverse immigration patterns, including from Asian countries. (Phillip Connor, 2019). In 2017, the UK was estimated to host between 800,000 and 1.2 million unauthorized immigrants. While specific numbers from Asia are not detailed, the UK has significant communities from countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Phillip Connor, 2019). The majority of new citizens came from Asia (40%) and Africa (32%), with India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh being the top three countries of origin where Indians formed the largest group (United Nations, 2015).

This data highlights the tendency of South Asians to favour Western countries as their primary destination for migration.

These individuals either live in hiding, avoiding detection by authorities, and lack legal recognition or protection, or they may choose to seek asylum upon reaching their destination country.

Why South Asians Choose Western Countries for Migration

Leaving behind one's home, country, family, and friends is never an easy decision. Yet, many people feel compelled to migrate, often driven by aspirations for higher education, economic advancement, better opportunities, or sometimes as a means of escaping violence and persecution in their home countries. However, the focus of this discussion is to explore what pushes individuals to such desperate measures that they risk embarking on illegal and perilous migration journeys, fully aware of the potential consequences and hardships they may encounter along the way. Some of the key reasons for their migration are explored below.

Ethnic /Racial and Religious Division:

A key driver of South Asian migration is the deep-seated fragmentation within their heterogeneous societies, marked by countless divisions along racial, caste, ethnic, and religious lines. These marginalized caste, religious minorities and other disadvantage tribal groups often face exclusion from the mainstream society and opportunities. The minorities feel threatened in their home country, therefore, moving abroad (although many of the disadvantage groups migrate to the neighbouring South Asian countries as well in large numbers) seems a better choice.

Unstable Govt. & Weak Civil Society:

According to Antonio Gramsci revolution occur in a state where civil society is weak. These developing countries are still on the path of growth, therefore, the Government even if they are democratic, unable to prevent the persecution which happens in the name of ethnic and religious divisions. Revolution, protests, civil wars, and religious/ethnic hatred among communities are still very rampant in these countries. Governments in these countries lack the stability and strength to move beyond racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts and prioritize social progress.

Divisions extend beyond ethnicity to geographical and linguistic differences, further exacerbating tensions. Weak civil societies fail to hold governments accountable for policy failures, corruption, and human rights abuses, compelling individuals to seek better opportunities elsewhere. These unstable governments often struggle to maintain law and order, resulting in economic hardship, violence, persecution, and civil unrest. E.g. The North Eastern part of India lack opportunities and facilities provided in mainstream society; thus, they flee to neighbouring countries or abroad. According to 2011 census, 25% North Eastern migrate only for employment opportunities (Lusome, 2020). Moreover, the plight of Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar forced to move to neighbouring countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Thailand and even illegally migrated to abroad. As of 2023 1.3 million Rohingyas are asylum seekers and took refuge in another country. Many walked for days through jungles and undertook dangerous sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal to reach safely in Bangladesh (UNHRC, 2024). It will not be incorrect to say “diversity of South Asia has turnout to be a curse for them” and unaccountable corrupted governments have exacerbated the division among them.

Slow Economic Progress:

Referring to South Asian countries as the "third world" may be considered derogatory, yet it remains undeniable that these nations lag behind in economic development compared to others. The slow economic progress coupled with rampant poverty, hungers, low standard of living, less per capita income and huge unemployment is what derives the people to migrate to another country. In 2013, SAARC accounted for 24% of the global population but contributed only 3% to the world's GDP, despite being larger in size than the EU. However, its GDP was merely one-third of that of the EU (Dayal, 2013). By 2023, SAARC's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached approximately \$4.5 trillion USD, representing around 4.2% of the global GDP. Over a decade, its GDP increased by only about \$1.5 trillion USD (Economy, 2023). As of 2023, the European Union (EU) accounts for approximately 14.46% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Statista, 2023). Poverty is huge parasite in the country. As of 2024, approximately 1.48 billion people in South Asia live on less than \$6.85 per day, constituting about 42% of the global population living below this threshold (Fleck, 2024). The white-collar labour wages is comparatively low and there is huge population who are unemployed, this compels them to migrate even by using unethical means. For instance, the average salary in Asia is around 12,883 USD per year, which is significantly lower than the average salaries in other continents like North America (USD 50,832) and Europe (USD 37,020). This makes the South Asians a competent source of sending migrants to abroad (Doctor, 2023).

The Western Dream:

The "Western Dream" is a powerful delusion held by many migrants, particularly from developing regions, who believe that moving to Western countries will provide them with a significantly better life. This dream often includes visions of economic stability, better living standards, and access to quality education, healthcare, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. However, the reality is far darker and harsh. This western dream has ruined the life of many Asian as upon reaching their destination, illegal migrants risk detention, deportation, and criminal charges, further shattering their dreams. The stark contrast between expectations and reality often leads to disappointment, mental health issues, and a feeling of being trapped.

Tracing Popular Illegal Migration Routes

Balkan Route (South Asia to Europe):

Harjinder Kumar (age 39) arrived in Serbia & fell into debt, while, Jasbir Singh (age 27) came to Serbia and paid € 12000 to human traffickers. These are the Indians who tried to enter Europe illegally through Balkan and stayed in Serbia (Serbia is the only country allow visa free travel). The route was popularized in 2015-16 when people attempted escaping conflict in the Middle East, all the way from Bosnia and Serbia to reach European countries, soon came to known as the Balkan route (Islam, 2022). The desperation and helplessness comes out in these words:

“If I had a job in India, I wouldn’t have to come Bosnia like this”, “European police don’t respect us. They even remove our turban, shake our beards and take off our clothes” (Islam, 2022).

The Donkey Route (South Asia to North America):

One of the most prominent illegal routes used by south Asians particularly from Punjab and Gujarat of India is the Donkey Route. The Donkey route involves crossing multiple borders all the way from South Asia then traveling to the countries in the Middle East like the United Arab Emirates or Oman. From there, they further proceed to African nations like Kenya, Ethiopia, or South Africa. The journey continues to South and Central American countries,

including Brazil, Ecuador, and Colombia, where they traverse the treacherous Darién Gap into Panama. Migrants then move through Central American nations such as Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and then finally after a long journey they reach to Mexico US border. The US or Canada is migrants' destination. The Dunky route is one of the most dangerous and longest migration routes. Mostly the dunky migrants either die in the journey or abandoned by dunkers (guides). There is no guarantee that migrants even after spending lacks of money will reach their destination alive and even after reaching the destination, it's completely a delusion if one believes that life is going to be easy. In the later part of this research paper the Donkey route will be explored in more depth.

Sea & Voyage route (South Asia to Australia):

The migration route used by irregular migrants from South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka are also marked by dangerous sea routes and voyages. Migrants embark on perilous sea journey from their homeland and move toward Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, where they await further arrangements (Graeme Hugo, 2014). The final stage involves the departure of boat from Indonesian port such as Sumatra or Java, then finally headed towards Australia's Northern Coast aiming for destination like Christmas Island or Australian Mainland (Bodean Hedwards, 2023). Australia has implemented stringent border protection measures, which involve intercepting vessels carrying asylum seekers and either returning them to their point of departure or transferring them to offshore detention centers, with Nauru being one of the most controversial. However, Australia has been criticized for violating the human rights of asylum seekers (Olbrycht-Palmer, 2025).

Air routes and fraudulent documents:

Low-wage-income countries such as Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka drive irregular migration, as many aspire to improve their economic status upon reaching their destination country. To some extent, this is true that laborers do receive better wages in developed countries. Many migrants believe that air routes are less dangerous than land or maritime routes. There is a strong link between smuggling networks and the migration of people through illegal air routes. When migrants fail to migrate legally, these smuggling networks become their only option, offering international protection. Smugglers transport people across long and remote land borders using various types of vehicles and collaborate with regional smugglers to organize air smuggling using forged and fraudulent documents (UNODC, 2024). Through these criminal networks they purchase fraud, stolen and fake documents to reach western countries.

Exploring dark realities of Inter Migration: Study of "Dunki" route from India to U.S

Studying Dunki route gives a clear picture of inter migration, state of desperation, helplessness, and legal consequences and working of criminal networks. The Dunki route is the name given to the route particularly from the state of Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat seeking entry into the US. This unique name of "Dunki" came from Punjabi idiom meaning to move or hop from one place to another (Chhabra, 2023). As its name suggest migrants need to hop constantly at multiple countries including deserts, national borders, sea, and dangerous jungle. The Dunki route is a dark perilous journey that no one should even think of attempting, where the hardship is beyond legal consequences. Those who attempted dunki will always describe it as scary experience and nightmare. Travelling via dunki route is costly as migrants pay around 20 to 25 lac to the agents (Business, 2024). These agents make promises that they will make them reach safely and dunkers will be allotted to them. However, when they embark on this journey, reality hits them hard and realizes that they made a life-threatening decision.

Exploring the stops and the route:

After reaching a Latin American country—often Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, or Venezuela—migrants embark on an overland journey facing treacherous jungles, rugged terrains, and waterways. Their route passes through countries such as Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and ultimately Mexico before reaching the U.S. border. Crossing the dense and perilous Darién Gap in Panama is a crucial and highly dangerous segment of the Dunki route (Business, 2024).

Does Reaching US Mexico border is a relief? Even if migrants survive criminal networks, physical and environmental hazard, starvation and dodge the eyes of authorities – is all this hard work pays off in the end? The answer is NO. They face arrest, detention and deportation back to their country. Consequences include 5-year ban on re-entry in U.S. (Security, 2024). They seek asylum upon reaching there which is human right but on June 2024 a subsequent amendment made which curtail the right to seek asylum in America (IRC, 2022).

Consequences to face:

Migrants who are unaware of consequences, also manipulated by the “American dream”, invest their life earning without knowing what consequences they might face on perilous journey of this Dunki route. Hardly a small section of migrants achieve their dream, many die during the journey, starve for days, constantly walk for days, months or sometimes even year and even if they reach to the border, most of the time they are deported back to their country. Upon arrival, they are placed in asylum centres where they await the processing of their claims. The life in asylum centres is not easy. Living conditions in these centres can be challenging due to overcrowding and limited resources. For instance, migrant holding centres in key border regions have been reported to operate at 150% capacity, housing over 1,500 migrants despite being designed for 1,000 (Taer, 2024).

Plight of real life Dunki migrants:

Youth in small Indian states are now frustrated with their unemployment and feel helpless as they watch their families struggle in impoverished conditions. The dream of earning in dollars drives many young people to become real-life Dunki migrants.

Some real-life examples include:

Among the Indians chasing the ‘American Dream’ are youths from Haryana. Jitendra is one of them. His real journey to his destination began in Ecuador. Jitendra and his group traversed through forests, rivers, and seas. They remained hungry for days and once survived on just biscuits for an entire week. Along the way, thugs robbed them of their money, phones, and even their clothes and shoes. They had to trek barefoot in the cold and snow (Jha, 2023).

In a documentary by The India express in which they interviewed the real life Dunki migrants. The migrants belong to Gholpura village in Karnal. According to locals every 80 young man out of 150 leave their houses to embark on journey of Dunki route. The plight of these dunki migrants is well explained in the words of Uday Singh who attempted the Dunki and deported by the US authorities from Mexico borders. Along with him 311 men were deported from total 500 migrants. The travelling agents charged Rs.15 Lacks from him and all that money got wasted. Uday Singh mentioned that upon arriving in Ecuador, local agents at the airport were there to assist them with their flight arrangements. He also highlighted that the toughest part of the journey was crossing the Panama Jungle.

(Source <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jvzlp6voxyY>)

Intra-Migration within South Asia

Migration, the relocation of individuals from one region to another, is a fundamental aspect of human existence that cannot be eliminated. Migration becomes a complex challenge when individuals cross national borders without proper authorization, resulting in irregular or undocumented status or seeking refuge. No country is entirely exempt from migration, and South Asia, in particular, experiences substantial movement both within and beyond its borders, posing distinct challenges for the region. Intra-regional migration, such as the movement of Bangladeshis to India, differs significantly from inter-regional migration, where individuals seek opportunities outside South Asia. The primary factors driving intra-regional migration within South Asia are as follows:

The first is economic disparity among countries. For example, India, as one of the world's fastest-growing economies, serves as a key destination for undocumented migrants seeking better opportunities. This influx has prompted responses such as the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) launched by the Indian government in Assam in 2019 to identify and address illegal immigration. The second factor is the threat of persecution based on race, ethnicity, or religion in the region. For instance, Sri Lankan Tamils have historically migrated to neighboring countries, particularly to India, to escape violence and discrimination in their homeland. Such migrations highlight the complex interplay of economic aspirations and safety concerns that drive people to cross borders illegally. While migration contributes to the cultural and economic dynamism of host countries, it also raises concerns about the strain on resources and opportunities for local populations. This often leads to demands from native residents to their governments to regulate undocumented migration and prioritize the needs of citizens. Over-migration can create tensions, both socially and economically, emphasizing the need for balanced policies that address humanitarian concerns while safeguarding local interests.

Popular migration flow within South Asia Bangladesh to India:

The migration flow from Bangladesh to India is a continuous story whose origin can be traced back to Indian partition 1947. With the partition, the world witnessed the biggest migration of that time. Pakistan till 1971 was constituted of East and West Pakistan. The oppression that Bangladeshi Muslims faced in East Pakistan by Urdu speaking Muslims created a political and social turmoil resulted in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The persecution of Bengali Muslims by the Pakistani army apparently created pandemonium with large scale migration into Indian Territory. New Delhi was more concerned about the increasing migrants in West Bengal and Assam which ultimately forced the Indian government to support Bangladesh's pro-independence group in the Bangladesh's liberation war. Some estimates reported that around 10 million Bangladeshis had migrated into India during the course of the war and out of which 1.5 million never returned. From 1971 till present illegal migration along with smuggling and border criminal networks are still a challenges for India. As per the estimates of 2020 almost 20 million undocumented migrants reside in India (Mayilvaganan, 2019), which increased from 3 million in 2010 (BBC, 2020).

Afghanistan to Pakistan:

One of the most pivotal movements during the cold war period was the invasion of USSR in Afghanistan, when the land of Afghanistan turned into a proxy war battlefield between the two super powers. After the fall of Shah of Iran in 1979, Pakistan remained only reliable ally of Afghanistan. This particular event during the cold war initiated the transmigration of refugees and illegal migrants from Afghanistan to Pakistan. During that period managing Afghan refugees was an important asset for President Zia (Schöch, 2008). Pakistan adopted a different approach toward illegal migrants and found a way to legalize the stay of Afghani refugees through following initiative:

- Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) - Provided an identification to Afghan refugees. The card legalizes and regularizes their stay in Pakistan. The documentation process was carried out by Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). In 2017 Pak authority established 21 Afghan citizen center in 17 districts (Migration, 2018).
- Proof of Registration (POR) - The act introduced in 2006 is an identity proof for Afghan refugee allowing them to legally reside in Pakistan for a temporary period (UNHCR). In 2024, Pakistan have announced 1 year extension of 1.5 million refugees (the extension period is from 30 June 2024-30 June 2025) (Hussain, 2024).

Sri-Lanka to India:

Forced migration from Sri Lanka to India is largely due to the geographical proximity between the two countries, separated by the Palk Strait. India often experiences influxes of conflict-induced and crisis-induced forced migrants. Sri Lanka underwent a 35-year-long civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The Sri Lankan civil war serves as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences that racial, linguistic, and ethnic discrimination can have, particularly in a region as diverse as South Asia. It exemplifies how deeply ingrained divisions along these lines can escalate into prolonged conflict, causing immense human suffering and socio-political instability. The persecution, deaths, mass killings, and massacres that Tamils witnessed, led them to migrate forcibly to neighbouring countries. Due to geographical proximity and sympathy for Tamils, many Sri Lankan Tamils fled to India.

Rohingya Muslims to India and Bangladesh:

Rohingya Muslims are the ethnic groups living in Myanmar. Due to persecution and internal danger they faced in Myanmar, forced Rohingya to flee from their country and seek shelter in nearby countries, largely they moved to Bangladesh. In August 2017, armed attacks, massive scale violence, and serious human rights violations forced thousands of Rohingya to flee from their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine State, forcing more than 742,000 people - half of them children - to seek refuge in Bangladesh. Many walked for days through jungles and undertook dangerous sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal to reach safely in Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2024). While most of Rohingyas took refuge in Bangladesh but poor security, hygiene and environment condition pushed Rohingyas to migrate further to India. In a study done by Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), it was found that the majority of their respondents had lived or spent time in Bangladesh before arriving in India. There are two main patterns of Rohingya migration to India: from Bangladesh westward to the state of West Bengal in India, and northeast to the Indian states of Mizoram and Meghalaya. On both of these routes, the Rohingya are vulnerable to exploitation due to their lack of official identification documents, their inability to speak local languages and their lack of financial means (MMC, 2019). Approx. 22,500 Rohingya refugees registered with the UN Refugees Agency (UNHCR) who have fled to India (Sullivan, 2024).

Crossing the boundaries: Bangladesh to India

India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan share a common history, yet they were tragically divided by the events of the past. Unlike Pakistan, India maintains a relatively cordial relationship with Bangladesh. However, the geographical proximity between the two countries has led to persistent issues of smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal migration. The flow of illegal migrants into Indian states, particularly Assam, Tripura, and West Bengal, has become a grave concern for the native populations in these regions. Examining this migration trend highlights the stark contrast between intra-regional migration within South Asia and migration from South Asia to other regions of the world. This study reveals the unique characteristics of the migration process, influenced by the region's diverse culture, history, and the compelling factors that drive people to leave their homes in search of safe surrounding.

Historical link:

Even before 1971 war, the trend of people migrating from East Bangladesh (Bangladesh/ East Pakistan) to India in search of better opportunity was in existence. The Britishers used to hire educated Bangladeshi professionals to expand their administration in Assam. East Bangladeshis also used to work in Bangladesh as peasant to cultivate the agricultural land of Assam. The Britishers made it easy for them to work in Bangladesh (Das, 2016). In the post-independence period, the world witnessed how India played a pivotal role in liberating Bangladesh from West Pakistan. The historical ties between India and Bangladesh is a significant push factor for migration. These relations are characterized by shared history, cultural bonds, and historical events like the 1971 Liberation War, have fostered economic, social, and familial ties. These connections make migration easier for Bangladeshis as India is a second home for them.

Linguistic and ethnic link:

The division of East & West Pakistan was triggered when Bangla language was oppressed by Urdu speaking people. Bengali speaking fought for the respect and autonomy of their language. The point is they speak Bangla which is the official language of West Bengal. This shared linguistic heritage eliminates language barriers, making it easier for migrants to integrate socially and economically in West Bengal. There are various estimates of presence of illegal Bangladeshi migrants in West Bengal such as in 2004, Sriprakash Jaiswal, the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, informed the Indian Parliament that there were approximately 12 million illegal Bangladeshi migrants in India, with West Bengal accounting for about 5.7 million of them (BBC, 2020).

Religious Link:

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country with policies based on Islamisation, along with anti-Hindu sentiments, it creates a state of fear and insecurity among the Hindu population of the country. Economist Dr. Abul Barkat of Dhaka University has conducted extensive research on the migration of Hindus from Bangladesh. According to his findings, from 1964 to 2013, approximately 11.3 million Hindus left Bangladesh due to religious persecution and discrimination. This equates to an average of about 230,612 individuals per year, or roughly 632 people per day (Hasan, 2025). For Bangladeshi Hindus, India seems a safe place to practice and profess their religion which is one of the reasons which pressurize them to leave their country. Last year 2024, the PM Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh was overthrown due to her authoritarian rule and left the country. The news of Hindus being targeted and killed was roaming around all over the world. Hindu residents confirmed episodes of vandalism and mob violence, particularly after the arrest of a Hindu monk in November. They also claimed that Hindu temples were vandalized and set on fire in Bangladesh. Bangladesh constituting 9 % of Hindus surrounded by overwhelming majority of Muslims, feels threatened and insecure (Saif Hasnat, 2024).

Dual analysis of inter and intra migration: Study of South Asia

Migration is not merely an act of crossing borders; it is a profound testament to humanity's enduring quest for a better future. Currently, approximately 281 million people worldwide reside outside their countries of origin. This raises a critical question: why do individuals choose to leave their homelands? Various factors drive migration, ranging from education and employment opportunities to more complex and pressing circumstances. This paper focuses on undocumented and irregular migrants, who often leave their countries due to unfavorable conditions in their homelands. These individuals are desperate to seek refuge in foreign lands. Specifically, the study explores the migration of South Asians to Western countries, primarily due to the inability of their home nations to ensure fair working conditions, adequate living standards, equitable wages, and just resource allocation. Weak governance, political instability, and widespread poverty in developing nations have forced millions to seek opportunities in more developed and economically stable countries. In South Asia, impoverished conditions create a psychological narrative that migrating to Western nations will secure a better future for migrants and their families. However, this

vision of a prosperous life often collides with a harsh reality. The "Dunki Route" serves as a stark example of how people are manipulated by the allure of the so-called "American or Western Dream." Desperate individuals give their life savings to agents who exploit their vulnerability, often leading to tragic outcomes. Many lose their lives during the journey, while others fall victim to criminal networks, smugglers, and human traffickers. Female migrants, in particular, face heightened risks, including forced prostitution, sexual assault, and exploitation. The root causes of irregular migration can often be traced back to systemic failures in governance. If workers were paid fair wages, if unemployed individuals could find meaningful jobs, and if people were protected from discrimination, persecution, and threats, the prevalence of illegal migration would significantly decrease. A fair distribution of wealth and resources, coupled with a commitment to human rights, could prevent countless individuals from undertaking these dangerous journeys.

Intra-regional migration within South Asia also reflects the economic hardships faced by its people. Many irregular migrants choose India as their destination due to its status as the largest economy in the region. However, the region's diversity, often considered its strength, has also become a source of division. The emphasis on racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities has fueled animosity, leading to persecution and insecurity for minority groups. This, in turn, forces many to seek asylum in search of safety and dignity. Ethnic tensions across South Asia frequently result in regional terrorism, mass killings, human rights violations, property destruction, and large-scale migrations. These conflicts highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms to address the underlying economic and social crises.

In conclusion, **illegal migration is often a coerced decision rather than a voluntary choice.** No one willingly leaves their home and family unless compelled by dire circumstances. The persistent economic and ethnic crises in developing countries are key drivers of irregular migration. Addressing these root causes with robust governance, equitable resource distribution, and a commitment to protecting human rights is essential in reducing illegal migration and safeguarding the lives of vulnerable populations. Both inter and intra migration in South Asia are driven by a shared factor: limited opportunities and the pursuit of a better life. However, the pathways taken and obstacles encountered differ.

Conclusion:-

Migration both inter and intra, remains a defining feature of South Asia and its socio-economic landscape driven by aspiration for a better and the harsh realities of limited opportunities. While inter migration from South Asia to western nation is fuelled by economic deprivation and allure of an NRI identity, intra-migration within the region is deeply rooted in socio-political factor such as economic inequality, ethnic conflict and civil unrest. The perilous nature of illegal migration, particularly through routes like Dunky route, highlights the desperation of those who seek opportunity abroad, often at risk of their lives. Similarly the continuous influx of undocumented migrants within South Asia, particularly from Bangladesh to India underscores the region's complex migration dynamics. Both form of migration intertwined with broader concern such as human trafficking, border security and refugee management creates challenges for policy making. Apart from discussing dual analysis, another aspect that have been examined is the compelling situation in both forms of migration where individuals migrate with the urge of having dignified life, socio-economic development and social security. It is not only the fault of migrants taking illegal ways to migrate but attention should also be drawn over inability of home countries to provide better life and security. The refugee rights are also human rights that every nation and entire world need to recognize. Recognizing the dignity and survival of those displaced is shared responsibility of all humanity.

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