CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Racial and ethnic conflicts in the present era have become a global feature. However, the basis of such conflicts need not be viewed as merely ethnic. There are sufficient reasons to believe that these conflicts are deeply rooted in rapid socio-economic changes taking place in the society and unequal access to available resources. Diverse ethnic groups sharing a similar resource base are unequally placed in terms of their control of the resource base, particularly land. The dominant and more enterprising group always has an upper hand in control of the resources thereby marginalizing the socially weaker segments. This unequal power relations between and among the several ethnic groups, if goes out of control, results in conflicts that take the shape of an ethnic conflict. In India, a country of vast size and ethnic diversity, such conflicts are not very uncommon. However, there is always a regional dimension to such conflicts as the elements of social diversity in India are regionally differentiated. Inter regional transfer of people, which is inevitable in the context of social and economic changes and vast regional disparity in the economic development has caused ethnic mixing in the historical past and is more so in the recent times. The problem of ethnic mixing was less intense in the past as long as the resource base was sufficient. But with increasing population growth, the competition for the resources certainly brought these groups face to face in control of the resources resulting in mobilization of people along ethnic lines.

The Northeast region of India that contains a very high proportion of tribal people in its population and where the tribes between themselves and between them and the non-tribes have often maintained knife edged boundaries, such conflicts are more numerous.
It is well known that the whole of the Northeast in the early 19th Century was a less inhabited land. However, unprecedented demographic, ethnic social and economic changes were brought about in the wake of colonial involvement in the region. Its economic transformation by the British Government caused enormous demographic shift. A large number of people were brought by the British from different parts of India to work in tea plantations, coal and oilfields as well as for road and building construction. As a consequence immigrants gradually settled down in this less populated region. Large number of immigrants from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan), Nepal, and other parts of India such as Bengalis, Marwaris and some tribal groups like the Santhal, the Oraons and the Mundas settled down in the fertile plains of the Brahmaputra valley, which gradually became a source of tension in the region. The coming in of the immigrant people from outside the region often forced the original inhabitants to redistribute themselves in areas much smaller in their territorial extent than in the past.

The two major non-Bodo land-owning segments in the region are the Santhals and the immigrant Muslims who came from Bangladesh. The Muslims had initially settled only in the relatively open areas such as the char or riverine areas of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries which were subject to annual floods, and there was no immediate conflict between the Bodos and the Muslims over land rights. Even so, many Muslims were killed in the 1993-94 riots. The Santhals who were brought by the British from the central India and who were ethnic tribes themselves, on the other hand, encroached upon the prime reserve forest lands, clearing them, and set up permanent habitations.

The fact behind the conflicts between immigrant group such as the Santhals in Assam to that of original inhabitants is that these immigrant group with the acquiescence
of government officials, settled in lands where there is some ambivalence about their rights to settle—"tribal" blocks or reserved forests—has made their residency rights suspect in the eyes of some Bodo activists Baruah ¹ (1999). Supporting their demand to draw the attention of Indian Government they attacked the Santhals two times in 1996 and 1998. As a result most of the Santhals left their villages and are living in the Relief camps. More than 1, 30, 067 Santhals are living in the Relief camps presently (in the year 2006). Considering the fact that Assam as a whole contain a little over 27, 00,000 Santhal population, this number of Santhals living in the relief camps is very large. The official figure for the Santhals as well as other population living in the relief camps of Kokrajhar district alone is as follows:

Table: 1.1
Kokrajhar: Santhal Population Living in Relief Camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>No. of Relief Camp</th>
<th>No. of Family</th>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santhals</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19681</td>
<td>25222</td>
<td>64540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2868</td>
<td>5566</td>
<td>10918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>22589</td>
<td>30852</td>
<td>75608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Deputy Commissioner Office, Kokrajhar

It is evident that nearly the entire Santhals in the district has been evicted from their villages and are living in the relief camps after violent clashes with the Bodo militants. The failure to resettle the Santhal refugees from earlier riots is one of the main causes of the renewed ethnic violence in Kokrajhar district, particularly the resettlement of refugees uprooted from the reserved forest areas. They have not been able to go back to these forests as in most cases; their settlements are now occupied by others, (despite court orders restraining people from settling in the reserve forests).

¹ S. Baruah, India Against itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.
1.2 Statement of the Problem

Wars and conflicts, whether internal or international, remain pervasive phenomena affecting mostly low-income countries. Demographic factors such as differential population dynamics by ethnic or religious group, or the number of young persons in a population, often play a role in the causes of conflict. The demographic consequences of war and violence include forced migration—refugees and internally displaced populations (IDPs), increased mortality and changes in fertility and family structure.

Modern warfare and ethnic strife have had a devastating effect on the lives and dignity of women and girls, as well as on the health and educational services that are essential to family and community survival. Along with reproductive health complications, the adverse effects of conflict hit women and girls harder than it does their male counterparts, since deliberate gender-based violence and discrimination are rampant in these settings. As such, these gender-specific threats to women and girls compound the challenges of ensuring their protection. This has resulted in gaps in the design and delivery of assistance and protection, short-changing the priority population of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Essential services such as basic health care, including reproductive healthcare and counselling, are often disrupted or become inaccessible during conflict situations. This compounds health risks for all affected populations, at times when public health needs soar. Women and girls become the individual and systematic targets of sexual violence, specifically when rape and sexual assault are used as weapons of war and ethnic conflict. Gender plays a significant role in determining which people are most likely to become infected with STIs, including
HIV/AIDS. Armed conflict increases the rate of new infections across affected populations, but women and girls are significantly more likely to become infected than men and boys.

Ethnic clash between Bodo tribe—one of the largest tribe in Assam and in North East India and Santhals—descendants of indentured tea labourers erupted in early 1996. Available literature on this ethnic clash says that Bodos are trying to solve the demographic equation in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra to create separate state Bodoland through 'ethnic cleansing'. Santhals or Adivasi (though the literal meaning of the term Adivasi is aboriginal or indigenous people, in Assam Adivasi means the descendents of indentured tea labourers including all the communities within it, like Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Khamer etc.) are the descendents of indentured tea labourers brought by the British during the nineteenth century. Though they were brought only to work in the tea gardens, in later course of life, they started settling in and around the tea garden and slowly moved out to far off places. Today their population is not exactly known, however some of the estimates show their population to be not less than 16 Percent (between 27 - 30 lakhs) of Assam's population Narzary\(^2\) (2006). The ethnic clash was only with the Santhals who reside outside the tea garden, and had nothing to do with Adivasis of tea garden who constitute almost the entire labour force of the tea garden till today.

Both communities, the Bodos and the Santhals, had been living in peace in the area for decades. But after the Bodo Accord of 1993, the Government came up with a formula that only those villages with a 50 Percent Bodo population were to be included

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into the BAC. This provision is generally believed to have encouraged a section of the Bodos, including armed militant groups representing the community, to attempt ‘ethnic cleansing’—driving out the non-Bodos to convert vast stretches into Bodo majority areas and thereby get them included into the Bodo Council and widen its territory (Hussain, 1996). The Santhal people living in such areas naturally fell as a victim to the militant’s scheme of creation of a Bodo Land.

The ethnic violence in Bodo areas of Assam following their demand for a separate state has certainly changed the world for many. The consequences of this clash have been many and varied for different people. While the consequences of any ethnic conflict or clashes are generally well known it requires little effort to imagine the diverse impacts such conflicts may have on socially differentiated people- the poor and the down trodden, the migrants and the landless, the men and the women or the children. Each segment receives the impact in ways not really comparable. Needless to say that the women are the worst victims of the conflict as they have to face a completely new world on the wake of displacement, family breakdown, loss of kith and kin and loss of support base-both economic and social. The present research aims at evaluating these impacts of the ethnic violence on the women in this context. However, it may be noted that the impact must have been greater on those women who are on the receiving end of the conflict. It is the Santhal women who have been more displaced than their counterparts among the immigrant Muslims or the Bodos. It is proposed in this research therefore to consider the impact of the conflict only on the Santhal women while recognizing the fact that the impact of the violent conflict on the women belonging to other ethnic groups and similarly affected by the conflict could not have been anything very different.
It is also a known fact that any ethnic conflict results in serious imbalance in the demographic profile of the community. The ethnic conflict in the Bodo dominated areas has changed the demographic scene on an unprecedented scale. There has been large-scale displacement and redistribution of people resulting in unprecedented changes in the growth rate of population and changes in age and sex-ratio, changes in occupation due to loss of land and due to migration to relief camps and other areas. All these demographic changes would have an impact on affected women who may experience a host of problems ranging from increased reproductive burden, loss of family support, widowhood and sexual harassment to increasing proportion of women headed families and employment etc. It is proposed in this research to evaluate these aspects as far as the affected Santhal women are concerned.

1.3 Choice of the Study Area

For the purpose of the present study the areas where Santhals constitute a significant proportion of the population of Assam has been selected as the study area. This means the entire proposed Bodoland Territorial Council constitutes the universe of the study. However, since the Santhals living in Kokrajhar district have been the worst hit due to the clash between the Bodos and the Santhals, the study focuses more on this area while the Santhals living elsewhere in the Bodoland Autonomous area are considered for reference purposes only.

Kokrajhar is one of the few districts in Assam that has been experiencing constant rise in the share of scheduled tribe population in its total. The reasons are a mix of high natural growth rate in the scheduled tribe population as well as migration of Bodo tribes into this district in the wake of a demand for separate Bodoland state during the last few
decades. Kokrajhar may be described as the gateway to the north-eastern region of India.

The district has a total area of 3,169.22 sq. km. and a total population of 9,30,404
according to the 2001 Census. The district is located on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra that slices the state of Assam into two, identified as north and south banks. The district is bounded on the north by the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, by Dhubri district on the south, Bongaigaon district on the east and the Indian state of West Bengal on the west.

The district was originally a part of undivided Goalpara district. Until 1956, the Kokrajhar town was merely a small village with a railway station that connected it to the rest of the world. In 1957, a new Civil Sub-division was created after carving out the northern part of Dhubri Sub-division and some parts of Goalpara Sub-division. This new sub-division was called Kokrajhar Sub-division. Goalpara district thus became divided into three sub-divisions. The area covered by the then Kokrajhar sub-division consisted of five tracts of the Eastern Dooars, viz., Bijni, Sidli, Chirang, Ripu and Guma with a total area of 4066 square kilometres.

On July 1, 1983 the Kokrajhar Sub-division was upgraded into Kokrajhar district with its Headquarter at Kokrajhar town. There were four police stations in the new district. They were Bijni, Sidli, Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon. The area of the district extended from the Manas River in the east to the Sonkosh on the west.

There was further reorganization of the districts in Assam in the year 1989, and some new districts were created. Thus, about 40 Percent of the total geographical area of Kokrajhar district was carved out for inclusion in the new district of Bongaigaon. The area delimited from Kokrajhar district to Bongaigaon covers the entire Bijni Revenue Circle along with 347.50 square kilometres of Sidli Circle. Later on twenty villages of Naikgaon Gram Panchayat with a total area 40.22 square km under Chapar Revenue
Circle of Dhubri district was transferred to Kokrajhar district. The present geographical area of Kokrajhar district is 3,169.2 square km.

The district now has two revenue sub-divisions- Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon sub-divisions. The river Gongia that is known as Tipkai in the southern part is the natural boundary of two civil sub-divisions. Gossaigaon town is the Headquarter of Gossaigaon Sub-division.

1.4 Overview of Literature

A very rapid survey of literatures available on the subject of the present research reveals a general paucity of published material. While the Bodo problem as such has attracted scholarly attention on such research problems as the ethnic issues of Assam, immigrants into Assam, inter-ethnic relation etc., the problem of women does not constitute an integral part of these studies. Much of the problem of women in the context of the conflict is merely seen as a violation of human rights (UNDP, 2000).

Choucri\(^3\) (1983) while explaining the relationship of the population and the conflict, has described that majority of the conflicts are now concentrated in the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, where we also have the population related problems. Khanday\(^4\) (2005) have explained the present conflict situation in Kashmir Valley in relation to continued breakdown of the hospitals and the problem faced by females accessing reproductive health facilities. Dabla\(^5\) (1999) have studied the impact of conflict situation on children and women in Kashmir.

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\(^4\) Z. Khanday, *Negotiating Reproductive Health needs in a Conflict Situation in the Kashmir Valley*, Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Trivandrum, Kerala, India, 2005.

The few exceptions to these are Pandey’s\(^6\) (1993) analysis of gender differentials in migrant workers and the effect of displacement on women by Fernandes\(^7\) (1995) although studied in a different context altogether.

Studies on ethnicity and ethnic changes in general have been undertaken by Levin\(^8\) (1993) explaining the causes behind changes in different ethnic aspects and their relationship with different ethnic groups. Wilkinson\(^9\) (1993) has taken six case studies of ethnic politics representing high and low patterns of conflicts.

Weiner’s\(^10\) (1978) pioneering work on migration and ethnic conflict in India certainly provided a background to many such works to follow. Myron Weiner in his study has observed that

“The presence of these migrants has shaken the foundation of Assamese social structure and created solidarity among the Assamese…influenced the educational, social and economic aspiration of the countless Assamese…Migration to Assam has also given rise to powerful assimilation and nationalist sentiments and backlash separatist agitations, to massive conflicts over language, education, and employment policy, and to political cleavage that have not only led to the intervention of India’s Central Government, and the use of the Indian army, but also have affected Assam’s relationship to neighbouring Bangladesh”.

A large number of researches on the Bodo problem and its consequences pertain to the genesis and resultant social tensions in Assam. Baruah\(^11\) (1994, 1999) placed ethnic problem as “Micro-Nationalism and state society struggle.” Baruah\(^12\) (1991) explored the

\(^6\) D. Pandey, ‘Migrant Labour and Gender Dimension: Micro-analysis of Gender Differentials in Migrant Workers’, Research Centre for Women’s Studies, Bombay, 1993.
\(^8\) M. D. Levin, (Ed.) Ethnicity and Aboriginality, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1993.
\(^12\) A. K. Baruah, Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics, Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati, 1991.
class dimension of ethnic conflicts in Assam. Some authors like Abbi\(^{13}\) (1984); Goswami and Gogo\(^{14}\) (1984), Barua\(^{15}\) (1986), Misra\(^{16}\) (1988), Bhuyan\(^{17}\) (1991), Barthakur\(^{18}\) (1995) linked the ethnic problem to unchecked immigration into Assam. Pakem\(^{19}\) (1990) wrote on nationality, ethnicity and cultural identity in the North-East while Verghese\(^{20}\) (1996), tried to explain the causes behind ethnicity and insurgency and its relationship with government policy and its effect on development in North-East India. Rose\(^{21}\) (1994) has analysed the impact of migration of ethnic Nepalese to the North-East India. Kar and Sharma\(^{22}\) (1990) gave an account of ethnic identity of tea labours in Assam.

**The Santhals**

According to Sharma\(^{23}\) (1994) Assam is a melting pot of different races, languages and cultures. Barpujari\(^{24}\) (1993) wrote out of different social communities, the Santhals were colonized by Britishers in Assam.


\(^{19}\) B. Pakem, (Ed.), *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in N.E. India*, Omsons, New Delhi, P. 23, 1990.


Skrefsrud (1887) is of the opinion that the Santhals entered India from the North-West and first settled in Punjab and then made their way to their present habitat—Chotanapur Plateau. According to Waddell (1893) the Santhals story of their advance from Hihri Pipri via Champa to their present location in the Santhal Parganas is manifestly a record of actual tribal progress, not as is usually believed, from one part of the Hazaribagh hills to another but from the central alluvial valley of the Ganges South-West wards to the hills, under pressure of the Aryan invasion of the valley from the north. But Chattopadhyay (1944) criticises the views of both the above scholars and having hinged upon the geographical evidence points out that the Santhals probably came from the Kaimur Range through the Champa pass and other neighbouring passes into the Chotanagpur plateau. Dolton (1872) reports that the Santhals came to the present abode from North-East India and found their way to Chotanagpur plateau and adjoining high lands by the side of their sacred stream, the Damodar River. Campbell (1894) indicates that the Santhals occupied the country on both sides of the Ganges but more specially the area to the North of it. The Campbell theory was not supported by Risley (1903).

However the history of Santhal migration does not remain conjectural from the 18th Century onwards as there are no authentic records regarding their movements. According to O’malley (1910) this is certain that the Santhal settled within historic times.

in the Chotanagpur plateau and in the adjoining districts of Midnapur and Birbhum. Towards the close of 18th Century they occupied their present abode-the Santhal Parganas.

Once upon a time they were leading a semi-nomadic life but gradually they accepted the life of agriculturists and leading a settle life in permanent villages. Their social life, philosophy and rituals are centre around there main occupation agriculture. Hunting, fishing, fruit-gathering, wood-gathering, and leaf picking, are also consider as important sources of subsistence. Santhals have a simple but highly respected social code of morality which helps the tribe to keep its solidarity Roy Choudhary32 (1961). The Santhals have a self-administrative three tier system, namely, at the village level, at the inter-village level and at the area level Verma33 (1977).

According to Dalton34 (1872) the Santhals also Colonized in other parts of the country and it is chiefly by migration from Hazaribagh and Birbhum districts that the modern Santhal Parganas was formed.

Lord William Bentinck, took steps to create a tea industry in Assam. Within a few decades tea became a booming business, with gardens in Lakhimpur, Darrang, Kamrup, and Cachar districts Weiner35 (1978). A substantial number of the tea garden labourers have settled as cultivators, either as landlords or tenants in land provided by the government. Others have found employment in construction industries. Of the 38,000 construction workers in Assam, 21,000 are migrants Barpuja36 (1993). The tea plantation

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34 E. T. Dolton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, Government of Bengal, Calcutta, 1872.
migrants have never been nor are they now economic, cultural, or political threats to the Assamese. The jobs they hold are not those sought by the Assamese. Their tendency to assimilate linguistically makes them model migrants to the Assamese Weiner 37 (1978).

Their presence in Assam was well known but there was dearth of data to show their numerical strength or geographical spread over the region Ahmad 38 (1984). The “tribal” blocks or reserved forests has made their residency rights suspect in the eyes of some Bodo activists Baruah 39 (1999). After Bodo Accord of 1993, The Government came up with a formula that only those villages with a 50 Percent Bodo population were to be included into the BAC. This provision is generally believed to have encouraged a section of Bodos, including armed militant groups representing the community, to attempt ethnic cleansing-driving out the non-Bodos to convert vast stretches into Bodo majority areas and thereby get them included into the Bodo Council and widen its territory Hussain 40 (2004). The Bodo militants in their attack on non-Bodo settlers indulged in an ethnic carnage against the Santhals Qureshi 41 (2004). Hence ethnic clash took place between Bodo tribe – one of the largest tribe in Assam and in North East India and Santhals–descendents of indentured tea labors Narjary 42 (2006). The first spell of this ethnic clash made about one fourth of the district population an Internally Displaced Person and by the second spell about 40 percent of the district population was Internally Displaced. This figure is much more alarming, as some of the people fled their home Narjary 43 (2006).

38 A. Ahmad, ‘Social Geography’ in Manzoor Alam (Ed.s), A Survey of Research in Geography 1976-82, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Concept, New Delhi, 1984, pp.67-84.
43 Ibid, p.3.
The inter-ethnic clashes in the Bodo heartland of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon has displaced a large number of people. At one stage, the number of IDPs reached more than 3 lakhs. It should also be mentioned here that the Bodo-Muslim ethnic violence that occurred in October 1993 has displaced about 3,568 families consisting of 18,000 persons. Again, a series of major incidents took place throughout the district in May 1996 when a section of Bodos attacked ethnic Santhals. This conflict has resulted in the displacement of a huge population. Almost 42,214 families consisting of about 262,682 persons were displaced by this conflict “at the peak of the Bodo Armed Movement, Assam accounted for nearly more than half of India’s population of Internally Displaced Persons”. These victims were sheltered in 78-relief camps around Kokrajhar and its adjoining areas. After staying as inmates in the camps many of them return to their villages in 1997 with a small amount of returnees grant provided by government of India. However, in 1998 again conflict started between the two groups resulting in the displacement of 48,556 families consisting of 314,342 villagers. Till April 2005, in Kokrajhar 126,263 inmates were living in 38 state sponsored relief camps in the district. Some of these conflict-induced IDPs are living in the relief camps for more than a decade now. The government is providing only rice to the inmates of some of the camps for 10 days a month. Even that supply too was erratic. Sometimes, the IDPs do not get their rations for months together. Assam government records indicates only 33,362 displaced people were left in the camps Kokrajhar district and 74,123 were left in the camps in Gossaigaon district Hussain44 (2006).

As far as women are concerned there is no dearth of researches on the demographic aspects but mostly on a general note. The effects of ethnically linked displacement in India are extremely rare to find. Bardhan’s\textsuperscript{45} (1985) study of women’s work, status and welfare provides a general background to forces behind traditional changes in India. Harrison\textsuperscript{46} (1990) accounted for maternal mortality and morbidity as a challenge behind third world countries like India. Desai and Others\textsuperscript{47} (1994) have worked on the social problems related to the working women in rural South India. Works on reproductive behaviour as well as on the causes behind high female mortality, morbidity are important areas of research.

Voydanaff\textsuperscript{48} (1991) discussed how economic distress can have a negative effect on family members’ physical health, psychological well being and behaviour. On gender, peace and conflict Skjelsback and Smith\textsuperscript{49} (2001) has discussed how in conflict situation one form of violence specifically targets on women rape. In the UNHCR\textsuperscript{50} (1993) report it is discussed about the state of world’s refugees, as the challenge of protection which can be supported by the detailed accounts of the 1995 massacre of Bosnaik men in Srebrenica in Danner’s\textsuperscript{51} (1998) book.

\textsuperscript{50} UNHCR, United Nations High Commission for Refugees 1993.
Community segregation especially dealing with minorities has been discussed by Blalock\textsuperscript{52}, (1967) he has given a theory of segregation in relation to the minority group. P. White and R. Woods\textsuperscript{53} (1980) in their book has explained the geographical impact of migration and social segregation in Birmingham.

Weather Ford\textsuperscript{54} (1996) described the foreign and female immigrant women in America have experienced the poor conditions of housing in relation to the spread of epidemics. While discussing about female immigration he has also talked about the relative burden of adjustment on women folk, where are forced to maintain a large family in a very limited space. Dilapidated housing and epidemics were not the only problems the immigrant family faced. In a pioneering study of Polish immigrants Thomas and Znaniecki\textsuperscript{55} (1927) of the housing condition of polish immigrants in America and Europe found that many of the immigrants experienced demoralization, poverty, marital problems, crime and delinquency among their children. Primary group relations broke down in a hostile and strange new environment. Because of the crowded living quarters, relatives put additional pressures to on already strained conjugal ties.

Anderson\textsuperscript{56} (1984), Goldberg and Huxley\textsuperscript{57} (1992) gave a concise statement of the relationship between brain, mind and social environment in the experience of mental distress. Davar\textsuperscript{58}, (1999) explained the mental health condition of Indian women in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{55} Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Vol. 2, Knopf, New York, 1927 (Originally Published by the University of Chicago Press in 1918).
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Ramachandran\textsuperscript{60} (1985) studied the linkages between the loss of spouse and psychiatric disorders and found that widowhood correlated with living alone, feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction with life. Elderly women living alone, numbering more than men, were considered as an ‘extremely disadvantaged group’ in a study by Chakraborty\textsuperscript{61} (1990). Chakraborty\textsuperscript{62} (1996) while describing the possible protective factors of joint families have led to conclusions that joint families have an inbuilt mechanism for preserving the mental health of individuals. Joint families are perceived as fostering greater emotional bonding between members, as having more care-givers to take care of the vulnerable and the weak, especially women and the elderly, and as being based upon mutuality and cooperation amongst its members. Chakroborty\textsuperscript{63} (1990) has explained that joint families also seemed to be fewer burdens due largely to the presence of economically dependent elderly females.

Mahadevan\textsuperscript{64} (1989) wrote on women and population dynamics perspectives from Asian countries. Dasgupta, Chen, Krishnan\textsuperscript{65} (1995) wrote on Women's health in India, risk and vulnerability. He specified the differences in mortality of female, and sex ratio as compared to male children

Gait's\textsuperscript{66} (1902) report, which was later reprinted in 'The Census of India 1951, West Bengal', contains a report on the district of Santhal Parganas, and on the migration of the Santhals to various parts of West Bengal and Assam, giving their pattern of distribution since 1872.

Chattopadhyay\textsuperscript{67} (1960) in a study of a number of Santhal villages in West Bengal, conducted during 1945-46, ascertained whether greater spread of literacy had had any effect on their family size. Mukherjee, et.al.\textsuperscript{68} (1969) tried to highlight some interesting evidences related to marriage in connection with household composition; clan affiliation and civil condition. Sinha\textsuperscript{69} (1963) described fertility and attitude towards family planning among the Santals and Paharias of the Santal Parganas. Skerfsrud\textsuperscript{70} (1903) while studying the relationship among the household members of a Santhal family revealed that a Santhal's wife is common property to husband's younger brothers even

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{References}


after their marriage. Similarly, a Santal woman’s younger sisters can legitimately share conjugal privileges with her elder sister’s husband without marrying him.

Verma\textsuperscript{71} (1970) analysed the socio-cultural dimensions of fertility among the socio-cultural dimensions of fertility among the Santhals. The author showed how the community is high fertility motivated and culturally oriented. Kochar’s\textsuperscript{72} (1966) study highlighted the high degree of social cohesion, social identity and strong bond within the Santhal community by which they maintain their traditional values and norms in spite of their vigorous contact with other communities.

Das and Banerjee\textsuperscript{73} (1964) represented the impact of industrialization on Santhals and the reasons and pattern of their migration to other parts of the country.

The Heidelberg Institute for International Institute for International Conflict Research defines conflict as a “clash of opposing interests or positional differences over national values and issues like independence, self-determination, borders and territory, access to or distribution of domestic or International power.”

Conflict studies constitute one of the central subjects in social sciences. There are increasing numbers of literatures available on conflict over the countries in the world. The focus on conflict issues in India too is increasing rapidly with such conflicts increasing in their frequency. The nature of conflict study in India has remained as a part of political sciences. Although initially the conflict study focused on conflict and violation of human rights, increasing emphasis on aftermath of conflict and emerging

\textsuperscript{73} A. K. Das, and H. N. Banerjee, Impact of Tea Industry on the Life of the Tribals of West Bengal, Tribal Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, pp. 88, 1964.
patterns over the conflict affected areas have now attracted serious attention from other social scientists. The north-east region has come to the focus of many conflict related studies largely due to the factor of immigration resulting into ethnic conflict. Extensive researches on the effects of conflict on displaced people have hardly received any attention of researches in India. Some of the issues which are still not adequately addressed in these studies relate to the direct effect of conflict on women as well as other segments of population. Needless to say, the long term effect of ethnic conflict on vulnerable groups like women is an important area of study that seems untouched in the country.

1.5 Objectives

The present study aims at getting an insight into the consequences such conflicts have on women. Needless to mention, all conflicts have differential impact on different social and economic groups with regard to their capacity to cope with the situation. Ethnic conflicts have serious consequences for women largely due to their position in the family and in the society at large. One important consideration is their reproductive role and responsibility. They are most vulnerable to conflicting situations. The nature of armed conflicts changed dramatically during the latter half of the twentieth century, with casualties among civilians increasingly outnumbering those of military personnel. Women and girls became especially vulnerable in such conflicts. Since the end of the Cold War, women have been the primary victims in ethnic conflicts, constituting the bulk of civilian deaths and displaced refugees. The impact of conflicts on women and girls’ reproductive and sexual health can never be underestimated. Their psychological, reproductive and overall well-being is often severely compromised in times of conflict.
Conflicts tend to increase the incidence of sexual violence; rape; sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS; and unwanted pregnancies. In addition, essential social services, such as medical facilities, on which women heavily depend for their well-being, are greatly disrupted by armed conflicts.

Given this background the broad objectives of this research may be stated as follows:

a) to get an insight into the ethnic dimension of the population redistribution in the areas of Bodo concentration;
b) to study related demographic changes which are directly linked to the ethnic conflict;
c) to assess the consequences of the demographic changes brought about by the conflict on the Santhal women.

1.6 Research Questions

The following broad research questions are placed before the research:

i) What are the consequences of the conflict on morbidity, mortality and disability?

ii) How does conflict affect fertility, reproductive health or household composition?

iii) What are the consequences of conflict in terms of forced migration and other types of internal mobility?

iv) What are the demographic repercussions of forced migration?

1.7 Database

Much of the data required for this research is obtained from the primary sources particularly through a survey in the rehabilitated villages and in relief camps in the study area. The secondary data has been collected from successive census enumeration, from the Bodo Autonomous Council, the District Commissioner Office and data available at National Informatics Centre.
Census publications pertaining to population data are used to analyse patterns in the distribution and growth of Santhal and Bodo population at district, block and village level. Data available from the Bodo Autonomous Council has been analyzed to identify villages of Bodo domination.

Besides, data are generated from the villages at primary level and from the relief camps to supplement information not easily available through secondary sources.

Data on redistribution of population in Kokrajhar district is entirely based on information available in primary Census abstracts of Assam, 1971, 1991, 2001. Since segregated data is not available for the Santhal population, help has been sought to estimate this population by a reference to language tables published by the Census that provides rich information on mother tongues. It is assumed that the Santhal mother tongue speakers certainly belong to Santhal ethnic tribe though it is quite likely that many ethnic Santhal might have shifted to other languages including Assamese. Thus the estimated Santhal population based on mother tongue data would necessarily be an underestimation of their actual numbers. However, in the absence of any definite source of information on the number of Santhal population, the mother tongue data available in Census certainly helped the present research as a very rich source of information.

National Family Health Survey-II, 1998-99 data on female headed households for Assam was used to consider the information as a base from where deviations could be analysed. This was done as no reliable data on female headed households for Assam could be available. Special tables on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes available with the Census of India, Assam series were consulted for tribe specific information, so vital for the present study.
In order to obtain information on areas of Bodo domination, number of relief camps, rehabilitated villages, number of villages affected due to conflict, number of people staying in relief camps and number of people rehabilitated etc. data were collected from District Commissioner Office and from the Bodo Autonomous Council.

Primary data has been collected on demographic aspects of Santhal women and their household members living at relief camps and at the rehabilitated villages.

There are however serious data limitations to the study. The first refers to the availability of data at village level in identifying the Santhal village. Census data on Scheduled tribes does not distinguish between different tribes. Though Special tables on Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes do provide tribe wise data, it does not provide the information at village level, something very necessary for the present study. Another serious anomaly in data refers to Santhals who despite being an ethnic tribe elsewhere in India are not categorised as such in Assam making it extremely difficult to identify their distribution in different parts of Assam. This limitation was partly overcome by referring to mother tongue data, though this estimation itself suffers much on undercounting as many Santhals have shifted to mother tongues other than their own. Being one of the major chunk of the population of the state of Assam in Bodo Autonomous Council, with no particularly enumerated category in the census it became difficult to identify the villages with Santhal population. The identification and relocation of real Santhal villages from the census data hence became an arduous task.

The ancestral identity of Santhals as a tribal community in Assam has been changed because of location specificity of such identities, which prevailed in their state of origin. Data on Santhal distribution in the state of Assam or North East is not available. There is
no possible identification of Santhal population has been given for the State of Assam. At the state they are called as part of communities tea gardeners. There was no specific identification of them till the year 1971. Later in 1990’s they enumerated in other backward category.

Village level data as available in Census suffered from another limitation that thwarted our attempt for an in-depth study of the village level reality. Data collected for villages from 1971 -2001 to study the distribution and growth of Santhal and Bodo population at district, block and at the level of villages reflected enormous variation in the names of the villages, distribution of the villages, location, and community inhabiting the villages which made it extremely difficult to trace the real Santhal villages.

Temporal, particularly decadal comparison became difficult as there was no census held for Assam in the year 1981 leading to missing information on villages by the year 1991 as the names and location of the villages in census had changed and the spelling of the name was not identical in the census data from 1971-1991. Likewise the reorganisation of the districts in the intervening period too posed serious data problems. Till the Year 1971 Kokrajhar district was included in the undivided Goalpara district. Hence the use of data for the Santhal population in the year1971 had to be done as the population distribution in the Goalpara district instead of Kokrajhar specifically.

Data collected from District Commissioner Office and Bodo Autonomous Council on villages, relief camps and rehabilitated villages was also erroneous when compared with the name given by Santhals during the field study. Most of the name of the villages for particular blocks, which were described in records given by District Commissioner Office
and Bodo Autonomous Council, did not correlate with the name given in the census for the villages in particular blocks.

In order to overcome some of these data limitations, the following techniques were employed so that the serious limitation of data does not impair the progress of the research. For example, the Santhal areas were identified on the basis of language data at the district level for 1971, 1991 and 2001. The plan for collecting data on Santhal villages had to be abandoned. In order to represent the existence of Santhals in Kokrajhar district language data has been used to find out the core and periphery of the Santhals for the state of Assam as a whole.

The district Kokrajhar was included in Goalpara district before 1991 and hence the representation of Santhals in the year 1971 was taken from the total Santhal speaking population as a whole under undivided Goalpara district.

Since data on villages were not available to compare the primary data collected from the relief camp and rehabilitated villages, data from National Family Health Survey-2 and census 2001 has been taken for the state of Assam as a whole considered as base line data for the sake of comparison.

In order to overcome the limitation encountered in getting village level data from secondary sources, an attempt was made to include questions pertaining to respondents conditions before moving to relief camp and/or rehabilitated villages to assess the impact of the conflict. Further to study the level of consequences of the conflict the data for relief camp and rehabilitated villages are compared with each other.
1.8 Methodology

The methodology proposed to be adopted for the present research is outlined below:

As has been mentioned earlier, one of the main objectives of the research is to assess the extent of spatial distribution of population and its consequences following the demand for Bodoland during the last couple of decades. Given this scope of the present research, the period of investigation is confined to four decades starting with 1970. The 1970s are chosen as the starting points as the decade is not much known for inter-ethnic strife resulting in redistribution. The following three decades have witnessed ethnic violence in many parts of the Bodo Areas and the redistribution tendencies characterize this period. Thus data pertaining to the period in 1970s has been profitably used to describe the ethnic conflict that followed and the ensuing pattern of population distribution while the data pertaining to the later years would indicate the pattern of redistribution.

An attempt has been made to look into the history of Santhal migration to Assam and to study their distribution with the help of identification of their core and periphery. To study redistribution over the district, the population in areas of Bodo concentration are understood by disaggregating the data into four sets: total population; total schedule tribe population; total schedule caste population; total non schedule population. The redistribution tendencies are examined at district level for all the four categories of population; in rural and in urban areas.

The Study has considered a time span of about 30 years also to understand the changes in vital demographic indicators as an impact of Bodo- Santhal conflict with
special reference to relief camps and rehabilitated villages. This has provided the temporal dimension to the changes in the demographic composition of the population in general and women in particular. A general picture of their demographic characteristics before the conflict began is obtained to be compared with their present demographic characteristics by studying the demographic characteristics of Santhals with special reference to women both before and after coming to relief camp and rehabilitated villages respectively. The selection of relief camps is based on a fair representation of the Santhals from all over the district. Six relief camps and four rehabilitated village have been selected for the collection of data and has been ensured that these relief camps and rehabilitated villages have Santhals coming from most areas of the district. The impact of the conflict on Santhal women and the consequences of the conflict has been analyzed with reference to the following broad demographic indicators as changes in fertility, marital status with special reference to widowhood and remarriage, problems with regard to reproductive burden, reproductive health, mortality and morbidity, changes in occupational structure, changes in household composition etc for the year 1996-2004.

In addition 4 rehabilitated Santhal villages in the Bodo dominated area are selected in the district, which has both experienced conflict in the camps and rehabilitated village is represented normal condition for the Santhals for a better comparison with the demographic characteristics of the Santhals affected by the conflict. It has been identified that the concentration of relief camps and share of Santhals in it is the highest in Gossaigaon block; hence Gossaigaon block has been selected to study both relief camps and rehabilitated villages.
It had been decided to assess the spatial dimension of the change by a reference to the changes in the distribution of the Bodos, Santhals and the others at the village level to ascertain the areas from where the Santhals has been forced to leave. An attempt has also been made to trace the same population living in the relief camps and to draw comparison on demographic indicators as pertaining to the household size, sex ratio, literacy and occupational structure using census data for the year 1971 and field based data for the year 2006.

Village level data could not be collected because of the problems related to the data collection on the villages with concentration of the Santhal population. The related limitation of data collection is discussed above in data base.

1.9 Organization of the Manuscript

The manuscript is organised into six broad chapters.

The first chapter outlines the design of the research work. The second chapter deals with spatial distribution of Santhals and the chronology of the events leading to the Bodo-Santhal conflict in Assam. It was felt necessary to provide these details as a background to an understanding of the impact of the conflict more particularly on Santhal women. The chapter has also included their distribution in India with special reference to Assam and the causes related to their migration. The chapter also studies the distribution and core and periphery of Santhals in India and in Assam too.

The Conflict has had its spatial impact too. The ethnic communities experienced redistribution on space on a scale unprecedented in history creating ethnically homogenous areas. It was felt necessary to discuss this process of ethnic homogenisation in the third chapter which deals with this aspect with a special reference to Kokrajhar.
district- the area of the conflict. The fourth and the fifth chapters deal with the impact of the conflict on Santhal women living in selected relief camps and selected rehabilitated villages respectively. The final chapter presents a summary of the consequences of the ethnic conflict on Santhal women.