CHAPTER 2
SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF SANTHAL AND CHRONOLOGY OF BODO-SANTHAL CONFLICT

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter an attempt has been made to discuss the historical background of Santhals, the pattern of their migration, spatial distribution with special reference to Assam. To understand the distribution tendency of population in Assam the changes in ethnic composition in Assam has been studied. A special attempt has been made to document the facts of Bodo movement behind the demand for the establishment of Bodoland Territorial Council. In this connection a chronological account of the Bodo movement for a separate state that culminated in the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council in the state Assam has been presented in order to get an insight into the nature of the problem that existed before the clash that took place between the Bodos and the Santhals. The chapter aims at providing a background to the conflict for a better understanding of the ethnic situation in the study area. It was felt imperative to add a brief overview of the causes that led to the conflict in a situation of an otherwise peaceful co-existence of diverse ethnic groups living in a shared space for centuries. The chapter reveals the manner in which an essentially political demand beginning with the recognition of Bodo as a medium of instruction transformed into a mass movement for separate statehood and a solution in granting autonomous council transforming almost overnight the cordial relations between ethnic groups in the very shared space into that of animosity, distrust and destitution. Territorial questions were linked to numerical superiority and the displacement of communities from their habitat in order to achieve ethnically homogenous space.

The chapter may not address to the core problematic of this thesis but is vital as a link and as a background to understand the effects of ethnic conflict on the
women of a particular community, namely the Santhals. The data has been collected extensively from various secondary information sources like books, journals and articles from internet.

The approach here is essentially historical. Events have been presented in sequence leading to the emergence of conflicting situation.

Historically, the state of Assam, an alluvial expanse laid down by Brahmaputra and its tributaries, offered suitable environment for the settlement of the different communities coming to the region from different parts of the country and outside the countries from centuries. The tribal and non tribal communities of the region have found suitable sites for their settlement in the isolated hill features, forested portions of the valley and its marshy tracts on the basis of the communities' requirements of subsistence and protection.

In a culturally diverse society like Assam, ethnic identity has grown as a crucial force often resulting in violent conflict. Autonomous demands of often different ethnic groups – the Bodos, the Karbis, the Dimasas, the Koch-Rajbanshis, the Rabha-Hajongs, the Tiwas, and the Missings – had caused serious concern to the authorities at the state as well as the centre.¹

Available records show that the Bodos before partition of the country were extensively distributed on both sides of Brahmaputra River as well as in the char area (river islands). They captured vast fertile land on both sides of the river Brahmaputra and the indigenous people and the early migrants (mainly Bodo) retreated back towards the north, inhabiting fallow land, grazing reservoirs, forest and wasteland.

After the partition of India, influx of refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) created problems related to shelter and settlement in large parts of

the state of Assam. Gradually the immigrant groups captured the lands inhabited by
the tribes. Inter-state migration complicated the issue; flow of migrants for years
together added to the already complex socio-economic problems of encroachment and
increased the pressure on land.

The migration had a debilitating effect on availability of land for the tribal
people as a whole and particularly the Bodos were squeezed rapidly towards the
north. The process continued much after the partition and it threatened the Bodo
identity owing to continued influx of people of non-Bodo origin into the already
shrunk areas of their habitat.2

Population pressure gradually increased over the years by both ‘indigenous’
and ‘domiciled’ people in the tribal belt and in the Brahmaputra Valley. The migrant
colonizers circumvented the land revenue regulation by converting vast tracts of
fertile land for commercial purposes, which were lying untouched by Assamese and
other tribal communities. The migrant colonizers transformed the land into rich tea
plantations and also started using it for other commercial purposes with the help of
migrant labourers from other parts of the country. The non-tribal migrants like
Santhals, the descendents of the tea garden labourers, already inhabited the forested
land from many decades. Other communities like Bengali Muslim and Hindu
migrants settled down in the land before or after partition of the country as there was
no stronger hold or interest of indigenous people till the mass movement raised by
Assamese community against the migrants. So the Line System or the formation of
tribal belt after independence of the country could neither prevent encroachment on
tribal land nor was the land properly politically demarcated to be protected from
migration of other communities.

2 A. Patra, ‘Redistribution of Population in Areas of Bodo Concentration in Assam’ Unpublished Ph.D.
2.2 Changes in Ethnic Composition of Assam

An interesting fact of the ethnic composition of the population relates to large increase in the share of the Scheduled Caste population between 1971 and 1991, and substantial decrease in their population in the following decade. The share of Scheduled Tribe population also showed a very large increase during 1971-91 decades but decreased marginally in the following decade. Similarly, the share of Bodo population in the total population was 4.23 percent in the census year 1971 which increased to 5.48 percent in 1991. The increase in the proportion of the Scheduled population during 1971-91 decades is followed by a corresponding decrease in the share of the Non-Scheduled population which declined from 82.78 percent in 1971 to 79.77 percent in 1991. The proportion of this group has marginally increased in the year 2001 (Table-2.1 and Fig.-2.1). It may be noted here that the Santhals are enumerated as part of the Non-Scheduled segment of Assam’s population.

In the last 30 years, the share of tribal population shows a positive change (+1.40 percent) compared to other ethnic groups in the state as a whole. On the other hand, the share of the Non-Scheduled population shows a negative change (-2.01 percent) in the same period for the state as a whole. It is clear that the tribal segment increased rapidly due to high natural increase in their population while the share of Non-Scheduled population decreased due to relatively low natural increase. The share of Santhal population shows a marginal increase (+0.3 percent) in the year 2001.

Table: 2.1
Assam: Distribution of Population by Ethnic Groups, 1971-2001 (in percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe</th>
<th>Non-Scheduled</th>
<th>Bodo</th>
<th>Santhal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of the distribution of population in Assam by ethnic groups at the district level reveals striking spatial variation (Table-2.2) except in the Cachar plains. The Scheduled Caste population accounts for a small proportion of the population in all other districts of Assam in the year 1971. The only other district in which the Scheduled Caste population constitutes a significant share of the total population is Nagaon located in the central valley. They account for 4 to 5 percent of the population in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Sibsagar districts dispersed all over the state. They have a negligible presence in the tribal dominated hill districts and in Lakhimpur district. During 1971 and 1991, the share of Scheduled Caste population increased uniformly in all the districts keeping the pattern unchanged (Table-2.3).

The Scheduled Tribe population is largely confined to the hill areas of the state. Lakhimpur, in the eastern part, and Goalpara, in the west are two other areas in the plains that contain a significant (over 13 percent) proportion of the Scheduled Tribes (Table-2.3). They are also numerous in Kamrup and Darrang districts in the plains of Brahmaputra where their share was 11 to 14 percent as per 1971 enumeration. The Scheduled Tribes are by and large absent in the plains of Barak
valley. In the remaining districts, they account for a little over 6 percent of the total population. Data shows that the Scheduled Tribes have some presence all over Assam except in the Barak valley. The pattern remains more or less identical in the year 1991. However, there are some notable changes. While Goalpara and Lakhimpur districts experienced substantive increase in the share of the Scheduled Tribe population, there was a significant decline in the proportion of the Scheduled Tribe population in the tribal dominated districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. Substantial incursion of the non-tribal population into these hill districts is the chief cause in the fall of tribal proportion in these areas.

Table: 2.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste to Total Population</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe to Total Population</th>
<th>Non-Scheduled to Total Population</th>
<th>Bodo to Total Population</th>
<th>Santal to Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Goalpara</td>
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<td>6.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>2. Kamrup</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>83.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Darrang</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nagaon</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sibsagar</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Lakhimpur</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. K. Anglong</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>42.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. N. C. Hills</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>29.8</td>
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<td>9. Cachar</td>
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<td>14.2</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
<td>86.9</td>
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<td>Assam</td>
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<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, Assam, 1971 and 1991

The Non-Scheduled population accounted for over 80 percent of the population in most of the districts of Assam except the two hill districts containing a majority of Scheduled Tribe population (Table-2.3). However, their proportion has been declining in nearly all districts except in the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North-Cachar Hills. The fall in the share of the Non-Scheduled population during 1971 and 1991 is remarkable in Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang districts, the areas of Bodo concentration.
The distribution of the Bodo population, enumerated as a Scheduled Tribe, shows extreme clustering only in three districts - Goalpara, Kamrup, and Darrang, located in lower Brahmaputra valley (Table-2.3). Both Goalpara and Darrang districts have experienced very large increase in the proportion of Bodo population in the period between 1971 and 1991 while elsewhere their share has remained static. In the three districts of their concentration, the Bodos seem to be the major tribal group as they accounted for over 70 percent of the total Scheduled Tribe population. Interestingly their proportion in these districts has been increasing over the years at the cost of other Scheduled Tribes.

It is evident from table 2.2 that the Santhals are widely dispersed all over Assam. They had some presence in 7 out of 9 (undivided) districts of Assam. They accounted for around 2.5 percent of the district’s population only in Goalpara district in the year 1971 which increased to 2.7 percent in 1991.

Table-2.3 depicts the distribution of population by ethnic groups in Assam, during the period between 1991 and 2001. It may be noted that the number of districts have increased in this period due to reorganisation of districts in Assam and this permits to examine the regional distribution of population at much lower scale of spatial aggregation. It is clear from the table that the Scheduled Caste population accounts for less than 7 percent of the total population of the districts in a majority of the districts in the year 1991. They account for a substantial proportion (over 10 percent) of the district’s population in the three districts located in the Barak valley, Morigaon and Nagaon in the central plains and Bongaigaon in lower plains of Brahmaputra valley. Their presence is marginal in North-Cachar Hills, Tinsukia, Sibsagar and Kokrajhar. The overall pattern of distribution remains by and large unchanged by the year 2001. However, the proportion of Scheduled Caste population
registered almost a uniform decline in most districts, a fact that defies easy explanation.

Table: 2.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>1. Dhubri</td>
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<td>78.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>83.6</td>
<td>83.2</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
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<td>88.5</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>91.4</td>
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<td>80.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, Assam 1991 and 2001

The Scheduled Tribe population displays a very uneven distribution across the districts. The hill districts of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong as well as the plain districts of Dhemaji and Kokrajhar supported a very high percentage (over 40 percent) of Scheduled Tribes in the year 1991. The other districts in the plains, that contained a sizeable Scheduled Tribe population include Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Nalbari forming a contiguous zone in the lower Brahmaputra valley; and Darrang, Lakhimpur and Morigaon forming another pocket of tribal concentration in the Upper and Central Brahmaputra valley. The spatial pattern of distribution of the Scheduled Tribe population underwent little change in the year 2001 with minor modifications. The
Scheduled Tribes also experienced a fall in their proportion in the total population in many districts. The only exceptions are found in the hill districts and Dhemaji, where the Scheduled Tribes have actually increased their share in the total population. Nevertheless, the fact that their share has fallen in many districts reveals the weakness of Census data. Either the 1991 Census overestimated the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Population or has under enumerated them in the 2001 Census (Table-2.3).

It is interesting to note that the proportion of the Non-Scheduled population has increased in a majority of the districts with the possible exception of those in which the proportion of the Scheduled Tribe population shows an increase during the period between 1991 and 2001. The spatial pattern in the distribution of Non-Scheduled population however does not show much of a change (Table-2.3).

As regards the Bodo population, they are largely confined to Kokrajhar district and account for a significant proportion of the total population in the adjoining districts of Bongaigaon and Nalbari as well as Darrang district in central Brahmaputra valley separated by Kamrup district that contains relatively lesser proportion of the Bodo tribes in the total population. However, the Bodos constitute a majority of the Scheduled Tribe population in a large number of districts from Dhubri to Sonitpur in a contiguous belt barring the exception of Goalpara which represents a break in the continuum. The index of concentration calculated for the Bodos reveals that they are highly concentrated only in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Nalbari and Darrang districts accounting for nearly 26 percent, 11 percent, 12 percent and 15 percent of the total Bodo population of the state respectively. Nearly 65 percent of the Bodo population of the state is confined to these four districts only (Table-2.3).
Analysis of the pattern in the distribution and concentration of the Santhal population after the districts were reorganised provides far clearer picture of the tendency of clustering and concentration, not so well demonstrated earlier. Needless to mention, the reorganisation of the districts into smaller spatial units provided much sharper insights into the pattern of distribution. Unfortunately however, this information is available for one decade only, i.e. 1991-2001.

Table 2.3 provides the details for 23 districts. It is evident that bifurcation of Goalpara district proved that the Santhals were actually confined to Kokrajhar subdivision of the undivided district. It is interesting that 7 of the 23 districts did not contain any Santhal population in the year 1991 though such districts were fewer by the year 2001. However, barring Kokrajhar district where the Santhals accounted for a significant 10.2 percent of the district’s total, they were an insignificant component of the population in the remaining. The only two districts where their proportion in the total population exceeded 1 percent are Bongaigaon and Nalbari districts. In the year 2001, the overall pattern remained identical, but the proportion of the Santhals increased substantially in Kokrajhar district where it accounted for a significant 16.7 percent of the total population of the district. The only other district where their overall percentage showed some increase was Darrang district where they accounted for over 1 percent unlike in the year 1991 (Table-2.3; Fig. 2.2a and 2.2b).

As far as their concentration is concerned table 3.6 clearly reveals a strong clustering of the Santhal population in Kokrajhar district where more than 60 percent of all Santhals lived. The clustering pattern strengthened by the year 2001 when over 62 percent of all Santhal population was enumerated in this district alone. The three other districts where the Santhals were concentrated in 1991 included Nalbari (10.5 percent) Bongaigaon (7.5 percent) and Sonitpur (5.1 percent). However in all these
ASSAM

Distribution of Santhal Population, 1991

0 60 120 Kms

DISTRICTS
01. Dhubri 13. Nagaon
02. Kokrajhar 14. Golaghat
03. Bongaigaon 15. Jorhat
04. Goalpara 16. Sibsagar
05. Barpeta 17. Dibrugarh
06. Nalbari 18. Tinsukia
07. Kamrup 19. Karbi Anglong
08. Darrang 20. N. C. Hills
10. Lakhimpur 22. Hailakandi
11. Dhemaji 23. Cachar

% of Santhal Population to Total Population
- 5 to 10.2 (1)
- 1 to 5 (2)
- Less than 1 (14)
- Nil (7)

Fig.-2.2a

ASSAM

Distribution of Santhal Population, 2001

0 60 120 Kms

DISTRICTS
01. Dhubri 13. Nagaon
02. Kokrajhar 14. Golaghat
03. Bongaigaon 15. Jorhat
04. Goalpara 16. Sibsagar
05. Barpeta 17. Dibrugarh
06. Nalbari 18. Tinsukia
07. Kamrup 19. Karbi Anglong
08. Darrang 20. N. C. Hills
10. Lakhimpur 22. Hailakandi
11. Dhemaji 23. Cachar

% of Santhal Population to Total Population
- 5 to 16.7 (1)
- 1 to 5 (3)
- Less than 1 (14)
- Nil (6)

Fig.-2.2b
districts their concentration decreased with a corresponding rise in the concentration index in Kokrajhar district. This is certainly an indication of the redistribution of Santhal population which now migrated from other locations in the state to Kokrajhar—the seat of conflict between them and the Bodos in the post Accord phase (Table-2.3; Fig.-2.3a and 2.3b)

Table: 2.4
(Location Quotients)

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*Source: Census of India, Assam, 1971 and 1991*

The distribution of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Non-Scheduled and Bodo population to the total population has been worked out for each district and also for the entire state in table-2.4 for both the census years 1971 and 1991 with the help of location quotient technique.

The values of the location quotients show a higher concentration of Scheduled Caste in Nagaon and Cachar districts in 1971. The pattern remains unchanged in the year 1991, though Kamrup, Nagaon and Cachar districts show an increase in the quotient in 1991 over 1971 (Table-2.4).

A very high concentration of Scheduled Tribe is found in Goalpara, Lakhimpur, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts in 1971. However, one more district, namely, Darrang, has been added to the list of very high concentration of Scheduled Tribes in 1991 (Table-2.4).
ASSAM
Distribution of Santhal Population, 1991

Districts:
01. Dhubri
02. Kokrajhar
03. Bongaigaon
04. Golaghat
05. Goalpara
06. Barpeta
07. Nalbari
08. Darrang
09. Sibsagar
10. Lakhimpur
11. Dhemaji
12. Morigaon
13. Nagaon
14. Golaghat
15. Jorhat
16. Sivasagar
17. Dibrugarh
18. Tinsukia
19. Karbi-Anlong
20. N. C. Hills
21. Karimganj
22. Hailakandi
23. Cachar

Concentration Index
- 10 to 60 (2)
- 5 to 10 (2)
- 1 to 5 (8)
- Less than 1 (13)
- Nil (3)

Fig.-2.3a

ASSAM
Distribution of Santhal Population, 2001

Districts:
01. Dhubri
02. Kokrajhar
03. Bongaigaon
04. Golaghat
05. Goalpara
06. Barpeta
07. Nalbari
08. Darrang
09. Sibsagar
10. Lakhimpur
11. Dhemaji
12. Morigaon
13. Nagaon
14. Golaghat
15. Jorhat
16. Sivasagar
17. Dibrugarh
18. Tinsukia
19. Karbi-Anlong
20. N. C. Hills
21. Karimganj
22. Hailakandi
23. Cachar

Concentration Index
- 10 to 62 (1)
- 5 to 10 (2)
- 1 to 5 (8)
- Less than 1 (10)
- Nil (3)

Fig.-2.3b
The Non-Scheduled population was highly concentrated in Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Cachar districts in 1971. By the year 1991, Lakhimpur experienced a decline in the proportion of Non-Scheduled population (Table-2.4).

The Bodos, as has been pointed out earlier, were largely confined to three districts, namely, Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang in the year 1971 with a little change in the pattern in the year 1991 (Table-2.4).

The Santhals are highly concentrated in the Kokrajhar district over 4.4 percent (Table-2.4)

A high concentration of Scheduled Tribe is found in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Nalbari, Darrang, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Morigaon districts of Brahmaputra valley and the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills in 1991. The patterns remain unchanged in the year 2001 except Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpata, Kamrup and Darrang districts in the lower Brahmaputra valley. It shows a decrease in the quotient in 2001 over 1991 (Table-2.5).

The location quotients for Non-Scheduled population are higher in Dhubri, Kamrup, Sonitpur, Nagaon Golaghat, Jorhat Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia in the Brahmaputra plain, and in all the districts of the Barak plain in 1991. The pattern remains same in the year 2001 (Table-2.5).

Bodos are largely confined to eight contiguous districts, namely, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra (Table-2.5).
Though less widespread than the Bodos, Santhals too are highly concentrated in around Kokrajhar district close to 7 percent in the year 1991 which increased to over 18 percent (Table-2.5 and Fig-2.4a and 2.4b).

### Table: 2.5
(Location Quotients)

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**Source:** Census of India, Assam, 1991 and 2001

Table 2.6 shows the concentration pattern of the Santhals in the rural and urban areas of Assam. It is evident that the concentration of the Santhal population in both the rural and the urban areas follows a more or less identical pattern. However, there are some significant variations. It is interesting that the rural Santhals are overwhelmingly concentrated in Kokrajhar alone (over 60 percent) while another pocket lies in Nalbari (over 7 percent). The concentration of the rural Santhals has been on the rise in the former while it is showing a decline in the latter.
Table 2.6

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<th>Proportion of Urban Population</th>
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Source: Census of India, 1991 and 2001 Primary Population Tables, Part-II (B), Series 4, Assam

On the contrary the urban Santhals show a more dispersed pattern in their pattern of distribution though the largest concentration is still in Kokrajhar district (36.8 percent in 1991). A good proportion of the Santhals (over 22 percent in 1991) living in urban areas are found in Darrang district. Over 5 percent of them were concentrated in Sonitpur district. By the year 2001, the urban Santhals seem to have a greater dispersion as they are found concentrated in more districts than the year 1991. A large increase in the proportion of urban Santhals took place in Kamrup district which contains the Guwahati city. Likewise Tinsukia emerged as another area of concentration of urban Santhals. Interestingly the urban Santhal concentration declined in the traditional areas of their concentration over the decade. In any case the
share of urban Santhal is extremely small and thus inconsequential from the point of view of redistribution.

2.3 The History of Santals in India—Pattern of Migration

The Santals are regarded as Pre-Dravidian aboriginals who, according to their traditions, are represented as a race wandering from one country to another. Authentic records reflect that during the 18th century many Santals began settling down in Chotanagpur and in the neighbouring district of Midnapur and Birbhum. These people who were endowed with essential skills of clearing the jungles for cultivation began to migrate to the Rajmahal Hills on the North-Eastern side of Chotanagpur plateau. Skreisrud (1887) is of the opinion that the Santals entered India from the North-West and first settled in Punjab and then made their way to their present habitat—Chotanagpur Plateau. According to Waddell (1893) the Santals' 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) criticised the views of both the above scholars and having hinged upon the geographical evidence pointed out that the Santals probably came from the Kaimur Range through the Champa pass and other neighbouring passes into the Chotonagpur plateau. Dolton (1872) reported that the Santals came to the present abode from North-East India and found their way to Chotonagpur plateau and adjoining high lands by the side of their sacred stream, the

6 E. T. Dolton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, Government of Bengal, Calcutta, 1872.
Damodar River. Campbell\(^7\) (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\(^8\) (1903).

However the history of Santhal migration does not remain conjectural from the 18\(^{th}\) Century onwards as there are no authentic records regarding their movements. According to O’malley\(^9\) (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 18\(^{th}\) Century they occupied their present abode-the Santhal Parganas. According to Dalton\(^10\) (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.

2.4 Santhals in Assam

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the Assamese social order was stable. There were higher castes and lower castes, and men with power and wealth, and men without, but there are few, if any, who moved from one category to another. Few men sought to change their social status by seeking new occupations, for apart from living in a tradition that discouraged upward mobility, there were few opportunities to move up.

The British created new opportunities. The steamy verdant hills, hitherto ignored by Assamese peasants, were converted by the British into rich tea plantations, whose products were soon to reach out to markets across the seas. In 1821 tea was discovered by an Englishman, and in the 1830’s the governor general, Lord William

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\(^7\) A. Campbell, ‘The Traditional Migration of the Santhal Tribes’, *The Indian Antiquary*, Bombay, Vol. 23, pp. 103-104, 1894.


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.\textsuperscript{11}

The scarcity of labour in the wake of extension of tea-cultivation made it necessary for the planters to import larger number of labourers from the densely populated areas of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Central Provinces, United Provinces and Madras.\textsuperscript{12}

In the beginning, the one major obstacle to creating a tea industry in Assam was the lack of an adequate local labour supply. Diseases, civil conflict, and the Burmese invasions had depopulated much of the province. For the local Assamese cultivators there was little incentive to work as low income wage labourers in unhealthy jungle terrain; they were comparatively prosperous, for there was much land.

The British first tried to solve the labour problem by importing Chinese coolies from Singapore. It was assumed by the British that the Chinese, whatever their background, knew how to cultivate and prepare tea. Several hundred Chinese coolies were brought from Singapore to the port at Calcutta, and then sent upland to Assam. En route the Chinese apparently engaged in a brawl with some Indians. Sixty were arrested and jailed by a local magistrate and the remainder refused to go on alone to Assam until their compatriots were released. The entire group, their contracts cancelled, were returned to Calcutta where, in their anger, they proceeded to a nuisance to the local police. The Assam tea Company, reporting to the London office, noted that “these men turned out to be of a very bad character; they were turbulent,

obstinate and rapacious. Indeed they committed excess which on occasions endangered the lives of the people among whom we had sent them and it was found almost impossible to govern them. So injurious did they seem likely to prove that their contracts were cancelled and the whole gang with the exception of the most expert tea makers dismissed" (see Harold H. Mann, “The early History of the Tea industry in North –East India,” The Assam Review, September 1934, p.10.

A system of contract labour was established. The British employers recruited indigent tribesmen from the hill areas of Southern Bihar, a region known as Chota Nagpur, paid their transportation and provided them with housing and medical care in return for a contract that indentured the labourers to their employers. By the turn of the century there were 764 tea gardens in Assam, employing 400,000 persons, and producing 145 million pounds of tea per year. The number of migrants to the plantations soared even higher between 1911 and 1921, when the tea industry imported 769,000 labourers. Another 422,000 came during the following decade.

Migration rose again during the Second World War, when Assam tea garden labourers were employed by the American and British armies to build roads and aerodromes to defend Assam against a possible Japanese invasion from Burma.

A considerable amount of assimilation since then has taken place. The children of migrants attend schools conducted in Assamese. Many of the Tribals now observed Assamese Hindu ritual, especially the Bihu festivals that are so central to Assamese cultural life. According to the 1961 census, only 204,000 persons reported that they speak a tribal language of Bihar and Orissa (Santhali, Oraon, Munda, or Sadan/ Sadari) as their mother tongue, though clearly the number of persons who are tribal migrants is considerably larger. The 1921 census estimated that migrants to tea
gardens and their descendants numbered a million and one-sixth of the total population of the providence.

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.

The tea plantation 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. And though there are trade unions among the tea plantation labourers, they play no significant role in the politics of the state. Nor are the tribal migrants in day to day social contact with the Assamese, for those who live on or near the tea plantations are physically removed from contact with the local population. A number of laws and rules— the plantations labour act of 1951, and the Assam plantation labour rules of 1956—require plantation owners to provide housing accommodations, dispensaries and hospitals, crèches for the children of women workers, and schools for children who work on the plantations. Canteens for meals and recreational facilities must also be provided by employers. The effect of these provisions is to limit routine contacts between tea garden workers and the Assamese.\(^\text{13}\)

Santhals are one of the laborious tribal communities among the Adivasis of Central India and brought by the British to North-East. They belong to proto-Austroloid group and considered as “Adivasis” or “original inhabitants” by the later settlers in India.

However they were the original inhabitants from Mid India but encouraged later to migrate to the North- East under orders of Steuart Bayley, chief commissioner of Assam to colonise the district of Goalpara defraying their expenses on travel from home, besides advances free of interest until they could reap a crop of their own. In 1891 the total number of immigrants who were attracted to tea gardens was estimated approximately at 423,199 or nearly eighty three percent of the immigrants and forming 7 percent of the total population of the province. In 1901 the number went up to 645,100 and two decades after to a million and a third, one sixth of the province. Of these, majority came from the Chotanagpur region of Bihar, Gaya, Santhal Parganas on account of their capability to withstand hard work in the jungle and rigours of climate in the tea-districts of Upper Assam. Bengal sent most of the recruits from the Burdwan, and Birbhum Districts. Several enactments as a sequel to the recommendation made by the commissions set-up by the government, from time to time, improved terms and living conditions of the garden labourers. The monthly wage which stood at Rs 2-8 in 1839 rose up to Rs. 4-8 in 1859 and reached Rs. 10-19 in 1911-1912. Besides rice at confessional rate, they were entitled to free housing, grazing ground, fuel, medical aid etc. That their material condition was considerably improved is borne out by the fact that they were reluctant to return back to their original home on the termination of the contract; although during seven years ending in 1883-84, as reported by the Chotanagpur authorities, no less than 50,000 returned home. They are far happier, remarks Gait "whether they continue to work in the gardens or to settle down to cultivate in independent settlements or combine both occupations than they would be if they abandoned this province to return to their own country. In 1860’s, the tribal people had migrated under "Penal Contract" to work in the tea gardens for a period of 5 years. But after the contract expired most of the
labourers could not return to their home land because the journey back home was risky, they belonged to landless sections and their livelihood in their homeland was uncertain, they could not escape the grip of the recruiting agents who were operating in that area, the opportunity for re-employment in tea garden by entering into fresh contracts, and opportunities for settlement in the land available near the tea garden held them back. The second reason of migrating to the tea gardens was because job was easily available for both husband and wife and the housing facility, water facility, electricity, ration were available at a very subsidised rate and education was free.

The planters in early stage resented their permanent stay in Assam, but the cost and difficulties involved in importation of new recruits induced them before long to encourage their settlement in the neighbourhood of their gardens. The time-expired labourers too found it convenient to settlement near the garden as ordinary cultivator and supplement their earning by working at times when regular labour was insufficient especially for plucking and hoeing. Normally they remained in their old gardens, but a segment of them took to cultivation on their own account and as a result villages of such immigrants were springing up in the neighbourhood of tea gardens. Assam those days had to depend by and large on Bengal for her requirement of food grains. The Assamese, stigmatised as apathetic and idle, were stationary or declining. The number of those who worked for hire was too small. Taking the valley as a whole, according to 1901 census, excluding the tea gardens, only 3.3 percent of the population belonged to the working class. The urgent need of the province therefore increased labour supply both for the cultivation of tea and ordinary farming.14

14 Barpujari, Op. cit
The descendants of the Santhals, who migrated from mid India going by the ancestral identities, continue to be recognised as schedule tribes in the areas of their ancestral home but have lost this status in Assam because of location specificity of such identities, as the status has been accorded to them in their place of origin. Despite their numerical strength and long history of settlement in Assam stretching more than a century, they remain ‘outsiders’ without the tribal status, and are deprived of benefits availed by the scheduled castes.

Language reveals a person’s origin, identity and culture. It is also a means for a person to interact with others, but in the tea gardens, many of them have lost their own language. Due to migration and the interaction with the outer world, these tribals have forgotten their cultural values, rituals, and festivals like -karma, the festival of the origin of the earth and human beings, in which young women are supposed to take a major part in rituals. These tribals are facing many social problems like indebtedness, alcoholism, mental exploitation etc.

2.4.1 Santhals in Assam- Core and Periphery

An attempt is now made to identify the cores and peripheries of the Santhal Community living in Assam using the formula below. A better understanding of the tribal pattern of spatial dispersion can be promoted by identifying the core and peripheries of a particular tribe group. An exercise has been done here to delineate the core and peripheries of selected Santal population with the help of a statistical methods discussed below (Table 2.7). It has been noted that the Santhal habitat penetrated by non tribal communities only a limited scale. There are two segments of Santhal core- one line in Santhal Paraghana district of Bihar (presently Jharkhand) and other in Mayurbhanj district in Orissa.
Table: 2.7
Tribal Cores and Peripheries: Computation Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Name</th>
<th>Total Population of the District/Village</th>
<th>Total Tribal Population of the District/Village</th>
<th>Total Population of &quot;X&quot; Tribe (Santalu) in the District/Village</th>
<th>Total Population of &quot;X&quot; Tribe (Santalu) in India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Technique</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Normalisation Value of the i\textsuperscript{th} spatial unit</td>
<td>Weightage</td>
<td>Composite Index (Ci)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 as % of 4</td>
<td>A,' = A_\text{r}/ Mean A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A_1,=A_1' + B_1' + C_1.5'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 as % of 1</td>
<td>B,' = B_\text{r}/ Mean B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 as % of 2</td>
<td>C,' = C_\text{r}/ Mean C</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Where S.D. is the Standard Deviation of the Composite Index

The Formula

Core = Mean C_1 + 2 S.D. and Above

Periphery = from Mean C_1 to Mean C_1 + 2 S.D.

The Composite Index (C_i) may be symbolically expressed as below:

\[ C_i = \sum_{i=1}^{3} W_j X_{ij} \]

When

\[ j = 1 \]

\[ i = \text{Number of Variables (i_1, i_2, i_3)} \]

\[ j = \text{Number of District (j_1, j_2, j_3)} \]

\[ X_{ij} = \text{Ratio of the percentage of one specific tribe in the J_{th} unit to the Total Population of that Tribe to its mean} \]

\[ X_{2j} = \text{Ratio of the percentage of one specific tribe in the J_{th} unit to the total population of the J_{th} unit to its mean} \]

\[ X_{3j} = \text{Ratio of the percentage of one specific tribe in the J_{th} unit to the total tribal population of the J_{th} unit to the total population of the J_{th} unit to its mean} \]

\[ W = \text{weightages given to the variables} \]
\[ W_1 = 1 \]
\[ W_2 = 1 \]
\[ W_3 = 1.5 \]

The spatial distribution of the cores and peripheries of the Santhals leads to the identification of a number of types:

i) both core and periphery of the Santhal are compact

ii) the periphery is compact but the core is fragmented

iii) the core and the periphery are fragmented; and

iv) the Santhal has a compact core but there is no periphery

Both the core and periphery of Santhals are compact. The core falls in West Bengal whereas Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand falls in periphery.

Table: 2.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>( C_i(1991) )</th>
<th>( C_i(2001) )</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Naibari</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Marigaon</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Golaghat</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Karbi Anglong</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>North Cachar Hills</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1991: Periphery: Mean \( C_i \) to Mean \( C_i + 2\text{SD} \) (2.9 + 2 * 5.2) So, Range between 2.9 and 13.5; Core: Mean \( C_i + 2\text{SD} \) and above (2.9 + 2 * 5.2 and above) So, Value 13.5 and above

2001: Periphery: Mean \( C_i \) to Mean \( C_i + 2\text{SD} \) (4.1 + 2 * 8.123) So, Range between 4.1 and 20.3; Core: Mean \( C_i + 2\text{SD} \) and above (4.1 + 2 * 8.123 and above) So, Value 20.3 and above
The Santhal core (Table 2.8) consists of one district of Kokrajhar. The periphery on the other hand, encompasses a wider region and is comprised by 7 districts spread over Barak valley (Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi) and Bangaigaon, nalbari, Dhubri as for the data in 1991 census whereas Darrang could be added in the year 2001. (Fig-2.5a and 2.5b) Periphery consists of two fragments.

2.5 Chronology of the Conflict: Demand for Bodoland

The Bodos (only Bodo Kachari is mentioned here) as the most numerous of communities cover the widest area. They are found in every district, but occur in greatest numbers in the lower and middle parts of the Brahmaputra Valley, namely in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. The Bodos’ relative strength in the state as a whole compared to the other Scheduled Tribes has been on the rise since the year 1971. This is in spite of an overall increase in the share of the Scheduled Tribe population in the state. According to 1971 census, the Scheduled Tribe population accounted for nearly 11 percent of the state’s total population whereas the 1991 census count revealed a substantial rise in the Scheduled Tribe population increasing to 12.83 percent. Even if one goes by the mother tongue data, the Bodo speakers have substantially increased their strength in the state’s total population. The Bodo (mother tongue) speaking population accounted for 3.64 percent and 5.75 percent of the total population of the state in 1971 and 1991 census respectively. However, the Bodos continued to be the single most dominant community among all the Scheduled Tribes living in the state constituting 38.49 percent and 40.71 percent of the total Scheduled Tribe population in the respective census years. This reveals that the Bodos have experienced substantial increase in their population in the intervening period of four decades or so.

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15 Ibid. P.2.
Core and periphery of Santhal Population, 1991

DISTRICTS
01. Dhubri
02. Kokrajhar
03. Longoigam
04. Goalpara
05. Barpeta
06. Hailui
07. Kamrup
08. Darrang
09. Sonitpur
10. Lakhimpur
11. Dhemaji
12. Morigaon
13. Nagaon
14. Golaghat
15. Jorhat
16. Sibsagar
17. Dibrugarh
18. Tinsukia
19. Karbi Anglong
20. N. C. Hills
21. Karimganj
22. Hailakandi
23. Cachar

Core and Periphery
- Core: Mean C + 2SD and above
- Periphery: Mean C to Mean C + 2SD

Fig.-2.5a

Core and periphery of Santhal Population, 2001

DISTRICTS
01. Dhubri
02. Kokrajhar
03. Longoigam
04. Goalpara
05. Barpeta
06. Hailui
07. Kamrup
08. Darrang
09. Sonitpur
10. Lakhimpur
11. Dhemaji
12. Morigaon
13. Nagaon
14. Golaghat
15. Jorhat
16. Sibsagar
17. Dibrugarh
18. Tinsukia
19. Karbi Anglong
20. N. C. Hills
21. Karimganj
22. Hailakandi
23. Cachar

Core and Periphery
- Core: 20.3 to 39.5 (Core = Mean C + 2SD and above)
- Periphery: 4.1 to 20.3 (Periphery = Mean C to Mean C + 2SD)

Fig.-2.5b
The movement for a separate Bodo State had its origin in the economic and socio-cultural aspirations of the Bodo people. They to begin with, raised the demand for a separate homeland while still under British rule. However, it was only in the 1930’s that they began to politically organise themselves in order to assert their ethnic identity. The process of the reorganisation of the state of Assam in the post independence era began in the year 1963 when the Naga Hills District and the Tuensang area of North East Frontier Agency became the state of Nagaland. Then in 1969, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi decided to further restructure Assam on a federal basis. After Nagaland became a state and anticipating further changes in the political landscape of Assam, the Bodo leadership in 1967 formed a political party called the Plains Tribal Council of Assam. Since its formation, the Plains tribal Council of Assam has categorically demanded a union territory status for the Bodos and other Plain tribals of the region to be named as Udyanchal. But the demand for Union territory was later changed to the demand for a separate state. The All Bodo Student Union was formed in February 1967 which raised a demand for a separate state for the Bodos.16

The political and ethnic situation in Assam changed dramatically towards the end of 1970s. The issue was the continued influx of “foreigners” particularly from Bangladesh that was perceived to be a serious problem that threatened to alter the demographic and ethnic balance of the state. The “indigenous” Assamese people expressed the fear that unless the “foreigners” are evicted and their influx is checked, they would very quickly turn into an ethnic minority. The 1980’s witnessed a mass movement in Assam led by the All Assam Students Union and the Asom Gana Parishad for the detection and eviction of foreign nationals from the state and the

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granting of greater autonomy. This movement was supported by majority of the Bodo youth who worked along with the All Assam Students Union. The movement came to an end after signing of the historic Assam Accord in the year 1985, and the subsequent elections that enabled the erstwhile All Assam Students Union leaders to form the new Asom Gana Parishad government in Assam in the year 1986. This particular development encouraged raised the hopes of the Bodos for fulfilment of their longstanding demand for achieving separate state for them.

However, as the post-Accord enthusiasm waned, the tribals began to perceive the new government’s stance toward them as not much different from that of earlier ones. As disenchantment spread among the youth, the All Bodo Students’ Union took over the leadership of the Bodos.

As regards preservation of the Bodo language and culture, it is worthwhile to mention that the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, a literary and cultural organization of the Bodos formed in November 1952 had been demanding since 1953 the introduction of Bodo language as a medium of instruction in the schools in Bodo dominated areas. The government of Assam had acceded to the demand after a decade only by introducing the languages at a primary level in 1963 and secondary level in 1968 (Gauhati University recognized Bodo as a Major/ Honours languages in 1977). As a consequence of the threat to their culture due to extensive continued redistribution leading to their squeezing into a much smaller territory than what used to be before, the Bodos demanded separate statehood in the same line as many other tribal groups in the North-East who were by then got separate states on ethno-lingual basis. The

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demand ostensibly flowed from their real or perceived fear of loss of their land, culture and identity.\(^{19}\)

The Bodos constituted 49 percent of Assam’s population in 1947. By the year 1971, only within a span of a little over two decades, their share in the total population dropped phenomenally to 29 percent due to internal and external migration, and the various state restructuring. In addition, the regular entry of migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh adversely affected the Bodo population structure in Assam.

The base of the Bodo economy is land, and while 90 per cent of the Bodos and other tribals depend upon agriculture for their livelihood, almost 70 percent of them are landless today\(^{20}\) due to indebtedness, poverty, and above all the entry of outsiders into essentially tribal areas.

During the Assam movement both the AASU and ABSU demanded the eviction of all non-tribals from essentially tribal belts. Consequently, Clause 10 of the Assam Accord stipulated that “it will be ensured that relevant laws for prevention of encroachment of government lands and lands in tribal belts and blocks are strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers as laid down under such laws”.\(^{21}\)

Several Accords signed by the governments in the North-East, and in particular Assam provided the strengths for the Bodo movement. The accord signed by the government of India with the one time secessionist Mizo National Front of Mizoram(1986), the insurgent Tripura National Volunteers (1988), and above all, the signing of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Pact with the Gorkha National

\(^{20}\) This situation has arisen because the so called protective measures of the tribal belts and blocks provided for in Chapter 10 of the Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act have not been enforced. Chapter 10 of the Act authorised the state government to form tribal belts and blocks in areas of the state to prevent non-tribals from encroaching on tribal land. See Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay), 24 June 1989, p. 1377.
\(^{21}\) Assam Accord, Memorandum of Settlement, p. 3.
Liberation Front of West Bengal (1988) increased the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos for a Bodo land state.²²

2.5.1 The Pre Accord Protest

During 1987 the main source of the turmoil in Assam was the rebellion of the Bodo tribe. The Bodos started demanding separate statehood, since February 1987 by resorting to both violent and non-violent means of long strikes, attacks on police, bombings, arsons, train derailments, and by looting other people. Long Bodo violent outburst forced the state government to call in the army and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). With the action taken by the Bodo extremists, the Bodo dominated areas of Kokrajhar and Udalguri remained in turmoil for several days, killing many innocent people in the region.

The violent activities to overpower the region increased gradually. Many of the non-tribal people in the Bodo dominated areas were forced to flee to neighbouring towns and other parts of the state. Although the Assam state government expressed willingness to further accommodate all tribals' socio-economic demands to prevent any more division of the state, the operations in Bodo dominated areas were intensified allegedly because of reports about armed Bodo training camps located in the forests bordering Bhutan. The entire state of Assam was declared a "disturbed area". The decision was made in response to the deteriorating state of law and order, mainly caused by the militant activities of the separatists. Two hundred and seventy companies of paramilitary forces from four army divisions were dispatched in Assam to push separatists.

The intensity of the revolt against the state and the central government was shown with the changes in the nature of revolt techniques; from harming innocent

people to damaging public properties. For example the Bodos started attacking trains by several explosions. Also continued large number of explosions at different areas of the state capital to represent their strong voice against state government and show their existence in front of central government.

The Bodos continued to agitate for a separate territory as Bodoland to be carved out of Assam. The matter aggravated with the state and the central government discord where state government wanted to go for negotiation with the separatists but the central government strongly expressed faith in the Indian constitution and wanted the separatist surrender their arms to stop the violence. Meanwhile the process of violent representation of there voice of revolt by the Bodos continued with bomb explosions over the region.

On 20th February 1993, a Memorandum of Settlement was signed between the state of Assam, the central government of India, representatives of the All Bodo Student Union and the Bodo People's Action Committee. Rather than acceding directly to the demand of the Bodo Tribe for a separate homeland, the Memorandum of Settlement called for the creation of a 40-member Bodoland Autonomous Council and a Bodoland Executive Council with 200 villages and 25 tea gardens under its jurisdiction. An agreement on the immediate implementation of the Memorandum of Settlement was concluded between the state government and the Bodoland People's Party on July 1993.

2.5.2 Post Accord Conditions

Although in the month of February, 1993 the federal government and the Bodos signed an accord to reportedly end the insurgency, the situation did not improve substantially because the Bodoland Autonomous Council was given

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23 ‘Chronology for Bodos’ Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland
exclusive power over 38 subjects within its jurisdiction such as education, forests, health, land revenue and others. The General Council and Bodo-land Executive council were made responsible for running the administration of Bodoland Autonomous Council area. The strongest reaction against the signing of the Accord was received from none other than the Bodoland Security Force. They opposed the accord as it did not fulfil all the objectives for which movement was geared.\textsuperscript{24}

Soon after the accord was signed, armed activities of the outlawed Bodo security Force demanded that "Bodoland" be "liberated" and went ahead with brutal plan of attacking non-Bodo communities. Instead the violent clashes between members of the separatists and non-Bodo people continued at Kokrajhar serving an ultimatum to the state government for the demarcation of their "homeland" boundaries. They also kept continuing mass movement in the separatist dominated areas of small towns of would-be Bodoland in Assam by closing schools and universities functioning.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{2.5.3 The Genesis behind Conflict}

The Bodo were migratory cultivators shifting from one place to another in search of fertile land which was one of the causes that the British Government during the colonial era did not grant permanent land rights to them. Gradually many Bodo people lost their land because of tremendous growth of population.\textsuperscript{26}

Both the communities, the Bodos and the Santhals, had been living in peace in the area for over a century. The territory earmarked for the Bodo Autonomous Council encompasses the contiguous geographical areas between the Sankosh River and Mazbet/ Pansoi River, which roughly mark the western and eastern boundaries on the northern bank. The more complex southern border of the Bodo Autonomous

\textsuperscript{24} Patra, Op.cit.
Council, often impinging on nontribal areas, appears to have been left unspecified. Comprising 2,750 villages and several towns, the Bodo Autonomous Council included 25 tea plantations.\textsuperscript{27} A benchmark for the inclusion of areas in the Bodo Autonomous Council was that the Bodos should constitute at least 50 percent or more of a village’s population. However, villages with lesser Bodo population have also been included to ensure territorial contiguity.\textsuperscript{28} 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 majority areas and thereby get them included into the Bodo Council and widen its territory.\textsuperscript{29}

2.5.4 Bodo-Muslim Conflict

Given the desire to create ethnically more homogenous areas with Bodos dominating in the entire Bodo Autonomous Council, the first target of the conflicts were directed to the Muslim community living in the area. The continued mass movement by the All Assam Students Union that begun in 1980s to evict the “foreigners” to which the Bodo Students Union was a party, provided the background for an onslaught on the Bengali Muslims. The first major incident of an ethnic conflict between the Bodo and Muslim communities in the region took place in October 1993.

Bodo separatist set fire to the houses of Bengali-speaking Muslim settlers in the countryside in the district of Kokrajhar. Several people were injured, 7,000 were left homeless and four villages were burned to the ground that displaced several people. To restore order and combat the rioting between Bodo separatists and the native Assamese population that followed the event, ten truckloads of army troops

\textsuperscript{27} "Tea Workers Oppose Bodo Accord", \textit{The Hindu}, 7\textsuperscript{th} March 1992, p.4.

\textsuperscript{28} George, Op. cit.

and hundreds of paramilitary troops were deployed in the state. The Bodo separatists continued attacking Muslim villages at lower Assam’s Kokrajhar and Barpeta districts. The armed Bodo separatists also opened fire at Muslim immigrants at the relief camps.

**2.5.5 Changing Demands**

Although the accord was signed demarcating the areas, the Bodos however demanded 515 villages to be included in the autonomous Bodoland area and that the influx of the Bangladeshi migrants should be curbed. The government excluded the villages from the original deal due to national security concerns. The massacre at the relief camps continued and prompted more than 54,000 people, mostly Muslims, to flee their villages and head towards cities such as Guwahati or Barpeta. The Indian government had sent 3000 additional troops to Assam and admitted that lapses in the state administration and the lack of adequate police forces led to the massacre of over 70 Bangladeshis at a relief camps.

Indian Government on the other hand had talks with Bhutan government and received the permission to allow Indian army officials to enter Bhutan’s territory to destroy bases suspected of harbouring Bodo militants. Subsequently Bodos continued killing non- Bodos, police and security forces and bombing on public properties like trains. As a result Assam government asked Central government to close the Indo-Bhutan border to check the cross-border movements of militants and additional troop deployments.

**2.6 Bodo-Santhal Conflict**

The move towards getting a larger territory included within the Bodo Autonomous Council triggered a conflict with the Santhals in the next phase after the conflict with the Muslims. The conflict took an ugly turn in the month of May 1996,
in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts. Over 100,000 Santhals were rendered homeless as their houses were burnt and another 100,000 fled to temporary camps. The clashes reportedly started after the killing of 3 Bodo girls by Santhals.

The army launched operation against the Bodo bases in Bhutan in the month of August. However they continued violence under the aegis of All Bodo Student Union, marched near the Parliament building, through explosions in trains and on railway tracks, railway bridge, bombing on courthouse, blowing up of two bridges, setting fire on government buildings in the region connecting main land to the state of Assam. As a result the government had to send 5000 additional troops into Assam to deal with the violence. Meanwhile All Bodo Student Union closed down Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts and other Bodo-dominated areas.

A meeting was held between the representatives of the federal and Assam governments and six Bodo groups, including the body that governs the Bodo district, which discussed the implementation of the 1993 Bodo accord where the government rejected the creation of a separate Bodo state and proposes that a working group be established. The violence on innocent villagers, strikes, and explosion of several public properties, continued as the protest against government.

Second Bodo-Santhal conflict started in April 1998. Where Bodos reportedly kill Santhal tribe in Kokrajhar district. Some 10,000 people flee. Four days earlier, two Bodos were killed and around 100 of their houses were burnt by Santhals.

Bodos allegedly killed several members of the Santhal community, planned several bomb blasts in different parts of the region. Members of the Santhal tribe kill 11 Bodos in Kokrajhar district, reportedly in response for a Bodo attack against them last week. Hundreds of Bodos and Santhals fled their villages and take shelter in refugee camps. Bodo-Santhal violence resulted Santhal houses burnt and several
Santhal deaths in Kokrajhar district. Over 100,000 people are homeless and taking shelter in refugee camps reported lack of food and the spread of diseases. As a protest to violence more than 1000 Santhals demonstrate in Guwahati demanding that the government provide them with proper weapons to protect themselves against Bodo attacks.

The Bodos reportedly killed several Santhals at a relief camp in Kokrajhar district. Bodos attacked a Santhal relief camp at Balegaon in Gossaigaon subdivision an Adivasi woman; they also burned 190 Santhal homes, in Koksuguri, Surendrapur and Sapkata villages in the subdivision. In turn the Adivasis burn down 10 Bodo huts.

Bodos extensively started violence all over the region by setting fires in market places, killing non-Bodo people, security guards, military troops. They killed several Muslims and Adivasis staying in relief camps, torching huts of relief camps, and several bomb attacks all over the region.  

What started with specific attacks on Muslims of Bengali Descent slowly engulfed other non-Bodo communities like the Bengali Hindus and the Adivasis. Unlike in the case of some of the previous ethnic pogroms in Assam, this time the pattern of violence appeared to be very calculated. The Bodo militants first targeted the Muslims of Bengali descent in 1993-94. Then in 1995-96, they started attacking the Bengali Hindus and finally raised voice against Santhals on 1996 and 1998.

Subsequently the Bodo Autonomous Council was signed which covered nearly 2,300 sq km in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang, Mangaldai and Sonitpur districts on the northern bank of Brahmaputra in Lower Assam. The Bodo accord had fixed the Sankosh river and the Majbat/ Pansoi river as the western and eastern boundaries of the Bodo Autonomous Council and excluded 10 km of the

India-Bhutan border belt to the north from its jurisdiction. The fresh demarcation has included all villages in the tribal belts, blocks, reserve forests and Scheduled tribe Assembly Constituencies within the Bodo Autonomous Council to form a compact area. The demand of 515 more villages was rejected by State Government. The State Government took the position that the villages could not be given away as Bodo constituted less than 2 percent of total population. Hence the Bodo continued their revolt until the next Accord was signed.

On February 10, 2003, the central government, the Bodo Liberation Tigers and the state government signed a new Bodo Accord for creation of a ‘Bodo land Territorial Council’ under modified provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution with its extension over The Bodo land Territorial Council was to comprise four new districts, viz., Kokrajhar, Baska, Siring and Udalguri, to be created by reorganising the existing ones. Initially, the Bodo land Territorial Council would comprise 3,082 villages.

The Accord signed between the central and the state governments and the Bodo land Territorial Council includes details of the steps to be taken for the protection of the rights of the non-Bodos. As per the Memorandum of Settlement, the creation of the Bodo land Territorial Council would not take away the rights and privileges enjoyed by any citizen of India with respect to his land at the commencement of Bodo land Territorial Council, nor bar any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by way of transfer. Such citizens are eligible for bonafide acquisition of land within the Bodo land Territorial Council area. As per Clause 4.4 of the Memorandum of Settlement, the language and medium of instruction in educational institutions will not be changed without the

approval of the state government. It further stated that Bodo language would be the official language of the Bodo land Territorial Council subject to the condition that Assamese and English would also continue to be used for official purposes. Moreover, the Bodo land Territorial Council would be the only tribal council in the country to have reservations of seats for non-tribals.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Fig: 2.6a}

\textbf{Fig: 2.6b}

The Council now comprises an area where the Bodos are clearly in a minority and the non-Bodos are apprehensive about it.\textsuperscript{34} The area under the Bodo land Territorial Council jurisdiction is called the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{The Telegraph}. February 11, 2003, p. 18 (Northeast)

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{The Hindu}. ‘Bodoland Territorial Council to Come into Being Tomorrow’ December 6, 2003.
consists of four contiguous districts-Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang, and Sonitpur-an area of 27,000 sq km (35 percent of Assam). The mushrooming of other community militant groups in Assam as a repercussion to these conflicts is now increasing in number. The Bengali Hindu formed their group, Bengali liberation tigers, Adivasis formed Adivasi Cobra Militants of Assam and Muslim Fundamental organisations formed Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam, Muslim United liberation Front of Assam.

Nonetheless, inter-ethnic clashes in the Bodo heartland of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon displaced a large number of people belonging to nearly all communities. At one stage, the number of Internally Displaced Persons reached more than 3 lakhs. It should also be mentioned here that the Bodo-Muslim ethnic violence that occurred in October 1993 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 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 returned to their villages in 1997 with a small amount of returnees grant provided by government of India. However, in 1998 the conflict again started between the two groups resulting in the displacement of 48,556 families consisting of 314,342 villagers. Till April 2005, in Kokrajhar only, around 126,263 inmates were living in 38 state sponsored relief camps.

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35 Wikipedia, on Bodoland.
camps in the district. Significantly, some of these conflict-induced Internally Displaced Persons 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 Internally Displaced Persons do not get their rations for months together. However, the official position of the Assam Government indicate only 33,362 displaced people who were left in the camps of Kokrajhar district and 74,123 had left the camps in Gossaigaon district.

In the Kokrajhar sub division number of inmates in the relief camps has indeed decreased from 41,999 to 28,961 by August 2006. Little more than one-third are children and two thirds consist of adults. However, we could not verify the number of Internally Displaced Persons as given by the district administration. Still the number of Internally Displaced Persons is quite large despite settlement of the Bodo issue. The leadership of the Bodoland movement now leading the Bodoland Autonomous Council as well as a part of the present Congress led coalition government of Assam. It seems they have given utmost priority to the rehabilitation of the ex-insurgents whereas resettlement and rehabilitation of the Internally Displaced Persons continues to enjoy a low priority as an issue in the political agenda of the state government as well as the Bodoland Autonomous Council. Although the government reports are claiming decrease in the number of the inmates of these camps but it was found during the field work that these displaced people are rather being forced to leave the camps. Many tribal leaders allege that stopping rations by the administration is used as a tactic to force these people out of the camps. The Muslims of Bengali origin chased out by the Bodo rebels in 1994 are living in pathetic conditions in some places of Assam. Near Bijni on the National Highway, nearly 8,000 such Muslims live in huts on both sides of the National Highway no. 37.
The life of the Internally Displaced Persons living in the camps in Assam has been miserable. Most of them do not get adequate food, nutrition and proper medical care. Children of these camps are deprived of formal education and health care services. Though, some receive food aid, but it often arrives sporadically and insufficient in quantity and nutrition. Thus losing their possessions like land, home and livelihood live in a dehumanised condition.\textsuperscript{36}

2.7 Concluding Statement

Fight for territorial supremacy was one of the triggering factors for the Bodo-Santhal riots in 1996. Both communities had been living in peace in the area for decades. But, with the signing of the Bodo Accord in February 1993 between the All Bodo Students Union and the Centre came the new autonomous structure called the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). Only those villages with 50 per cent Bodo population were to be included into the BAC. This provision is generally believed to have encouraged a section of Bodos, including armed militants of different hues, to attempt ethnic cleansing - driving out the non-Bodos and converting vast stretches into Bodo majority areas. The divide today between the two communities is more than complete. The demand for Bodoland and issues like protest against Muslim, Bengalis and Santhals in the region reveals that the Bodos adopted the method of achieving their demand by the means of “ethnic cleansing” and “violence”. The ensuing clash between ethnic groups has left many homeless and without the social support base which they enjoyed before the conflict erupted. The Santhals, due largely to their immigrant status and lacking political and economic resources, were naturally the worst hit. There is a still a lack of clarity about the total area of Bodoland Territorial Council; the number of villages included and in future the villages might get included

within the council, its total population and ‘ethnic mix’ of that area. The ‘ethnic mix’
comprises the Hindu Assamese, the Adivasis, the Hindu Bengali and the Muslim
communities. All these communities have a reason to be apprehensive on the decision
taken in support of Bodos forming Bodoland Territorial Council and extending its
area by including the villages with less than 50 percent of Bodo population to form
contiguous region. As they view the land equally as their homeland. The setting up of
the Bodoland Territorial Council, without clarifying these issues, and removing these
apprehensions, is likely to be one of the most problematic aspects of the functioning
of the Bodoland Territorial Council. Given the violence that marked the agitation in
all its phases, a resumption of similar sectarian violence for fulfilling further future
demands is very much on the cards.

Although the confrontation has taken an ‘ethnic’ dimension and the
Memorandum of Settlement speaks about the Bodos forming Bodoland Territorial
Council fulfilling the economic, educational, and linguistic aspirations and the
preservation of the land rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the people
residing in the region, are likely to be exploited by the Bodos against the minority on
all aspects of life.

The minority communities who are at the receiving end over the region now
started to retaliate by mushrooming up their own militant groups’ like Bengali Hindu
formed there group Bengali liberation tigers, Adivasis formed Adivasi Cobra
Militants of Assam and Muslim Fundamental organisations formed Muslim United
Liberation Tigers of Assam, Muslim United liberation Front of Assam, all these
groups are now better equipped to resist Bodo extremists. The Bodo movement has
paved the way for the minorities to follow the same lines drawn by the Bodo
extremists and show their retaliation to Bodo autonomy over the region.
Santhals are the most badly affected by conflict among all other minor communities. Presently they are in the most worsen state with lack of social development with poor economic background. Many of them have faced displacement twice within a short period of time and are staying in relief camps for more than a decade. The resettlement and rehabilitation of the devastated Santhals is still a low priority issue in the political agenda of the state government as well as Bodoland Territorial Council.

The significant issue that is addressed in this research however does not relate to the cause and the solution to the problem. The basic issue is the impact of the conflict on women in a situation of ethnic unrest, displacement, fear and uncertainty of the future. The Santhal women are of particular interest as they are in the receiving end of the ethnic clash in the wake of the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council.

As far as the tribal population is concerned, this segment is highly concentrated in three major pockets in Assam: lower part of northern Brahmaputra valley mostly inhabited by the Bodos, Rabhas and the Tiwa communities; in the south central parts considering of the two hill districts (North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong) of Assam where the Karbis and the Kacharis dominate and the third pocket is located in the north-eastern corner (Dhemaji district) of Assam which too contain a sizeable proportion of the Bodos in the total Scheduled Tribe population.

The Scheduled Caste population is highly concentrated in the southern districts of the Barak valley. The two other areas of their concentration are found in Morigaon in the central part and Bongaigaon district in the western part of the state.

On the other hand, the Non-Scheduled population is distributed all over the state though the extent of their dominance is inversely related to the areas of concentration of the Scheduled Tribes. The most interesting aspect of the ethnic
composition of Assam relates to the fact that the Scheduled Tribe population is
distributed both in hills as well as in the plains. The Bodo Tribes are by and large
confined to the northern bank of the Brahmaputra Valley.

At the state level, the share of the Scheduled Tribe population increased
rapidly during the period 1971-91, but declined subsequently. The Bodo population
too increased its share in the total as well as in the Scheduled Tribe segment in the
same period. The increase in the share of the tribal population as also of the Bodos
appears to be due to high natural increase in their population. This increase in the
proportion of the Scheduled Tribe as well as that of the Bodos has been responsible in
a relative decline in the share of the Non-Scheduled population over the period due
largely to lower natural increase in its population.

The history of Santhal migration into Assam reveals aspects of their spatial
concentration and clustering in the state. Ethnically a tribe and recognised as a
Scheduled tribe in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal, the Santhals who were
brought to work in the tea gardens of Assam in early 19th Century are not recognised
as a Scheduled tribe in Assam. To begin with the Santali immigrants were almost
exclusively confined to the gardens; but later their descendants formed a sizeable
chunk of the population in the districts of Darrang, Sonitpur, Nagaon, Jorhat,
Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Cachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj and Tinsuhiis districts in upper
Assam where the tea gardens were located. But later these ‘tea tribes’ moved to lower
Assam too and were found in significant numbers in Kokrajhar and Bongaigon
districts too.

The Santhal territory in the mainland remains little disturbed as far as their
cores were concerned. Even the periphery remains highly compact revealing little
distribution of the Santhal population in the mainland. However, there appears to be
significant redistribution of Santhal immigrants in Assam as the initial livelihood available to them in the tea gardens has dwindled in scope forcing them to disperse themselves into a vast territory. Significantly, their core of concentration lies away from the major areas of tea cultivation and is now located in Kokrajhar district and the adjoining areas. The Santhals now are a largely cultivating group and have diversified their livelihood systems in the wake of demographic increase in their population and limited opportunities in the tea gardens which are less labour intensive than before.

The Bodos who were far more widespread in their territorial distribution have also been subject to tremendous redistribution and are now confined to a much smaller territory in the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. At the district level, the Bodo population shows extreme clustering in just three districts- Goalpara, Kamrup, and Darrang (eight districts in 2001, after reorganisation of these three districts) located in lower Brahmaputra valley. These three (undivided) districts have experienced unprecedented rise in the proportion of the Bodo population during 1971-91 decades, a fact that cannot be simply explained by natural increase alone.

The redistribution of both the communities- the Bodos and the Santhals brought them face to face as the cores and peripheries of the two communities coincided significantly. It is this accident of history in the peopling of Assam that promoted one of the most serious ethnic conflicts for the political control over a territory. The ethnic clash between the two groups left many dead, homeless and without a sustainable livelihood. The impacts of the conflict, long after the settlement, have continued to affect all sections of the people in the territory.