THE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT AND REHABILITATION:

A STUDY OF REANGS IN MIZORAM

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The state fails those people most who are deprived of the basic human rights for reasons over which they have no control. The agonies of the unfortunate people, who are uprooted from their own place owing to some incomprehensible phenomenon, have always cast a deep shadow over the efficacy of the political structure called the ‘State’. They are the hapless internally displaced persons. The definition of this term is aptly given in “The UN Guiding Principles On The Internally Displaced Person”, which says “......internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, or in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international territory”. Anyhow, these displaced people are deprived of their human rights owing to their tormentors’ overbearing strength and the lackadaisical attitude of the governmental machineries both at the place of their original residence and at the place where they are forced to seek refuge to.

The phenomenon of internal displacement has affected a large number of countries experiencing violent clashes, inter-ethnic conflicts, or state-sponsored oppression of the minority communities and violation of human rights. As per a report published in 2008 there were around 26 million internally displaced persons around the world. An internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who is compelled and coerced to flee his or her home but who would not cross over his/her country’s border and seek refuge in a foreign country. They are often referred to as refugees, although they do not fall within the current legal definition of a refugee.

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It is difficult to ascertain the correct definition of the concept ‘Internally Displaced Persons’. People may be forced to flee from their homes because of war (civil or international) disasters (natural or man-made), development (construction of dams or urban clearance). Still the definition provided in the General Principles on Internal Displacement appears to be the most inclusive one. In India internal displacements are principally caused by man-made factors and they can be categorised into two groups; development induced and strife induced. “Displacement due to social and political strife is massive.”

Homeland often becomes a source of inter-ethnic conflicts. The most primitive human urge to establish control over the existing or potential homeland necessarily leads to violent clashes either between a non-tribal (viewed as intruders by the second group) group and a tribal group or between two aggressive and hostile tribal communities. In most of the cases the minority group is driven out from that assumed homeland. As an inevitable consequence of that, large scale displacement takes place. “The urge to protect an existing homeland against the homeland claims of the rival group, the projects of creating a new homeland or the fear that one ethnically defined group’s homeland or a part of it can be claimed by another are typically the subtexts of these conflicts.”

In the last half 1980s, inter-ethnic conflicts and Indian Government’s pro-active counter-insurgency operations and secessionist movements by some militant groups were responsible for wide spread internal displacements especially in the north-eastern region of India. The affected areas were Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. In northern part of India, Jammu and Kashmir too experienced similar problem. Political extremism caused internal displacement in states like Chhatisgarh, and a portion of Bihar.

The present study will address this problem in the context of forced displacements of the Reang people from the state of Mizoram. The Reangs in North East India are facing such ordeal since the late eighties of the last century. They are one of the most unfortunate

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5. India: large numbers of IDPs are unassisted and in need of protection in Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: 3 May 2007 http://www.internaldisplacement.org/assets/library/Asia/India/pdf/india-overview-may07.pdf Accessed on 23 May 2013
internally displaced persons in this region. In 1997 more than 43,000 Reangs were forced to migrate from Mizoram to Tripura and Assam and until the turn of this century, 7000 of them were languishing in make-shift camps in forest areas of Riflemara, Kanchinalla, Ramnathpur, Kalapahar, Bagcherra, Baruncherra, Chaulkhauri near Hailakandi districts of Assam and Mizoram border. During the same time a large number of Reang (Bru) families living in Mizoram started arriving in Kanchanpur Sub-Division under North Tripura District since 29/10/1997. The influx continued mainly for about a year covering period from 29th October, 1997 to end of September, 1998.6 These Reang displacees had come in groups. The largest numbers of Reangs (Approximately 35000) are living in Kanchanpur camps in North Tripura under dismal conditions. Reangs were provided shelter in 6 Relief Camps in two areas –one on the western side of Jampui Hills in the nearby areas of Dasda – Anandabazar road and on the eastern side of Jampui Hill in the nearby areas of Damcherra-Khedacherra road. Most populous camp is at Kashirampur (Naishingpara). Other camps are Longtharaikami (Ashapara), Hezacherra (all on Dasda Anandabazar road), Kaskau, Hamsapara, and Khakchang (all are on Damcherra-Khedacherra road). Ironically the state government termed internally displaced persons as “migrants” and not as Internally Displaced Persons, in accordance with the definition of UN Human Rights Charter.

Mizoram had always being a state dominated by the Christians Mizos. They had started unleashing terror tactics for unsettling the minority Bru community. Under the impact of large scale violence against them the Brus had to flee their villages and ran for their lives. They took shelter in North Tripura and a small group took refuge in Assam. The Brus were tortured, their properties destroyed and the Bru women were raped. So they had no option but to quit. They became internally displaced. The Mizoram police instead of protecting the Reangs had instigated the Mizo youth to attack them. Even the Government of Mizoram ignored their plight and the officials supported the opinion of the then Mizoram Chief Minister who had said that the dissatisfied Brus from Mizoram, can very well stay back in Tripura since originally the Brus/Reangs belong to Tripura.7

But what was the reason behind such exodus? The Reang or BRU community was extremely marginalised and persecuted in Mizoram and were deprived of all kinds of social, cultural and in particular political rights. The Reangs in Mizoram had existed in a more or less submissive manner owing to the attitude of distrust shown by the majority Mizo community towards them. For quite some time sporadic communal skirmishes between the dominant Mizo Community and the oppressed Bru people in Mizoram in various forms took place and simmering tension ran strong beneath the apparent calm, displacement of the Brus to North Tripura also continued. After Lok Sabha Polls in 1996 the relationship between the Mizo and Reang community nosedived. The Mizo National Front tried to induce the Aizawl District election officer to omit a large number of names belonging to the Reang people from the voters list. The Reangs revolted. As a result of this deprivation the leaders of the community had asked for an “Autonomous District Council” and allotment of one legislative seat exclusively for them from the Mizoram Government. The demands were forthrightly dismissed by the later and the majority Mizo Community started intimidating and threatening the Reang people per say. Moreover an alleged murder of a Mizo Forest Guard by the Reang people created an acute conflict situation. This led to the attack on the later under some pretext or other. Even ladies belonging to that community were not spared. Rape of underprivileged Reang Women was quite common in Mizoram.

The Mizoram Government tried to underplay the developments. According to them a few thousands Brus fled to Tripura apprehending attacks on their community. The government officials thought that there were some minor incidents. While the Bru National Union leaders claimed that people of their community got killed, their women got raped and their houses were torched. The officials described all such allegations as false. So they felt that the veracity of such charges needed to be examined if the actual situation is to be assessed.

The present study has attempted to explore the background of this phenomenon of internal displacement and in the process the researcher tried to get some ideas about the components involved in the study. Historically speaking, the Reangs were widely known as ‘Tuikur’ in Mizoram. But the Reangs claim that their mythical ancestor was ‘Bruha’, and subsequently they came to be known as Bru people. Originating from Rangamati region (now in Bangladesh) and Chittagong Hill Tracts they migrated to Tripura and Mizoram and settled
down there as permanent residents. They have two major groups, viz., Mechka and Malchhai and several sub groups under them.\textsuperscript{8}

The present study aims at making an in-depth assessment of the real situations primarily in the Relief camps in North Tripura. The principal objective will to be to evaluate the status of human rights of the Reang community against the historical backdrop mentioned so far. The brutal majoritarianism of the Mizo people has displaced the Reangs and the aftermath holds a still pathetic future for the tribe. There lies the need for a comprehensive study of the position of these hapless people and their future in the context of the recommendation of the UN, i.e., the UN Guiding Principles on the Internally Displaced Persons. By human rights one may mean those minimal rights that individuals need to have against the state or other public authority by virtue of their being members of human family, irrespective of any other consideration. Such as civil and political rights, e.g. right to life and liberty, freedom of expression, right to vote and the right to participate in the public affairs and equality before the law; and economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to participate in culture, the right to be treated with respect and dignity, the right to food, the right to work, and the right to education.\textsuperscript{9} Presumably the violations of human rights are most common in case of internal displacement caused by inter-ethnic conflicts. This research will try to throw light on all the aspects mentioned above with reference to the existence of internally displaced Reangs.

The study has attempted to explore the role of both the host society and the society from which the Brus had been displaced in facilitating their return to their place of natural habitat. It hopes to unravel the underlying political complexities involved in the bargaining and negotiation process between the Government of Tripura and Mizoram Government. The important role of the Union Government as mediator can hardly be underestimated.

Finally, the study attempts to make an assessment of the extent to which the Bru IDPs were allowed to enjoy their socio-politico-economic rights as well as cultural freedom as all

\textsuperscript{8} Subrata Kumar Dutta op.cit p..20.

Others Indian citizens can enjoy. The objective is to find out whether they get the opportunity to participate in the public affairs of Mizoram.

**Brief Overview of Existing Literature.**

One of the principal dilemmas in studying the present problem is to make avail sufficient literature on the conditions of the Reang community. However, any endeavour to present a brief overview of existing literature in this field should start with a mentioning of the book entitled *Internal Displacement in South Asia:*\(^{10}\) edited by Paula Banerjee, Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury and Samir Kumar Das. As the title suggests the book is a comprehensive effort to address different kinds of forced displacements in different countries of South Asia. It starts with an illuminating foreword by Francis Deng, the then Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, and Roberta Cohen. The book contains nine chapters revealing the ordeals of different IDPs in different countries. The editors in their brief introduction highlight the different case studies mentioned in the nine articles and the nature of vulnerabilities of the IDPs. Mossarat Quadeem’s article "Afghanistan: The Long Way Home" presents a historical background of conflict-torn Afghanistan starting from the Soviet invasion in 1979 and the account of 400,000 internally Displaced People by mid-90s. The Talibanisation of Afghanistan further worsened the situation. Atta ur Rahaman in his article “Pakistan: Development and Displacement” referred to development induced displacement in the context of construction of different dams like Mangla, Tarbela etc. and the construction of roadways projects. His reference to conflict-induced displacement involving the Kalpars and Bugti tribes was quite informative. Samir Kumar Das in his article "India: Homelessness at Home" mentions the fragile relevance of the UN’s Guidelines in India’s politico-legal context. Only in the late 1980s, some concrete efforts became evident with regard to resettlement of the project affected population. But, those drafted principles were not legally binding. He critically discussed the nature of displacement mentioning the categories of different types of displacements. Subir Bhaumik in his essay "India’s North East: Nobody’s People in No-Man’s Land" gives a wide-ranging account of conflict-induced displacement in Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. He, as a seasoned journalist, presented an intricate framework of multi-ethnic arrangement reflecting deep-
rooted animosity among the communities in India's North-East. Displacement here very often took place on ethnic, communal and linguistic lines. "Bangladesh: Displaced and Dispossessed" by Meghna Guha Thakurata and Suraiya Begum reveals five broad categories of displacement. Rampant floods and land erosion had caused large scale displacement in Bangladesh. The Chittagong Hill Tracts crisis involving the Chakmas created a critical conflict situation which resulted in an exodus of huge number of IDPs. The complex political scenario of Burma/Myanmar was critically analysed in the article "Burma: Escape to Ordeal" by Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury. Myanmar is a typical multi-ethnic nation of South Asia. It was very much a British Colony for more than a century. However decolonisation actually could not ensure the emergence of a strong democratic Burma. In 1958, the military slowly started taking hold of the country. And, in 1963, the coup d'état resulted in full-fledged military rule. Army’s effort to control and if possible to destroy the ethnic opposition by Karen, Karenni and Mon communities resulted in large-scale internal displacements in Myanmar. Manesh Srestha and Bishnu Adhikary in their article mention about three kinds of IDPs. The first is development-induced ones, the second one being the results of Kamiyas or bonded labours, and the third category includes the IDPs who are displaced due to conflicts between the Maoists and the State. Joe William in his essay "Sri Lanka: A Profile of Vulnerability" wrote about the hapless victims of long drawn ethnic clashes between the Sri Lankan people, the State as a whole and the Tamil insurgents under LTTE. The gruesome battle was fought in the peninsula of Jaffna. Paula Banerjee’s article "Resisting Erasure: Women IDPs in South Asia" is an extremely illuminating account about the wretched conditions of women victims of internal displacement in the South Asian countries. Practically, the conditions in the relief camps for IDPs are atrocious and hardly any privacy is available to the women inmates. In Burma, among one million IDPs, 80% are women and children the women are forced to work as labourers or are made to perform odd jobs. Rape of ethnic minority women became rampant.

Similarly, Sanjib Baruah’s ‘Durable Disorder’11 presents a critical view of nation and state-building in India's Northeast in the post-colonial scenario within a complex theoretical framework. He narrated the developmental endeavours in Arunachal Pradesh against the

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backdrop of overbearing presence of China across the border, and related concern for security. His attention to the tensions emanating from the confrontation between the Naga outfits and the Indian State, revealed the threat to pan-Indian nationalism. The post-Chinese aggression period saw the regionalisation of north east and the birth of a kind of cosmetic federalism. The seven state units (Later on Sikkim has also been included in India’s Northeast) were brought together into an institutional arrangement, the North Eastern Council (NEC). The endeavour for development for creating a federal culture was challenged by large scale immigration to the ‘northeast’ from the rest of the country. That resulted in wide-spread resentment among the indigenous population and the same virtually forced the Indian state to render significant cultural and other concessions to the tribal communities in those states. The very name of those states suggests that. At the same time, the Government of India always tried to obtain military solution to all kinds of insurgency. Democratic dialogue became a backburner. As a result of that the insurgency-ridden northeast became a state within state with almost a parallel political system controlled by the militants. Without a sustainable peace process Baruah feels that, the counter-insurgency efforts for containing militancy are likely to fail. According to him, apart from economic underdevelopment, the lackadaisical attitude of the Government of India towards the history of this region has also infuriated the indigenous population. In the third part of the book, the author addressed the incongruities in the land holding system in Assam in particular and the gross injustice involved in the post colonial arrangements. His pertinent question is ‘whose land was it anyway?’ His account of the Naga conflict provided valuable information about the strange multiplicity prevailing among the hill people. The upheaval in Manipur was critically explained by the author. He then presented an exhaustive account of the militant movement under ULFA and the involvement of the Assamese civil society. The strong sub national current challenged Government’s policy towards illegal immigrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh). The question of citizenship became the most cardinal one. The depiction of ULFA-SULFA dichotomy is highly thought-provoking. Baruah’s chapter on "Citizens and Denizens" are equally probing. It directly addresses the question of internal displacement.
Blisters on their Feet\textsuperscript{12} edited by Samir Kumar Das, presented an in-depth and critical analysis of the problem of internal displacement in the North-eastern region in India. The articles are based on empirical research. They show how inter-ethnic rivalry, developmental schemes of the Governments, (both central and state) insensitive to the needs and existence of the ethnic minorities and the wrath of the nature, have displaced thousands of helpless people from their place of residence against their will. The first five chapters by seven authors concentrated on Arunachal Pradesh and the types of displacement therein. However most of such cases are development induced barring the case of the Sulungs. They were bonded slaves who were released owing to governmental policy. Altogether eight articles were covering IDPs of Assam. Articles by Nazmin Banu Islam, Aparna Goswami and Baneswar Das, Jyotirmoy Jana highlighted the internal displacements caused by flood and riverbank erosion. Brahmaputra River is primarily responsible for such occurrence in places like Nagaon, Morgaon and Barpeta etc. But a vivid depiction of conflict induced displacements was available in the articles by Makiko Kimura, Biswajit Chakrabarty, Subhash Barman Uddipana Goswami, Abdul Mannan Mazumdar and Barnali Bhattacharjee. In post assembly election scenario in 1983 huge clashes between plain land Assamese and Bodos, between Assamese and immigrant Muslims broke out. The bloody skirmish led to wide spread displacements of 65000 in Nowgong. Some even fled to West Bengal. The Bodo-Adivasi confrontation had always taken an ugly turn. The Nellie massacre was a glaring example. Such inter-ethnic struggles resulted in displacements of not only the Santhal Adivasis but also of a section of Bodos where they are in minority. This is evident in western Assam. Ethnic cleansing force the minority ethnic group to flee but life in relief camps was as bad as it could be. In western Assam even the Nepalese constitute a part of the IDPs. In 1998, it was found that, at least 2,50,000 IDPs were languishing in Assam. In one of the articles, a special mention was made about the Muslim IDPs in Kokrajhar and Chirang in particular. Section-III of the book is on Manipur. Articles were written by K. Gailangam, Ksh. Bimola Devi, Koijam Sethajit, S, Mangi Sing R.K, Ranjan Singh and L. Leiren Singh. This section covers the conflicts between Naga and Kuki tribes and its impact on Zeliangrong community as a lot of people succumbed to this inter-ethnic riot. The

forcible imposition of taxes by the Naga on the Kuki community created tremendous pressure on the later. Riots in Purum Pangaltabi village and its effect on the society therein and the Government’s rehabilitation package were properly described. R.K, Ranjan Singh’s presented the displacement phenomenon owing to the construction of Ithai Barrage. The fourth section of the book refers to the IDPs of Tripura which is directly related to the present study. It is pointed out that, the Reangs who were forcibly uprooted from Mizoram, and who took shelter in Tripura were almost equal to the Reang population in Tripura. Apart from development-induced internal displacement, inter-ethnic riots between the tribal and the migrated Bengali people caused large-scale displacement in Tripura. The make-shift camps where they were putting up were in very bad shape in terms of hygiene and other human amenities. Important case studies were provided in some such articles. Displacement also took place due to the Gumti Hydel Project. The fifth section addresses Northeast India as a comprehensive entity. Of all the articles, one by Mr. Subir Bhaumik systematically discussed the types of displacement in India's Northeast. In explaining inter-ethnic relations, he showed that, in some places the domination is one-sided, while in Tripura and Assam the victims (Bengalis and Adivasis) retaliated and established some control over areas belonging to the indigenous tribes.

A rich source of information has been found in the book Troubled Periphery by Subir Bhaumik. The book unravels the mysteries of India's northeast emanating from the existence of the multi-ethnic composition of the region. He felt that, India's ‘Northeast’ was a British imperial construct which was perpetuated by independent India. An exhaustive historical account was given by him. According to him, the Mongoloid stock of India's Northeast is not culturally or sociologically akin to the mainland India. In terms of religion, it has got its separate identity. Apart from Assam, Manipur and Tripura, ‘Hinduism’ had very little hold and the rest had mostly embraced Christianity, and a section practiced animism. In certain areas, the migrating population adopted the language and religion of the place of their settlement, as it happened in Assam for the Bengalis, the Na-Assamese. However, AASU and then AGP, and finally ULFA raised the ‘foreigners’ issue so strongly that the minority Bengali, Bihari and Marwari people started consolidating themselves under national political

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parties. BJP made inroads in Assam politics. In contrast, all the tribes had one voice against the ‘foreigners’. But, the ULFA wanted its dream to have a multi-lingual independent Assam free from Indian colonialism. The Chinese aggression paved the way for statehood for Nagaland as a policy of containment. Along with Mizoram, Meghalaya earned statehood owing to the resentment of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribes against the Assamese society. Bhaumik pointed out that, the question of land ownership was the principal reason behind ethnic tension. The author explores the issue of language as a highly potent source of inter-ethnic conflict. It is evident in each of north-eastern states. The question of leadership created a deep chasm between the migrants and the ethnic majority in states like Tripura Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram. Even in Meghalaya, the Bengalis are hooted out from their erstwhile position of dominance. Bhaumik has provided an exhaustive analysis of the different dimensions of insurgency in India's Northeast and its varieties. The strategy of Government of India is also critically discussed. The historical origins and the distinct nature of different insurgent movements in the perspective of the India's Northeast's states are explained in details. He felt that, both the migrant settlers and the original inhabitants in that region were displaced either due to inter-ethnic conflicts or development work. For instance, the Dumbar Hydroelectric Project displaced both the Bengali fishermen and tribal families. The author mentioned five reasons for internal displacement, viz., a) development projects; b) violent conflicts; c) counter insurgency operations by the security forces; d) natural calamities; e) grabbing of land by migrating communities. His vindications of the existence of foreign hands behind these insurgencies are quite informative. He had shown how the porous frontier has virtually turned this region into a haven for the drug dealers and the sellers of illegal arms and contraband goods. This further strengthened secessionist forces. He had further narrated how the electoral politics in this region have acquired an extremely complex character owing to the political strategy adopted by national party/parties in entering into covert and overt understanding with the rebel tribal groups for electoral gains and thereby extending the legitimacy of the elected government.

Sanjib Baruah’s cerebral book India Against Itself focuses on the weak federal structure of the Indian democracy, which, in his opinion, tries to stifle the voice of sub-national entity,

thereby giving rise to violent inter-ethnic conflict. He challenges the very process of nation-building in India from a theoretical standpoint. The author refers back to the British colonial history of India to show how the then rulers tried to wean away the plains from the hill kingdoms for weakening the hill people's command over the domain. The British wanted to create a wedge between the Nagas and Ahom people. Baruah’s attention to Assam with regards to problems of immigrants brings to the surface the British design to exploit that region for tea trade. The colonial rulers brought in thousands of immigrants from Bihar, U.P. and Bengal to act as labour in tea plantations. The immigrant labourers were also absorbed in other industries like coal, oil and construction industries. The Muslims of Bengali descent adopted the Assamese language and culture as their own, but the Bengali Hindus were resisting the assimilation process which resulted in a critical inter-ethnic tension. The Assamese started strongly asserting their cultural identity against the onslaught of the immigrant communities. It became a tussle between Assamese sub-nationalism versus the pan-Indian nationalism. The question of language became a strong basis of contestation. The Assamese language was indeed the principal consideration for Assamese cultural and social identity. The conflict came out in open. Baruah divides the sustained conflicts in several phases in a chronological manner. Phase one denoted as the festival of protest. Phase two was one of confrontation. The third phase marked the breakdown of order. The fourth phase contained the contest between the state and the movement. The fifth phase was one of accommodation. In subsequent chapters, the author painstakingly depicts the growth of militant sub-nationalism under ULFA as a potential challenger to Pan-Indian nationalism. The role of civil society of Assam in providing support to this movement was explored. At the same time, Baruah also explained that, the sub-national narrative of ULFA was challenged by the Bodoland movement, which refuses to accept that Assam belongs to the so-called Assamese only. For them, it belongs to the original aborigines like them.

Subrata Kr. Dutta has given an excellent account of the Reang tribe in his book Uprooted Reangs: Strangers in their Motherland.15 He has shown how the Brus (Reangs) suffered in Mizoram in the hands of the majority Mizo community and the Government of Mizoram, as their social, political, cultural and economic rights were violently violated. There were

85000 Reangs living in 75 villages in Mizoram until the first half of the 1990s. While referring to their history, Dutta pointed out that, they were systematically persecuted by the Mizos and 40% of them were forcibly converted to Christianity. The Brus or the Reangs belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of tribes. Their chiefs are known as Rai (Monarch). They are highly social and cordial community. They virtually thrive on jhum cultivation and hardly have any industries of their own. The oppressing Mizo society became extremely hostile towards them and subsequently the names of the Bru people were systematically eliminated from the voters’ list for further isolating them. Their demand for Autonomous Council was forthrightly rejected and there began subsequent torture of the community, resulting in killing of Reang men and even rape of their women. Even eviction notices were served to drive out the Reangs from Mizoram. As a result a section of Reangs fled to the Hailakandi district of Assam and a huge group consisting of around 40,000 Reangs were forced to migrate to North Tripura’s hilly terrain. The author explains the dehumanising conditions of the migrated Reang tribe in the relief camps in Kanchanpur in north Tripura. There has been serious allegation against the Relief Distribution Officers about their insensitiveness and callousness while distributing relief and even about non-availability of relief materials. Owing to extremely unhygienic conditions in the camps the outbreaks of contiguous diseases have turned the camps into potential death traps. Even the basic amenities are not available in the camps. Government of Tripura has failed to ensure proper distribution of relief materials. The author also narrated the growth of Reang militancy under the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF). In this context the role of NHRC, (National Human Rights Commission) Union Government and State Governments was discussed in the book, with regard to the possible return of the Reangs. At the end, he makes an assessment of the human rights situation in general in India's northeast, and refers to the observations of the international society.

The exhaustive analysis on refugees, and their problems and the policies on internal displacement were found in Refugees and Forced Displacement\textsuperscript{16} edited by Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm. The book addressed the issues on international security,
human vulnerability and the role of the state. The book has three parts which are subdivided in sixteen chapters. It dealt with migration, both voluntary and forced, as characteristics of individual and collective actions, refugee flows and human displacement have been a feature and consequences of conflict within and between societies. The authors said that, refugees are, in various contexts, both a cause and a consequence of conflict. The different chapters dealt with refugees as grounds for international action, international relations, refugee protection policies and security issues. The second part addresses internal displacement, return of the IDPs and their resettlement. Erin D. Mooney while describing displacement opines, “Uprooted from their homes, separated from family and community support networks, and shorn of their resource base, internally displaced persons suddenly find themselves stripped of their most basic means of security and survival”17 He referred to the notion of sovereign state’s responsibility for providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons. The chapter also mentioned that the need for an international regime for protecting internally displaced persons. The normative framework for protection becomes all the more necessary in the absence of specific international convention. A chapter by Julie Mertus dealt with sovereignty of the state, gender and displacement from a feminist perspective. She pointed out that approximately 70-80 per cent of the displaced are women and children and the experience of flight and displacement has different implication for male and female members of a population, largely according to the roles they are expected to play in society.

‘Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey’18 edited by Janie Hampton is an excellent document for anyone studying internal displacement. Roberta Cohen has given a detailed picture of recent trends in protection and assistance for internally displaced people. She rightly pointed out that the Guiding Principles are the results of many years of work by a team of international legal experts collaborating with international organisations, regional bodies and NGOs under the direction of the Representative of UN Secretary-General. She highlighted the importance of a perfect definition of internal displacement in this context. It should be, according to her, a coerced and involuntary movement and should remain within

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one’s national border. She emphasised on the new approaches to protection. She felt that, the NGOs have also begun to shoulder responsibilities in situations of internal displacement. She added that one way the international agencies and NGOs alike can effectively manage the risks of engaging in protection work is by banding together and taking joint stand. Jon Bennett in the essay on "Problems and opportunities of displacement" touched upon the issues related to perceptions of displacement. The need for understanding the internally displaced people’s own perception of their plight and the kind of coping mechanisms they use to allay further hardship was highlighted in this essay. The author felt that the power relations should be understood while explaining the problem of displacement since it is rarely an apolitical process for citizens caught up in the struggle for power. James Kunder’s article on IDP children had highlighted the problems of displaced children and the practices by international organisations that effectively benefit them. The article by Susanne Schmeidl presented comparative trends in forced displacement with graphical presentation. Part II of the book provided a exhaustive account of the regional profile. It had covered West Asia, Central and East Asia, Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, North-East Asia, South-East Asia, Central-Asia.

"Unstable Populations, Anxious States:" a book edited by Paula Banerjee, provides an in-depth analysis of conflict induced displacement. Parivelan’s essay "Protection Needs, Current Legal Avenues and New Legal Strategies" claims that, language is one of the pertinent markers of ethnicity. According to the author, the ethnicisation of politics and politicisation of ethnicity have become quite common in modern world. The unequal power structure that exists in a state on that basis can result in inter-ethnic conflict. He effectively described the new legal strategies for handling forced migration. The article "Do the Displaced Have a Right to return?" by Bhavani Fonseka describes the displacement occurring in South Asia. It is mentioned that, a key issue that needs highlighting in South Asia is that not all IDPs own land and therefore are unable to return to one’s own land. A pertinent question needs to be explored and answered. Examples are cited from Sri Lanka. In the absence binding international laws with regard to IDPs, suggestions were made to fall back on International Human Rights Laws. This book has thirteen chapters addressing issues

like humanitarian aspects of borders especially in the East and North East India, and the specific cases of Sri Lanka, Nepal and in general those of South Asia.

The book entitled ‘Forced Migration in North-East India’ was edited by Nilanjan Dutta which addressed the problem from the perspective of media. It has seven sections. It addressed the ever-increasing incidents of internal displacements in India and the urgent protection concerns. The second section dealt with the problems of refugees and the stateless persons in India's northeast involving the Tibetans and Chakmas. The third section by Paula Banerjee discussed the issue of Chin Refugees in Mizoram. These refugees fled Burma (now Myanmar) and settled down in Mizoram. There was huge tension involving the relationship between the Mizos and the Chin refugees. The chapter on Causes and Pattern of IDP movements specifically relates to the present study of internally displaced Brus of Mizoram. Subir Bhaumik’s highly informative article reveals the underlying politics of internal displacement in India's northeast.

Sibaji Pratim Basu's edited book, ‘Forced Migration and Media Mirrors’ is also based on media perspective on forced migration. The editor at the beginning of the book had opined that the media persons may lack the necessary skill and knowledge to deal with these complex situations in many cases. While a social scientist/field researcher may have with him the technical expertise and motivation, to understand the problem in its proper perspective and can make the government of the day sensitized to that problem. His book aimed at bridging the chasm by engaging a host of scholars and journalists to write on forced migration. Several articles in this book have been written on issues of forced migrations in different parts of India.

‘Internal Displacement: Conceptualization and its Consequences’ by Thomas G. Weiss and David A. Korn is an extremely valuable book for anyone interested about this humanitarian crisis. It traces the existence of this phenomenon chronologically on the world map. The authors opined “The phenomenon of internal displacement was real enough. Around the globe millions of people were being forced from their homes by spreading rash of state

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breakdowns, civil wars and other violent disorders, with no assured access to international humanitarian relief and even less prospect of international protection from the worst sorts of abuses.” It describes the international efforts in attaining a solution of these problems and the final birth of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The authors strongly felt that, one of the main barriers to addressing internal displacement was the problem of securing the recognition that this category of victim is automatically entitled to international protection under human rights law, which shields the human dignity inherent in all individuals.

The book, ‘Protecting the Displaced: Deepening the Responsibility to Protect’ edited by Sara E. Davies and Luke Glanville deals with question of protecting the displaced. The question that was raised in this book was about the possible authority that would bear the responsibility of protecting them. In their words “.....Member states in the United Nations 2005 agreed that the ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) principle imposed upon each individual state a primary responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.” The book addressed different types of displacement including those caused by natural disasters. The book referred to the responsibility of the international community to protect the displaced.

After going through the above literature on IDPs in India's 'Northeast', we notice that, any exclusive and in-depth studies on the internally displaced Reangs is virtually absent. Special efforts have not been made to find out the conditions under which the Reangs were forced to flee Mizoram and the role of the Mizoram Government in this regard. The post-displacement scenario in Tripura and Assam camps are not meticulously explored. The absence of an adequate amount of case studies in those books has failed to throw enough light on the status of human rights of the hapless displaced Reangs. The first-hand information about the attitudes of the governments of Tripura and Assam towards the IDPs and their problems are not available in those literatures. No mention has been made about the responses of different social organisations and NGOs and of the civil society per se to

this critical problem. No assessment has been made about the application of the UN Guiding Principles on the Internally Displaced Persons in addressing the problems of the Reangs.

Under the circumstances, we shall attempt to find out answers to the following questions:

First, what are the real sources of the conflict between the Mizo people and the Reangs in Mizoram? Second, whether human rights of the Reangs are violated in the relief camps in Tripura? Third, what are the instrumentalities of the Governments of Tripura in restoring the rights of the Reangs in the relief camps? Fourth, are the Reangs convinced of the efficacy the measures adopted by the Tripura Government? Finally, whether, the greater the marginalisation of the Reang Community in Mizoram the lower is the degree of their human right indices?

This research relied both on survey methods and field research methods. As a research technique, observation in natural setting was heavily depended upon. Sampling was on non-random basis, as availability of respondents was quite irregular owing to the situation in the relief camps. Detailed interviews of the Government officials and political personnel, on the one hand, and the displaced Reangs, on the other, were conducted on the basis of interview schedules. Special emphasis was given to case studies where some of the individual inmates of the relief camps (mainly women) were interviewed with open-ended questions, and sometimes through focussed group discussions. These were supplemented by consultation of libraries and a few primary resources. Journals, e-journals, local and national newspapers were also important sources for information about the latest developments involving the displaced Brus.
Chapter II

The History of Reangs

The Reangs are considered to be one of the most prominent tribal groups in the socio-economic domain of North-east India. Ethnically they have retained their distinct identity notwithstanding the over-bearing presence of larger tribal groups in the states of North-east India. A substantial numbers of tribal communities reside in every nook and corner of that region. Amongst them, Reang tribal community has been able to hold a place of significance in the whole of the tribal communities. “The original home of the Reangs is said to be Mayanithlang in the Lushai Hills. However it was too old a development to be historically ascertained, yet it was assumed that owing to some internal feud and vendetta a few chiefs in the Persons of Tuiloha, Jangiska, Paisika, and Tui Bruha and their entourage left their hearth and home migrated to Tripura and Chittagong many centuries ago”.¹

The Bru tribe has been identified as the outsiders since many years back; subsequently the Government of India had named and recognized them as Reangs. They belong to the scheduled tribe of Tripura. In fact the actual nomenclature of the tribe is “BRU,” but, for some inexplicable reason they came be known as Reangs later. It is indeed a mystery to all, as to how such nomenclature came into being. “Reang” is one of the clans or sub-tribe of the BRU. There are twelve clans in the Bru tribe excluding the Reang clan, such as: (1) Molsoi (2) Meska (3) Raikchak (4) Chorkhi (5) Msha (6) Chongpreing (7) Toimui yaphaoh (8) Tauma yakchwo (9) Nouhkham (10) Wairem (11)Apeto (12) Yakstam.²

However the Mizoram’s Bru Displaced Peoples Forum (MBDPF) leader Mr Bruno Msha could not throw any light on this issue. All that he told the researcher was that there was a lack of unanimity of opinion regarding the nomenclature ‘Reang’. Even the site describing the history of the Bru tribe could not claim with certainty that the name Reang was the name of a tribe and not that of a single person. And in Mizoram, as per available records, the

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Uchoi community is also considered to be a clan under the Bru ethnic group. All Bru people, except a few, have the same faith and belief about it and claim themselves as “Brus”. The community as a whole can mutually understand, without any problem while communicating among themselves in their native tongue, ‘Kau-Bru’. There is no regional dialect related problem in understanding this language even though there are slight tonic differences. In Mizoram, they can speak Mizo and the native tongue. In fact Kau-Bru as a language enables them to talk to the Reang community from Tripura when they come across.3

The Reangs are said to have come first from shan of upper Burman(now in Myanmar) region, in different waves to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Similarly, another group came through the Mizoram Border. Reangs have lived in Mizoram in large numbers from the time of their migration and they still live in Mizoram and a part of them slowly crossed over to Tripura particularly to Kanchanpur, Chawmanu, Kailashar, Ambasa and other place of north Tripura. Reangs settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts moved to south Tripura and concentrated in Udaipur, Belonia, Amarpur, and Gandachara sub-division. There are legends galore. However, scholars say that they were part of the great movement of the Mongoloid populations. Reangs are also found in Assam, migrated from the same region of Burma, particularly in Cachar areas. A large numbers of Reangs still live in Chittagong hill tracts. In Mizoram the Reangs are known as Tuikuk. The Reangs claim that they have originated from the mythical character of Bruha, eldest son of Devtarani and Devalaxmi born out of two stones erected by God. In his journey from Rangamati in Bangladesh to Chittagong Hill Tract he stopped at a point. Subsequently the Reang tribe entered Tripura. At that time, Mahendra Manikya ruled the kingdom of Tripura. The Reang chiefs made many attempts to reach the King to seek asylum. They sought the assistance of his ministers, bureaucrats, and courtiers for help in arranging a meeting with the King but with little result. By this time, they had exhausted their supplies and became desperate to catch the attention of the King and had erroneously committed a serious crime of breaching the Gomti Dam. The King was about to annihilate them for that but the timely intervention of the Queen Gunabati saved them and they started residing in Tripura. The Reangs hail from a mongoloid origin. They belong to Tibeto-Burman group of tribes and in terms of language spoken they come under

3. Ibid
the Bodo group. The Reang, also known as the Bru, are a designated Scheduled Tribe spread through Tripura, Mizoram and Bangladesh. Because of their low socio-economic status, in Tripura they have official classification as a ‘Primitive Tribal Group’, which entitles them to special development and protection measures. The Reangs broadly speaking has two clans a) Molsoi and b) Meska or Mechka which are again subdivided into several sub-clans. Under the Molsoi category there come the Mechka, Mesa, Raichak or Raikachak, Takh Mayakcha, Waring or Wariem, and Charkhi. There are Murchhai, Apet, Nakhya or Nagkham, Chamrong, Darbung, Sajraj, and Reang. Later on all the groups came to be known as Reangs. 4 Even these Reang tribes like to identify themselves as Bru. It has rightly been believed by this Reang tribal community that the term Reang has been taken from another word Borok from Kokborok. These Reang tribes built their houses in the districts of both South Tripura and North Tripura. However a section of the Reang tribes went to Mizoram. 5 In fact the Reangs moved from the eastern side of Aizawl to the western side. In order to carry on the conversation, these Reang tribes use the beautiful dialect of Reang of the famous language Kokborok. It has the origination of the Tibeto-Burmese origin, which often is identified as Kaubru or Kobru. Today they speak Reang that is Kaubru among themselves and with others they speak Dhulian i.e. a mixture of broken Hindi and English. It seems that they don’t have their own script but those who got converted to Christianity use Roman script. The Reangs in Mizoram settled down in the valleys along the Lengai and Teirei rivers in Aizawl district and the Karnafuli flowing through the Western parts of Lunglei and Chhitmuipui districts. 6 Historically it was seen that initially among all the tribal communities the Lusei were the most fearful tribe. In fact there were fifteen tribes which had settled down in Mizoram. Smaller tribes were apprehensive of attack by the Lusei tribe and hence settled down either in deep forest areas or in remote areas in order to avoid confrontation with them. That was applicable to the Reangs too. They had settled in the peripheral areas of Mizoram. 7 However there is another theory about the place of residence of the Reangs. The

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6 Subrata Kumar Dutta: op.cit p.20
7 S.K. Bhattacharyya op.cit. p.153
Bru villages are generally located in the valley near a river or stream. Seldom is a Bru village purely inhabited by Brus situated on the hill top. Most of the Bru villages are located at the low region between the hill ranges. While, the then Lushai Hills remained under the control of large number of Lushai chiefs with their separate jurisdictions having a few villages. There was a vast area of deep forests or Jungle which could not be easily accessed by Lushai. Such places were therefore virtually beyond the administrative control of the Lushai chiefs thus had provided a safe settlement for the Bru immigrants in those inaccessible areas of Mizoram. In fact there is another reason why the Brus used to select village site in low lying area is obviously due to their fondness of river, stream, and brook from where they can easily procure fish, crabs, snails etc. for curry. Also a settlement in a low place gives them a less tiresome task of carrying jhum products and collection of daily needs like fire-wood, jungle fruits, root tubers and so forth. However, nowadays owing to the scarcity of arable land and modernization the Brus gradually give up their typically traditional vocation and primordial way of living and have started opting for well built house in big villages. Now, most of the Bru Villages in Mizoram are located in remote areas. Unfortunately, they cannot be linked by at least a motor able road; and those villages which are linked by motor able road are also linkable only during the dry seasons. They are; therefore, compelled to remain aloof from the mainstream of the Mizoram’s society. The Reangs are primarily an agrarian tribe. In the past, they mostly practiced the Huk or Jhum cultivation. For this they had to clear a piece of land by setting fire or by clear felling of trees and then using that area for growing crops of agricultural importance such as upland rice, vegetables or fruits. After a few cycles, the land becomes infertile and a new area is chosen. In fact this jhum cultivation practically was responsible for a somewhat nomadic life of the Brus, as they could not settle down in a particular place for a long time, and had to shift from place to place due to the need for searching dense forest and fertile land. Even today, the majority of the Bru people have been surviving on this kind of cultivation. After the harvest season and storing of paddy from March/April to August /September the male folk in the Bru families get involved in the jobs of collecting cotton, sesame seeds and chili during October November. After the Jhum season is over they go out for hunting, fishing,

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8 S.K. Bhattacharyya, op.cit 154
collecting honey, cane and so on. While the Bru women remain busy with weaving traditional clothes.\textsuperscript{9}

The chief crops the Reangs grow are cotton, paddy, maize, all vegetables. Gathering of edible roots and creepers are also done to supplement the income. They sometimes hunt the animals for consumption of their meat. They enjoy group hunting of wild animals, share meat and arrange grand feast. Though the major occupation of the Reangs is agriculture but they also go for carpentry, basketry, fishing, cattle rearing and labour work.\textsuperscript{10} Within a Bru village the economy rests on barter system, but they also go for monetary transactions while dealing with the people in market place. It is believed that between the month of July and September owing to scarcity of food the Brus work as casual labourers. They live in deep forested areas almost at the periphery of development plan both in Tripura as well as Mizoram. However Governments in both the states make high sounding claims about the steps they have taken for the development of the tribe especially with regard to revamping their mode of Jhum cultivation. In Mizoram the Church elders claim that it is extremely difficult to inspire the Reangs who are known as Brus there, to make them send their children to schools which had been set up by the Churches. The Bru parents are labourers or Jhum cultivators who have little interest about formal education. The government of Mizoram point out that owing to the nomadic nature of the Bru people it is extremely difficult for the government to carry out projects for the development of infra-structural facilities for the Brus. The Bru leaders simply laugh at such ridiculous claims. They feel that such excuses are necessary for hiding official mischief and rampant political corruption.\textsuperscript{11} In fact all the money allotted for the development of the Reang tribe by the Central or State Government are either appropriated by the Government officials or by half educated neo-political elite Mizos of those areas.

While referring to the growth of Reang population in Mizoram it may be pointed out that according to the 1961 GOI census the number of Reang speaking population were around

\textsuperscript{9} Bru Tribe of India Op.cit
\textsuperscript{11} http://sodhanga.inflibnet.ac.in
Within a decade it rose to around 10,000. And by 1991 it is believed that around 85,000, Reangs stay in Mizoram. There could have been large scale migration from Tripura. They are however marked as scheduled tribe.\textsuperscript{12}

As has been pointed out already that the Reangs are broadly subdivided between Molsoi and Mechka clans and each of the clans perform certain communal functional functions for the well-being of their fellowmen. The Reang clans and sub-clans do perform specific political functions along with fulfilling their social and economic obligations. The major functions of the sub-clans are to trace their descent. The Christian Reangs however do not regulate marriage. As a whole all the Reangs consider themselves as the poorest community of all the other communities that exist in Mizoram. Others, they believe are better off. They have every reason to believe that they are discriminated against by the authority. The Reang society endorses endogamy. The age for a girl to get married is between sixteen to twenty years and for a boy it is between twenty to twenty-five years. Polygynous marriage is very rare. Both remarriage and divorce are permitted in Reang society. The Reang families are nuclear and extended types. The mishai (husband) and bihi cooperate with each other regarding household work. The umpha (father) and ghelamisha (eldest son) command respect and they take the final decision.\textsuperscript{13} All the sons will get equal share of the family property. However the one who looks after the parents in their old age gets the ancestral house. The Reang women take part in household work like \textit{ritami} (weaving), \textit{bollami} (fetching firewood), \textit{maimochummi} (cooking) tuikhaumi (fetching water), \textit{vataurommi} (cattle rearing), \textit{mairammi} (Jhum harvesting). But for some strange reason the men discourage their female counterparts from participating in politics.\textsuperscript{14}

The majority of the Reangs is Vaishnavite by faith and project themselves as Kshatriyas in the Hindu social rung. The Reangs worship some spirits as well as Hindu Gods and Goddesses. They worship \textit{Maitoikhaim} deity (Lakshmi) and \textit{Baroi Pintimi} (Kali) in Hindu religion. Just like the Hindus some Reangs offer daily prayers to Gods and Goddesses. Before the harvesting (Jhum) season starts the Reangs offer special prayers and sacrifice.

\textsuperscript{12} S.K Bhattacharyya. op.cit. p 154
\textsuperscript{13} Sanat Chakraborty: \textit{Reangs, Displaced by Ethnic Vision} in Refugee Watch (March 2001 No.) Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (March 2001 No.)
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid
animals to please the Gods.\textsuperscript{15} However a large section of that community got converted to Christianity. In fact a growing number of Christians (almost all of them are Baptists) exists in both Tripura and Mizoram. A section of them are under Presbyterian Church. The Christian Reangs in Mizoram follow Baisakhi (New Year’s Day), Khrismas (Christmas) and Good Friday. They have been subjected to forced conversion it is alleged. At the end of 20th century, they are always subjected to religious persecution.

In erstwhile Reang societies the \textit{Roaja} (the King) used to rule the community who enjoyed absolute authority. All other appointments to different administrative posts were made by him. They were known as \textit{Choadhury, Bahadur, Rai} and \textit{Karbari}. The administrative structure was federal in essence under the central command of the king. A \textit{Rai} was a feudatory ruler under the king. The Rai and his subordinates and followers commanded high respect in the Reang community. Moreover there were subordinate rules for each sub-clans of Reang society. Each \textit{Karbari} was in charge of one village. He was a tax-collector cum arbitrator for reconciling all disputes arising in the village.\textsuperscript{16} The chief used to rule the Reangs through the \textit{Karbaris} in Mizoram. In early 1940s the Reangs revolted against the dominance of \textit{Rais, Kanchans} and \textit{Choadhuries}. The position of \textit{Choudhury} was highly honoured and respected in spite of the fact that he was not provided with personal staff like that of the \textit{Rai} and \textit{Raikachak}. In his domain he is all in all and everyone paid him homage and in turn he also tried his best to look after the welfare of his subjects. Although the institution of this \textit{Chouduryship} was not in conformity with the usual form of democratic organization since \textit{Choudhury} rules more or less like a dictator, almost all cases of internal dispute and crimes were settled by him with the help of his subordinate staff according to their own social and customary institution. The people lived in their own tribal way of life under the paternal care of \textit{Choudhury} and they enjoyed peace and tranquility. After the abolition of chieftainship in 1954 the Reangs like all other tribal communities in Mizoram are ruled by village councils elected on the basis of adult franchise. The Secretary and Crier are selected by the President of the Village Council on the basis of his consultation with other Council members. The Village Council will undertake the job of road construction and

\textsuperscript{15} S.K. Bhattacharyya op.cit. p.156

\textsuperscript{16} ibid. p 157
its maintenance, maintain playgrounds, settle disputes, allot land for Jhum cultivation and finally maintain law and order in the village. 17

The Reangs are by very nature apprehensive of aggression and attack by outsiders. This fear psychosis had made them extremely cautious and defensive. Perhaps this is the cause behind their effort to remain isolated. And as a precautionary measure they build their houses on hilly slopes or hillocks so they cannot be easily attacked. Reang houses are known as Tong-ghar made out of bamboos. 18

The Brus are in a very disadvantageous position with regard to education. Most of them have not received formal education. However in recent years they have started sending their children to primary schools. Every village is having one primary school. However most of schools are not well attended. Especially very few female children attend schools. The quantum of school drop-outs is high. The Brus are known to be studying upto pre-university level. However the tremendous hegemony of the Church on Mizoram’s social structure had virtually deprived the non-Christian tribes from getting access to higher education. Few Reang men however pursued higher academic degrees. 19

The Reang population in Mizoram seldom approached the health centres even before the development of inter-ethnic tension between the Bru and Mizo communities. They preferred to depend on their village medicine men and their indigenous medicines and hymns. In rare cases they have opted for modern medicines. Most of them even stayed away from family planning programmes and negligible number of Reangs had followed such programme.

The Reangs are somewhat conservative in their social outlook. They do not encourage free mixing of young and unmarried men and women. However things are changing under the impact of modern life. There had been cases of premarital pregnancies. In fact their relative proximity with other communities like the Lusei and Pang had somehow influenced their traditional society.

17 Ibid. p.161
18 Ibid. p.160
19 Ibid p. 160
Historically it was seen that the Reangs were not very keen to go out of their social setting. They were culturally close to the Tripuris. These two communities shared common social, economic and ritual related features. In Mizoram the Reangs have Lusei, Pang, Bawm, Bengali and Chakma as their neighbouring communities. The Reang families which had converted to Christianity had close relationships with the Lusei, Pang and Bawm communities as they share common religious practices. But in general they are closer to the Bengalis and Chakmas. However the non-Christian Reangs are basically conservative in nature. In spite of that it was seen that Reangs while living under Chakma District Council develop closer ties with other communities like the Lusei, Pang and Bawm. Owing to occupational and commercial consideration they have to interact with non-Reang communities. For instance in village market they have to sell or exchange commodities. Even while engaging in Jhum cultivation mutual cooperation among the communities becomes imperative.

Under the impact of modern society in Mizoram, the Reangs have learnt to become cordial and social. Especially Christianity is heavily influencing the traditional Reang social system. Their traditional nature becomes evident while they are engaging themselves in their cultural activities. They take great pleasure in performing their traditional dance and songs. Mishami is the dance form in which most of the Reangs participate. Recent years it is been seen that in Mizoram, the Brus speak Mizo and the native tongue fluently. However, a good number Brus who could get the opportunity to become educated can speak English, Hindi, Mizo, Bengali and some other tribal languages. Bru people are generally friendly and accessible and other ethnic groups can freely mix with them. Now, the business groups for their sheer business interests and the Christian clergies for getting the Brus converted to Christianity have started speaking in Kau-Bru/ Bru language with the Brus.

The greatest obstacle to the development of the Reang tribe lies in the lack of industry, infrastructure and communication system. That is why they virtually remain isolated from the mainstream society. The Reang persons have to travel for miles through unfriendly roads for reaching a market place for doing business. Owing to their dependence on only

21. S.K. Bhattacharyya op.cit. p.163
agriculture they have to rely on nature alone for their survival over which they have no control. Land, forest and water are the only resources on which their economy depends. In seasons when Jhum farming is not possible they have to work as labourers and become exposed to rampant exploitation by the Mizo society. As casual labour in some Government Departments like Electricity or Forest, they earn a meagre income.

The Reangs are poorest among all the tribes which inhabit in Mizoram. On the one hand rampant discrimination against them coupled with deep-rooted animosity shown by the Mizos and on the other hand the Reangs’ excessive dependence on their traditional life style had deprived them of the fruits of development. In recent years some kind of urge to get themselves accommodated in a modern Mizo society had motivated a section of them to go for education. However in the process they had fallen prey to the Church and were virtually converted to Christianity and were sucked into the mainstream Mizo culture shunning their ethnic identity.\(^{22}\)

\(^{22}\) Subrata Kumar Dutta: op.cit. p.24
Chapter III

Politics of Displacement from Mizoram

The most agonising process in human history involves forced displacement of hapless victims from their original place of residence. They are displaced from their natural habitat, from their root, from the areas filled with friendly smell and familiar tweeting of birds. The oft repeated term internal displacement describes situations where a large number of people usually belonging to the same community are forced to flee their villages or localities for either developmental projects or natural and ecological disasters and calamities or severe armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights. This is how the Guiding Principles on internal displacement has described this highly disturbing phenomenon. The phenomenon of internal displacement has been widely described by international observers as one of the most complicated and disturbing humanitarian challenges of our time. Its tentacles have reached every corner of the globe. The phenomenon of forced displacement puts the state structure in a complex and difficult situation. The authorities have to bear the responsibilities of addressing this problem of internal displacement. Root causes of internal displacement are those which initiate a conflict, although these can be difficult to identify and isolate as most of today’s conflicts could only be understood as self-perpetuating and displacements caused by such conflicts can be seen not only as an effect of the conflict but also eventually as a cause of its continuation.1

The initial response of the state to this crisis should be one of preventing such displacement. All such violence should be immediately contained and occurrence of physical attacks on the victims (prospective displacees) should be summarily stopped by pro-active state intervention. However prevention of displacement should never be confused with efforts to

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obstruct the flight of threatened populations, to deter the departure of people who intend to seek refuge elsewhere or to undermine the institution of asylum.

The entire North East India has got a unique feature. It is a region which houses large number of tribal communities and their innumerable subgroups. As a result, one may find wide varieties of cultures, languages, dialects, ethnic and political identities. These are more often than not responsible for contestations among these groups and subgroups for resources and above all political power. Fierce struggle for control over some areas get the better of the established democratic competition, practices and norms. That is why the region remains a volatile one and inter-ethnic conflicts and riots at times lead even to the dreaded phenomenon of ethnic cleansing. In a Report of The Workshop on the IDPS in India’s Northeast it was mentioned “Ethnic conflicts became endemic in postcolonial North East India. Here, ethnic conflict includes the conflict between the state and ethnic groups/insurgent groups, inter ethnic and intra ethnic conflicts. One particular situation of ethnic conflict may reflect one, two or all these three kinds of conflicts simultaneously.”

A majority of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were displaced owing to these conflicts could never return for several years, due to either protracted conflicts or owing to the fact that those disputes over land and property remained unresolved.

Mizoram comes under that region and as an area it had been a disturbed one even before it acquired statehood. In fact its journey to statehood was marked by prolonged bloody struggle against Indian state system. As a dominant ruling community the Mizo people had not exactly been known for its accommodative attitude towards other minority tribes in Mizoram state. The tension involving Mizo-Chakma relationship was palpable. The present study addresses the inter-ethnic conflict between the Mizo and the Reang tribe of Mizoram who are better known as Brus there. The Mizo society is never ready to consider the Brus as a part of the Mizo society and they consider them as outsiders. They were not even ready to share their resources with this tribe and the question of granting them any political status under the system of an Autonomous District Council (ADC) on the soil of Mizoram was an

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impossible and absolutely unacceptable proposal. In fact this communal apathy has a long history, even much before the overt crisis broke out over the demand for an ADC was made by the Bru leadership in early 90s. In an letter to the National Human Rights Commission by the Mizoram Government regarding this crisis it was mentioned that when the Brus who were recognised as Reangs (Schedule Tribe) as per the Constitution Order (1950) fled owing to the persecution in the erstwhile Tippera kingdom (now divided between Tripura and Bangladesh) arrived at Mizoram in the early 1940s and then they never made any claim that they were the natural inhabitants of Mizoram. So the Brus have always been outsiders and can never be a part of the larger Mizo culture. So the almost inimical approach to the Bru community becomes evident from this document. Under this pretext they were tortured and hooted out of Mizoram. As if, this logic empowers the Mizos to displace the Brus, who had been staying in Mizoram for many decades.

In Principle number 5 under Section II of the “UN Guiding Principles On The Internally Displaced Persons” it was clearly stated that “All authorities and international actors shall respect and ensure respect for their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, in all circumstances, so as to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to displacement of persons.”

The large scale exodus of the Brus from Mizoram started in 1997 after the violent attack on their villages by the Mizos following an alleged murder of a Mizo forest guard in Mamit district. Actually the inter-ethnic conflict erupted with the placing of a political demand by Brus for an Autonomous District Council (ADC) for their tribe just like that of the Mara tribe. The civil society organisations of Mizoram like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) had strongly resented it and Mizos attacked the Bru villages. The Brus started fleeing their places headed towards Tripura and Assam. The process of displacement was induced by such conflict.

The Reangs are located mainly on the western part of Aizawl district (bordering Tripura) and on the north (bordering Assam) with sparse settlements upto Lunglei in south-western parts of Mizoram bordering Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, accounted a population of

around 85000, scattered around 120 villages in Mizoram However the Mizo authorities forthrightly reject this claim. But what was the reason behind such exodus? The Reang or BRU community was extremely marginalised and persecuted in Mizoram and were deprived of all kinds of social, cultural and in particular political rights. The Reangs in Mizoram had existed in a more or less submissive manner owing to the attitude of distrust shown by the majority Mizo community towards them.\(^5\)

Prior to 1990 there was hardly any overt manifestation of animosity between the Reangs and the Mizos. However when the Bru community started to assert their cultural identity, the Mizo society became apprehensive of their motive. They saw it as an attempt to subvert the well integrated Mizo society. As it is they always resented the existence of non-Mizo communities on their soil. The Brus and Chakmas were considered as burden on the Mizoram state.

As per a report of South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre (SAHRDC) published in 16\(^{th}\) March 2001, the entire controversy began in 1990 with the passing of a resolution by the Bru National Union, an assumed political party of the Reangs, in its general assembly meeting, demanding Autonomous District Council for the Bru community within Mizoram. The Mizo Students’ Federation (MZP) immediately objected to that and construed it as an attempt by the Brus to divide Mizoram and immediately they wanted the Brus to leave Mizoram. The MZP was ready and resolute to resist any attempt by the Brus to pursue their goal of obtaining an Autonomous District Council. For them it amounted to division of Mizoram. “Mizoram is the only land the Mizos have and it could not be lost to foreigners and other communities.”\(^6\)

During such developments a militant Bru outfit named Bru National Army came into existence in 1994. It wanted to uphold the cause of the Reangs in Mizoram. The leaders resented the attempt of the Mizo society to wipe out the culture of the Brus. There was large scale conversion to Christianity, forcible imposition of Mizo language on the Brus at the

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\(^5\) *India: large numbers of IDPs are unassisted and in need of protection* in Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: 3 May 2007

cost of their own language Kokbarak or Kobru. Even Brus were forced to adopt Mizo names. It was a cultural hegemony in its worst form. To make things worse about 20000 Bru names were deleted from the voters’ list.\textsuperscript{7} It was done to thwart the voice of dissent and to frustrate any effort for seeking autonomy. Mizos are somewhat proud of their isolated and exclusive nature. For them any non-Mizo is either a foreigner or an outsider. The demand for autonomy made by the Bru leadership made the entire Bru community a sworn enemy of the Mizo community. It may be viewed as a kind of sub-nationalism. In order to suppress all other identities the Mizos have taken recourse to violence. They are extremely hostile to the second largest tribe in their state; the Brus. Mizos consider it as an attempt to fragment the Mizo State further and it becomes a very emotive issue. To counter such demands such minority tribal groups are branded as outsiders who have settled down in Mizoram since long time. And all sorts of attempts were made for de-legitimising their claims by deletion of names from the voters’ list, or by questioning the census report. Any minor incident did provoke a violent reaction from the majority tribal group.

The Mizoram Govt. from the very beginning tried to adopt a populist political stance in addressing the problem. Instead of reconciling it, the Govt. tried to take steps for further marginalising the Reangs. The Sanctuary Project was extended to the areas mostly inhabited by the Brus. The Bru families were forced to flee to areas in Mizoram which were not meant for their settlement.\textsuperscript{8} That had further alienated the Brus. That in fact compelled a section of the Brus to turn militant. Hostility and tension between the two communities increased like anything. Then the infamous killing of the Mizo Forest Guard by the Bru National Army people took place which added fuel to fire.

Along with militant outburst by the marginalised Bru community a steady democratic movement was growing up. A few Reang leaders tried to contest in state assembly election. That was not appreciated by the Mizo Students Union or Mizo National Front. However the Bru candidates were defeated. Yet the Mizo community tried to stifle the voice of democracy. All the political parties in Mizoram initiated a mindless violent campaign against non-Mizo tribal communities like the Brus and the Chakmas. The Brus were

\textsuperscript{7} Subir Bhaumik. \textit{India’s North East: Nobody’s People in No-Man’s Land.} in Banerjee Paula, Basu Ray Chaudhury, Das Samir Kumar (eds) Sage Publications 2005 P.163

\textsuperscript{8} Subrata Kumar Dutta \textit{op.cit} P.20
repeatedly referred to as outsiders by the entire Mizo society including the administration. Constant threat was issued against the Bru communities. The unabated persecutions by the Mizos had created a deep-rooted fear psychosis in the minds of the Reang families.  

In a period between 1993 till the large scale exodus of the Brus in 1997 lot of atrocities were reported in Mizoram on this Bru community. Brutal tortures ranging from physical assault to killing of hapless Bru men became the rule of the day. In Bru villages houses were set on fire on a regular basis. The sheer act of killing or destruction was only a part of this total conspiracy to ensure forced migration of the Bru families from Mizoram. Other kinds of methods adopted by the Mizo community to make the existence of the Brus more agonising were evident as well. Large number rapes of Bru women had been taking place in Mizoram which had created a huge tension between the two communities. Ravishing of young Bru girls every now and then had traumatised the Bru society as a whole. Along with it the Mizo people started to deprive the Reangs of whatever little help and facilities they were getting from the Government. Strangely enough the Government remained a mute spectator and ignored every single complaint made by the Bru victims. In fact this indifference shown by them was politically motivated. All the atrocities committed by the Mizos were either guided by the Mizo organisations or supported by the Mizo leadership. The political isolation of the Brus was complete when a huge number of Bru names were deleted from the voters’ list. Thus the Brus were robbed of their basic constitutional right. However the Delhi High Court intervened while giving its verdict in a case, relating to these types of large scale disenfranchisement. In 1999 it had passed an order directing the Mizoram Government to establish two special polling stations near Mizoram-Tripura border to enable the Bru IDPs to vote. This however did not enable the Reang IDPs to exercise their right to vote as out of 32000 displaced Brus only 1198 found their names in the voters’ list. Whereas the Bru leadership strongly claimed that some 17500 names went missing. Even then the Mizo organisations like MZP and YMA objected to this. This was deliberately done by the Mizo authority to disown the Bru families as inhabitants of Mizoram.

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10 Sanjib Baruah, Durable Disorder Oxford University Press.(2007) pp.199-200
The Mizoram Government was not only insensitive to the Bru demands for justice when atrocities were committed on them, it also left no stone unturned to isolate the Bru community from the mainstream. Whenever any complaint was made by a Bru, the police would immediately try to harass him or her. Upright leaders were immediately put behind the bars.

Mr. Bruno Msha, the General Secretary of Mizoram Bru Displaced People’s Forum (MBDPF), pointed out to the researcher that the Brus were constantly discriminated against under all circumstances. They were not given access to education. Education were made available to a handful of converted Brus who had to serve as slaves in Christian Mizo families and that too after bearing heavy financial burden. Even the educated ones were not to get suitable jobs as all dignified jobs were earmarked for the Mizos only. Government jobs were out of the bound of the Brus. Bare minimum civic amenities were not made available to them.

As per Indian constitution our nation is secular in character. Such a precious ideal carries no meaning in Mizoram. The Brus were never allowed to practice their religion overtly. Especially the Hindus were persecuted. They were not allowed to offer their religious prayers freely. Tremendous pressures were exerted on them to get themselves converted to Christianity. Temples were blazed. The Assam Tribune published a report in July 10, 1998, which pointed out that the Mizos served orders that the Reangs should disown their traditional Hindu culture and identity and to get converted to Christianity. They were indeed forced to adopt Mizo culture and shun their own language and heritage. Even Bru names were not allowed.

The ultimate conspiracy to drive out the Brus from Mizoram was revealed when notices were served by the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) asking all non-Mizos to quit Mizoram. Threats were issued to the minorities and particularly to the Brus. On receiving the letters the Brus were asked to leave Mizoram instantly and all Mizos were asked to spread this message to all Bru villages. It was made amply clear that any non-compliance with this order would invite serious punishment. Otherwise properties of the Reangs would be confiscated, their

11 Sanjib Baruah, India Against Itself Assam and the Politics of Nationality, Oxford University Press. (2006) P.37
women would be raped and the men would be killed. Media did report that quite a few Bru men were killed by the Mizos and raping of Bru women took place in Chokarthal areas of Mizoram. Heavy penalties were imposed on Bru families for no reason. That was described as special tax for living on the soil of Mizoram. These kinds of brutalities induced the large scale Bru exodus to Tripura and Assam. The internally displaced Reangs from Mizoram took shelter in Tripura with the hope that they would get support from the Reang community of Tripura.

Initially the Tripura Government described them as Reang refugees. This was an absolutely wrong nomenclature in the study of Diaspora. They were very much Indians and should have been referred to as Internally Displaced Persons.

The displaced Reang population had to withstand Mizo atrocities even after fleeing Mizoram. The Mizos were not willing to allow the Brus to live in peace in the relief camps in Assam situated near Mizoram border. They started serving notice to the displaced Reangs in Ghatghuti, Rifelmara and Sahebmarra villages in Hailakandi district of Assam, threatening them to quit. The miscreants were aided by Mizo police force and they set the camps on fire, assaulted the Reang men and even sexually harassed the Reang women. This was reported to the then chief Minister of Assam Mr. Prafulla Mahanta.12

However it would be entirely wrong to believe that displacement of the Brus have stopped after 1997. Even in 2009 a fresh group of Reang IDPs arrived in Tripura. According a published report of Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) owing to an alleged murder of 17 year old Zarzokima, a Mizo youth, violent attacked started on Bru community. But police enquiry failed to prove that the Bru Revolutionary Union had its hand in the murder. The Mizo police also explored a love triangle theory. Later two alleged killers were arrested. The Mizos blamed the Brus for this and claimed that the killing of the Mizo youth was a ploy to stall the process of return of the Brus. The same allegation was made against the Mizos by the Bru leadership. Mizoram’s Bru Displaced People’s Forum further added that under the pretext of this alleged murder, the Mizos had driven away the remaining Bru families from Mizoram. In 2009 too similar kinds of torture was carried out on the Bru population in

Mizoram. The Bru houses were burnt down and the Mizos claimed that the Brus themselves had set their own houses on fire only to discredit them and it was difficult to buy that logic as the Brus did not have any fund to rebuild their own houses. The Mizo authority however informed the fact finding team from ACHR, that the Government had issued a shoot at sight order to prevent such violent acts and ten rioters were arrested.13

However the fact finding team from ACHR mentioned in its report the following incidents:

“On this night itself (13th November 2009 night) Bazirungpa Veng (part of Thinghlum Village) was gutted down by unidentified miscreants setting ablaze 20 houses. On the next day 14th November 2009 (Saturday), fire broke out at Damdial and Damparengpui in which 7 houses and 3 houses were destroyed respectively.

On the night of 14th November 2009, 5 villages namely – New Eden, Tumpanglui, Mualthhuam, West Bunghmun and Kolalian were burnt by an angry mob who had returned from Bunghthum after attending the funeral ceremony of the Late Zarzokima. On the 15 November 2009 (Sunday), a number of 46 houses were set ablaze at K Sarali”.14

The Mizos were particularly targeting Damdial village which actually was built to accommodate the rehabilitated Bru National Liberation Front members who had entered in to an agreement with the Mizoram Government. The Reang inhabitants claimed that the Mizo youths were aware of the status of the village yet they destroyed it with a definite motive of either forcing the Brus to leave Mizoram or for creating a fear psychosis among the Bru families who were ready to return to Mizoram as a result of the on-going negotiation between the Governments of Tripura and Mizoram. In fact about 5,000 were displaced and over 2,000 ran away from their villages and took shelter at Cheragi bazar in Karimganj district of Assam, and the rest of them took refuge to Chhimluang, Kanthol Bari and Lungthir villages in Tripura near the Mizoram border, and at Zampui Hills under Kanchanpur Sub Division in North Tripura. On 19th and 20th November 2009, around 2220 Brus fled to Damchhera, Dasda and Jampui blocks in Kanchanpur Division of North Tripura. The Mizos carried on their attacks on the Brus even in Tripura relief camps as per

13 Subrata K Dutta. op.cit p 58

the Report of the Fact Finding Committee of ACHR. A large number of young Mizo hooligans had started to assault the Brus in Kakchung relief camp in Kanchanpur in North Tripura. They were heavily armed. However timely intervention by the Tripura police saved the situation for the Brus and the Mizo goons were pushed back to their state. 15

Any objective assessment about the Bru demand for Autonomous District Council would appear as logical. In the first place Brus can never be considered as outsiders. As free Indian citizens they had every right to reside in a place where they had been residing for a long time. Secondly the Brus constituted the second largest tribal community in Mizoram numbering around 87000 as against 5, 60,000 Mizos. While smaller communities like the Chakmas and Maras could get Autonomous District Council for their respective communities so the Bru demand for the same was absolutely justified. The very idea of treating the Brus as outsiders was not only obnoxious but also mischievous and dangerous. That kind of attitude is a threat to the very ethos Indian culture. Thirdly, some amount of autonomy is required for any race to ensure development of their community. The backward areas inhabited by the Brus needed to be developed and that could have been possible only if the Mizo authority had been responsive to the Bru demand for Autonomous District Council.

For quite some time sporadic communal skirmishes between the two ethnic groups in Mizoram in various forms were taking place and tension was brewing beneath the apparent calm and displacement of the Brus to North Tripura also continued. After the Lok Sabha Polls in 1996 the relationship between the Mizo and Reang community nosedived. The Mizo National Front tried to induce the Aizawl District Election Officer to omit a large number of names belonging to the Reang people from the voters’ list. The Reangs revolted. As a result of this sustained deprivation, the leaders of the community had asked the Mizoram Government for an “Autonomous District Council” and allotment of one legislative seat exclusively for them. The demands were forthrightly dismissed by the later and the majority Mizo Community started intimidating and threatening the Reang people per say. Moreover an alleged murder of a Mizo Forest Guard by the Reang people created an acute conflict
situation. This led to the attack on the later under some pretext or other. Even ladies belonging to that community were not spared. Rape of underprivileged Reang Women was quite common in Mizoram. The Deccan Herald reported on 17th August 2003 that the Reangs, second largest tribal group of Mizoram, had long been demanding for an Autonomous District Council (ADC) based on 6th schedule of the Constitution in Reang dominated areas of Southern Mizoram so that that ethnic group can socio-economically develop itself. The demand had been raised under the banner of a new party called Reang Democratic Party (RDP). The majority of the Mizo tribesmen were used to treat the Reangs as bonded labourers and slaves, hence they had looked upon the Reang demand for autonomy with deep hostility. The Displacement started in October 1997. The Reangs started fleeing their homeland in Mizoram as a result of the attack on them by the Mizo people who constituted the majority in Mizoram. They fled to Tripura and Assam. Some 35000 to 40000 Reangs also known as Brus switched over to Tripura during night time to escape the brutalities of the Mizo people. This happened after the Bru National Liberation Front i.e. BNLF started claiming for autonomy. This resulted in tremendous tension between the two communities as the Mizos felt that it was ploy by the Brus to divide Mizoram. The Reangs as it is lived in an extremely hostile hilly terrain which made their living highly difficult and on the top of that they were subjected to isolation and occasional onslaught by the dominant Mizo Community. As a consequence of that the conditions of the scattered Bru villages were adversely affected. They had to shift their position frequently. Their translocations from one place to another make them exposed to further inter-communal tension. As a result of this the Brus as a minority tribal community are neglected and deprived of all kinds of developmental work be it in the field of health, education or community development. They are never entitled to government jobs. The lack of formal education among most of the Brus makes things even worse.

The Reangs are also in a disadvantageous position with regard to their cultural/social or religious identity. As per an estimate given by the newspaper article by Shri Anil Dhir, like Kashmiri Hindus, Brus have been hounded out of Mizoram, which is virtually a Christian majority state, as they refused to convert. As they constitute a small tribal community their plight and suffering has gone unnoticed for the last sixteen years. In his words: “Mizoram is the only Indian state which has unconstitutionally declared itself as a Christian State. The
Presbyterian Church in Mizoram is most dominant over political leaders, the government of Mizoram and Mizo civil society. Nearly 97 per cent of Mizos are Christians.”

Bru (a derogatory term for Reang in Mizoram) National Union President Swaibunga said in Silchar recently, “We are being persecuted by Mizos since we strongly opposed conversions. Mizoram is a Christian dominated state and they want everybody to become Christian. Even the Chakmas are facing persecution. Minorities are not at all safe in Mizoram. Since we raised our voice against the forcible conversions, we were driven away”.

With regard to their language the dominant community virtually forced them to take up Mizo language. Even they strongly pursued the Reangs to give Mizo name to their children. Religious jingoism of the Mizos practically threatened the traditional cultural and value systems of the Brus. Reangs’ lifestyle, believes, feelings, cultural identity, perception and social values are completely different from those of the Mizos. The healthcare and education service provided by the Mizo-Christian missionaries had a negative impact on the Reang society. It strongly affected in varying ways their faith, customs, habit and way of living and thinking. In fact the Mizo community desperately tried to impose its culture on the Brus to destroy their identity.

However the marginally educated youth among the Reangs realised the pain of losing their identity. Especially the ambitious young Reangs started organising themselves against rampant domination and discrimination. The counter-hegemony effort resulted in the birth of an apolitical Bru organisation, viz. Reang Peoples Union.

The key players were Swaibunga (Graduate from North East Hill University), Laninthanga and Ramawia. The researcher learnt from Mr. Swaibunga, the present President of Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Forum (MBDPF), that they had submitted a memorandum to the Mizoram state government containing three principal demands

16. Ibid pp 6-7
18. Anil Dhir: op.cit
• Inclusion of Reang programmes in All India Radio, Aizawl
• Reservation of jobs for Reangs in government services and
• Nomination of a Reang leader in the legislative assembly

Incidentally two Reangs Zoduha and Lalnunzira became nominated members to the Assembly. Subsequently new demands were raised.

There is a need to discuss the historical background of this inter-ethnic relationship between the dominant Mizo community and the minority Bru tribe. 1990 saw the birth of Reang Democratic Convention. Mr. Swaibunga, Mr. Chawngzika and Ashiba as office bearers started their movement for preservation of their culture, customs, and language with a view to ensuring their socio-economic development. Virtually they wanted to bring the entire Reang community under the common ethnic nomenclature Bru. The political aspiration of the Reangs became distinctly evident when two Reang leaders, Mr. Chandra Mohan and Mr. Maturi contested in district council election in Lai Autonomous District Council. This has led to further escalation of inter-communal tension between the Mizo and Bru people. The Reangs failed to get any representation in district and assembly elections.19 In order to get an access to the decision making structure, the Reangs forwarded their claim for an exclusive Autonomous District Council. They had cited the examples of the Maras, Chakmas and Lai District Council under Chimtuipai Administrative Autonomous District Council the communities were certainly smaller than the Reangs. Autonomous District Councils are created for protecting the customs, traditions and culture of tribes having their distinct identities separate from the mainstream society. The Reangs as a scheduled tribe was living a life characterised by backwardness and underdevelopment. There was tremendous dearth of infrastructure and communication facilities. The very idea of industry was absent. So under the circumstances the demand for Autonomous District Council was absolutely justified. The Reangs population in Mizoram was around 85000 and they were the second largest tribal community next only to the Mizos.

19 Mizoram : Assam Opinion (11th May 2011)
The demand for autonomy waged by the Brus meted with stiff resistance from the Mizoram Government. The political leaders of Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), Mizo National Front (MNF) and Sailo’s People Conference strongly supported the Government. They firmly asserted that Mizoram was for the Mizos only. 1994 saw the birth of another Reang outfit namely Bru National Union (BNU) under Mr. Swaibunga for unilaterally carrying the struggle for autonomy. This further widened the schism between the two communities. That resulted into complex ethnic conspiracies by the Mizos. First, they started describing the Brus as foreigners. Secondly, in order to further marginalise them a large number of names belonging to the Reang communities were systematically deleted from the voters’ list. This disenfranchisement weakened the claims of the Brus over their land in Mizoram. Thirdly, the Mizos initiated a strong anti-foreigners movement against the Brus which more often than not was resulting in violent manifestation of ethnic attack. The scattered Reang population started getting consolidated apprehending such attacks.

The Government of Mizoram had declared the Dampa forest areas as a prospective tiger wildlife sanctuary. This was purposefully done to evict the Reang habitation from the areas of Tuipuibari, Dampa Rengpui, New Chika, Mualvawm, Saipui, Sidon, Lampchera and Persang. At present this area is further extended to Reang dominated villages like, Tlabung Dinthar, Hnakkai, and Zuanzawl etc. It was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Mizoram Government to corner the Reang population absolutely. A section of the Reang people had opted for the path of armed resistance and formed Bru National Army. An alleged murder of a Mizo Forest Officer had led to violent clashes between the two communities. Initially all the Reang villages in and around Tuipuibari were attacked. Their houses were burnt down, their properties were plundered and physical assaults were carried on over both men and women. Several incidents of rape took place. This violence spread to other parts of Mizoram. The attacks were at beginning carried out by the militant Mizo youth but soon a large section of the general Mizo people joined this act with the sole motive of driving the Bru population out of Mizoram. A large number of Reangs left Mamit and Lunglei district

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20 Subrata K Dutta. *op.cit* p: 36
and headed for Kanchanpur district in north Tripura. Several families took refuge to Hylakandi in Assam.²¹

The Mizoram Government was a mute spectator of this development. The authority did not bother to interfere for restoring calm. On the contrary, a section of the police started looting the fleeing Reang families carrying their limited belongings near the Mizoram border. The present research largely depended on the responses of the internally displaced Reang families residing in Tripura. The researcher interacted with the camp dwellers in Kanchanpur and other areas. He visited camps in Naisingpada, Ashapada, Anandabazar, Hezacherra, Kaskau, and Damchhera. He interviewed around 63 respondents with a standard questionnaire and collected data on the basis of case study method. The researcher had carried on prolonged conversation with around 63 respondents in a weeklong exercise. Apart from that, group-level interaction and observation provided important source of information. The detail of the same may be presented in the following manner:

The respondents were interviewed with a standard schedule in different camps. 98% of the respondents were having large families consisting of seven to ten members. However they were not joint families in conventional sense. All the respondents who were residing in the relief camps in Tripura had crossed over to the state in 1997-98, exactly after the incidents of Mizo attacks on Reang settlements. They had come from different areas of Mizoram like, Tuipuibari, Saipui, Chimluang, Damparengpui, Tuiram, Thaidor etc. When they were asked about the reason for leaving Mizoram 25% pointed out that the Bru demand for Autonomous District Council had practically infuriated the Mizo people. They have started their tirade against the Bru people. In order to drive them away from Mizoram the houses of majority of Bru families were burnt down and villages were ransacked. So the Reangs had to flee. 93% of the respondents have pointed out that looting; arson and physical assault were the direct cause behind this forced migration. At least seven respondents mentioned about incidents of rape of Reang women in their villages. All the respondents have claimed that they were threatened by the Mizo people and Mizo Police which made them flee. One among them mentioned that she had received a notice ordering her to leave Mizoram immediately and

never to return again. When specifically asked about the types of torture they faced in Mizoram, the responses were more or less similar. It included killing of Bru men, burning of houses, physical assault and threatening, raping and molestation/teasing of women folks, killing and devouring their livestock, destruction of agricultural produce etc. The researcher wanted to know which section of the Mizo population was responsible for their ordeal. 60% of the Bru respondents emphatically said that the general Mizo public were hostile to them and they carried on all those heinous acts. Some 27% of the respondents held the Mizo policemen were responsible for their misery, while the rest felt that MZP and Young Mizo Association along with the Mizo police and Government Officials were behind this conspiracy. However 99% admitted that they were receiving their provisions through the rationing system till the trouble broke out. Only a handful of them pointed out they were self sufficient in this regard as they depended on their Jhum cultivation.

The researcher enquired whether the children of the Reang families were given access to primary or higher level schools. 62% answered in affirmative but the rest said they were not so fortunate to avail education for their children. One Bru person pointed out that a Bru had to have proximity with the Mizo Christian society to get an access to high school education. It was further found that the entire Bru population in Mizoram had to speak Mizo language for conversing with a non-Reang people though they have a reasonably developed mother tongue: Kobru. However the Reangs were allowed to vote in the elections. This was perhaps a mechanism to obtain legitimacy for the Mizo Government. When the tension increased between the two communities a large number of Bru names were deleted from the voters’ list. This disenfranchisement was done in order to frustrate the political demands of the Reangs for Autonomous District Council, and for reservation of two seats for the Reangs in the State Assembly. Subsequently the deletion of names has become a ploy for sabotaging the ‘Return’ process. The Reang families were asked by the researcher whether they had local level leaders for protecting their cause. The answers were in affirmative. Some even mentioned about the existence of village chairman. 70% of the respondents were aware of the demands made by their leaders for Autonomous District Council and they knew what it actually meant. However the remaining 30% had no idea about the concept.
The Reangs in the relief camps in Tripura were quite vocal when they were asked about their security in post-conflict situation in Mizoram. All the respondents said they were too scared to move freely in Mizoram. They said they very rarely ventured out of their areas. However, they admitted that prior to the violent development they could move around. In post 1997-98 scenario their security has been seriously undermined, as per their account. About 15% of the respondents said that they had to remain alert even in their own villages. Two of them pointed out that the alleged murder of the Mizo Forest Guard by Reang militants had made things worse for them.

The Reang IDPs were asked whether they were allowed to use the local Mizo markets for procure things for their daily requirements and the responses were varied. 48% opined that they had access to those markets. Around 34% said they were not allowed. 10% categorically pointed out that they had local market run exclusively by the Brus. The remaining said they would buy things from markets in Tripura border or Assam border depending upon the proximity of their respective villages. The respondents pointed out that they were always apprehensive of the local Mizo population. Even incidents of harassment of the Brus by the Mizo youth whenever they went to Mizo markets were narrated by them.

The Reangs in Mizoram were also reluctant to approach Mizo Government Officials for addressing their needs. They told the researcher that the Officers had scant regard for them and always treated them with disdain. They were asked whether they received any help from Government Health Centres when they fell sick. 94% said that they had never approached any Government Health Centre as the doctors there, were not at all helpful. Some 3% said they avoided such centres because they were situated in far off places. The remaining said that they received treatment from Health Centres. None of the respondents however approached any private Mizo doctor. A few were treated by Chakma doctors.

The respondents however talked in detail about the absence of their liberty to perform religious ceremonies or to pursue their religious faith. Especially the Hindus were particularly targeted for practising their religion. They informed the researcher that the Mizos were particularly hostile to any village where Hindu deities were worshipped openly. They used to come at midnight, dead drunk and picked up fights with the Brus under some pretext and would destroy their deities. They would tease the Bru women saying that, unless
the Brus worship Jesus they will not get salvation. Hindu gods are meaningless they would say. The Reangs were forced to practice their religion most secretly so that the Mizo people could not interfere. A handful of Christian Reang families could carry out their religious ceremonies openly. Most of the Bru persons were apprehensive of Mizo interference in religious functions notwithstanding their Christian background. Around 47% respondents complained about forced conversion. A few of them even confided that when they came to Tripura they again became Hindu.

The Reangs were divided in their response to the question whether they socially interacted with the Mizos in Mizoram or not? About 53% said they barely met them. However 22% gave affirmative answer. The rest pointed out that Mizos looked down upon them and never bothered to talk to them as the Brus were treated as outsiders in Mizoram. On the top of that Reangs avoided them as they were anxious about the security of their women accompanying them.

The researcher tried to find out about the Bru people’s perception of the Mizo police in pre-conflict Mizoram. The responses were revealing. 60% straightaway opined that they did not trust the police and they did not ever approach the police for any help. Some among them said that the BSF personnel were rather helpful. 35% of the respondents pointed out that on the contrary the Mizo police force were either reluctant to help them or unnecessarily harassed them when the Reangs approached them for help. The police would laugh at them when Bru ladies complained against the Mizos for sexually harassing them. The police would say that they are having innocent fun and there was no need to become too fussy about it.

The researcher had closely interacted with around 39 Bru ladies and gentlemen in different relief camps in Tripura. He obtained more exhaustive information from the Reang IDPs when he concentrated on case study method. A lot more information was available about situations leading to the forced migration of the Reangs. A middle-aged lady Basmati who happened to be a Vaishnavite, said that she fled from Falcon area of Mizoram along with the fellow Brus. Her house was burnt down before her eyes and his sons and grandsons were mercilessly beaten, however she never protested or lodged any complain to the local police station. Instead she ran away without any of her belongings, and the entire family crossed
over to Tripura, and took shelter in Anandabazar Relief camp. In Mizoram till the conflict broke out she could live in her village and she possessed chickens and pigs and had an orange orchard of her own. She lamented that though she felt claustrophobic in Mizoram yet she missed her village. Another Bru lady named Soninorum said she was forcibly converted to Christianity as the local Mizo leader told her that else she would be driven out. Originally a Hindu she was compelled to go to a Church situated in a far off place. However this conversion could not save her from the wrath of the Mizo youth. Her wooden house was burnt to ashes. In the entire Nathiazo village was torched. She fled with others leaving behind a small rice-mill she possessed.

Nazirung a 45 year old person narrated his ordeal. He used to live in Khanthuang village. He said that for a long time the Mizo police kept on threatening them. He was a jhum cultivator in Mizoram. His house was set on fire and every little thing he possessed was destroyed. All local Bru young men were roughed up and he had fled with his family and had reached Toiring River and the forest near it. They had to spend four nights in jungle without food before crossing over to Tripura. While going by the account of the rest of the Brus certain common trends were noticed by the researcher behind the politics of displacing the Brus. Thalyiti, a 48 old year lady pointed out that the Mizos were not only happy seeing them fleeing, had also wanted to instil fear in their mind so that they would never dare to come back to Mizoram again. Her husband was repeatedly beaten by the Mizo people though he was leaving Mizoram. Her appeal to them was ignored, and only an intervention by the village Mizo leader did save him. Similarly the lady named Ranobati was looted as she was crossing over to Tripura. Bironjoy, a 75 year old man complained about persecution by the Mizos regarding religion. All his religious scriptures were destroyed by them. A reasonably well-to-do lady by their standard, Ms. Damayanti had a shop in Mizoram. She was advised by some Mizo elderly men to run away from her place and she paid heed to that. Her shop was taken over by some local Mizo goons. Even her betel nut trees and teak wood garden were captured. Vanlalringi, 32 years old lady and Christian by faith was raped by drunken Mizo people in her village. Her pets were taken away and were devoured by them on the same night. Mr. Behra narrated about the violent riot that broke out after the story of the alleged murder of the Mizo Forest Guard was spread. He said that even a single Bru house was not spared. So they ran for their life.
Mrs. Bruiksom, a 35-year-old lady, gave an exhaustive account of the types of torture the Bru families had to face in Mizoram. As a jhum cultivator, her ordeal started when the land was forcibly taken away by the Mizos with the help of the police. Domesticated animals were captured by them. She soon realised that the voters’ list was tampered with and she found that the name of her own and those of her neighbours were missing. She also could see that in a nearby village discrimination against the Brus was clearly evident. These were done in order to put pressure on the Brus for getting themselves converted to Christianity.

The event narrated by Mrs. Bandalruati was even stranger. She too had left behind her betel nut garden in Mizoram. According to her, she was hooted out for a strange reason. There was a tussle between some Assamese persons and the Mizos in a Bru house near Mizoram-Assam border. The Mizos alleged that the Bru family had helped the Assamese. Hence they should have no right to stay in Mizoram. Then they started torturing the lady. She had to flee.

The Reangs who were converted Christians were not spared. Mrs. Lalkungringi had to change her maiden name as it sounded like a common Bru name. The betel nut garden which she managed under Govt. lease was taken away. She was sexually teased on a regular basis. Even her Christian school authorities misbehaved with her.

The Mizo politics became further evident from the narration of Mr. Soinaran Reang, a man in his early 40s. He pointed out that in 1995 Assembly election the Brus participated. One of them was the candidate. The Mizos had taken this as an attempt to gain access to the power centre. The political unity of the Brus was not appreciated. They asked the Brus whether they were after Autonomous District Council. After a year a large number of Bru names were struck off from the voters’ list. When the Brus protested, they were told that only those Brus who were living in Mizoram for the last 50 years would find their names in the voters’ list. However, when the Mizos started attacking the Bru villages, the Mizoram Govt. remained a mute spectator. In Mr. Reang’s village, the threatened Bru families approached the Village Council President for security but the Mizo politician expressed his inability to provide them any shelter, and advised the Brus to keep a low profile. The Bru families who were too scared simply fled but the brave ones stayed put. The Young Mizo Association
members came to the village and warned the families of grave consequences and told them to follow those who had already left Mizoram on their own.

Mr. Ramlakhi said that the drunken Mizos picked up some fight with them and threatened them to leave Mizoram. He and his people were too scared to withstand that. In some relief camps in Tripura the Reang dwellers preferred to use the term Lushai to mean the Mizos. It is the name of one the ten Mizo tribes which live in Mizoram. While talking to the Bru IDPs the researcher found that most of them were mentioning that the Mizos were not only destroying their belongings and taking away their live stocks but on the top of that they were sexually harassing the Bru women.

The researcher also obtained data from long chatting sessions which were arranged in the later part of the afternoons when the camp dwellers were back from their work. Certain specific information was made available to him. The Brus felt that in Mizoram they should have opted for animal farming instead of jhum cultivation as enough land was not available. With regard to the education of their children it was revealed that beyond class IV access to education was absolutely impossible unless and until they had send their children to Mizo families to work as pages. In return the Mizo house owner could be generous enough to provide some books to the children. On the top of that the Bru parents had to arrange for hefty sums to ensure further studies for their children. The girl child too had to go through the same process for gaining access to high school education. They were further exposed to sexual exploitation. Even then the so-called educated Brus were not given Govt. jobs as they were meant for the Mizos only.

The Mizos were happy to see the Brus scattered in large areas. For ensuring development of the areas inhabited by them called for some kind of consolidation. The Young Mizo Association and YMC did not like the idea at all as they feared that such unity would enhance the strength of the Brus and they would ask for autonomy. So they disturbed this very effort for consolidation. The Mizo NGOs brought this to the notice of the Mizoram Government but the later paid no attention to this as its survival depended on the support of the Mizo youth. The upright Bru leadership protested against this conspiracy but they were either assaulted or were put behind the bars. They were dubbed as terrorists. The ordinary Bru people who pleaded for the release of their leaders were assaulted too. For two years
this continued and then the alleged killing of the Mizo Forest Guard took place and the situation went out of hand. All sections of the Mizo society took part in this ethnic violence. Burning of Bru houses, destruction of their properties, looting their crops, domesticated animals and animal farms, raping their ladies and girls became common occurrences in Bru villages. Even the Church Pastors played the same dirty tricks. When help was sought from the local MLA he declined and blamed the Brus instead. The Mizo police who came for enquiries actually turned into their tormentors. In some cases, Bru villages were sold at Rs six lakh after the exodus. In a particular village the Bank Manager had advised the Bru families to flee and asked them to sell their animals to him. Cunningly he bought properties worth a lakh for Rs 5000/- only. Elsewhere Mizos made the Brus sell of their pigs at throwaway prices. Ordinarily a full grown pig would sell at Rs. 10000/-, but it was bought for Rs. 500/-. Cocks were killed for Mizo feasts and the owner helplessly observed. They were told that they were paying the taxes for living in Mizoram. The police force did not even bother to take down the complaints of the hapless Brus. Young Bru girls were teased and molested before their parents. When they protested they were beaten. They were treated as infiltrators in Mizo territory. The Bru claim for any freedom was never seriously considered. The educated Brus were feared by Mizos as they could have raised their voice and indeed they were targeted under some pretext or another. The researcher also had prolonged interactions with the Bru leadership in Kanchanpur. They were the office-bearers of Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Forum (MBDPF). Mr. Bruno Msha, the General Secretary of MBDPF was asked whether they had ever thought of turning their movement into a militant one, he vehemently nodded his head to express his disapproval. He was of the opinion that their community was too small to take up a violent path. Any such adventurism would invite greater crises for the tribe. It would give the Mizoram Government an excuse to tyrannize the Bru society once for all. All their democratic movements could be suppressed and large scale annihilation of the Bru people would take place in the name of maintaining the law and order in Mizoram. However when the researcher drew his attention to the role of Bru National Army (BNA), Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram (BLFM) and Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) in this regard, he cynically remarked that those organisations have unwittingly done a disservice to their cause. Notwithstanding his opinion an objective assessment was made about the role of BNLF and BLFM in the context of the
aggressive anti-Bru politics of YMA or MZF. One section of the Brus realised, after the huge exodus of the Bru families from Mizoram to Tripura and Assam in 1997, that mere pleading for justice before the unfriendly Mizoram Government would not lead them anywhere. In 1998, the Bru National Liberation Front had carried on a series of violent attacks on the Mizos as a mark of revenge for all the atrocities committed against the hapless Brus for over a decade. Partially they were successful as since then the Mizo Government had started having a sort of dialogues on a more or less regular basis. However the IDP leadership in Tripura was not very hopeful about the outcome of such political exercise. Mr Bruno Msha of MBDPF, General Secretary, in fact informed the researcher that the Mizoram Government’s step to enter into negotiations with the BNLF leadership should be viewed as an attempt to create a divide among the Bru leadership.

The opinion about the political position of the Brus is not a unanimous one. A strong critique of the role of the present MBDPF leadership was found in the statement of Mr. Elvis Chorkhy whom the researcher interviewed during his visit to Mizoram. Mr. Chorkhy the erstwhile leader of the same organisation informed the researcher that the present MBDPF leaders are misleading the Bru IDPs. They were asking them not return to Mizoram and wait for some time when they would be getting Rs. 2,00,000/- per family and would get government jobs. Mr Chorkhy felt that this might ruin the future of the community if they fall for such false promises. He felt that the demand raised by the Brus for an Autonomous District Council was a premature one. Since this community’s place of habitat was widely scattered, it would be almost impossible to attain some kind of geographical unity, as a necessary precondition for any administrative zone or jurisdiction. The decision to fight election too was an unwise one as unless the process of return was completed. It is advisable that they should return first, get resettled and should be lying low for some time. And then in an organised manner they should try to get themselves politically mobilised. He pointed out to the interviewer that it was of no use to fight the Mizoram administration from the relief camps of Tripura, rather the struggle should start after their return to Mizoram. It should be guided by a strong political strategy. The Brus ought to start pressurising the authorities in Mizoram for allotting particular areas for their resettlement which are both accessible and conducive for carrying out Jhum cultivation. Those areas should not be scattered and on the contrary they should earmarked for Bru habitation. That would pave the way for the
development of a secured zone for the Brus and that would in a covert manner facilitate their political unification.
Today the most important issue that involves the international community is that of ‘Protection’ of the victims of forced migration. Especially the humanitarians cannot but revolve around the question of protecting a person’s basic human rights. The relationship between the ideas of protection and human rights should be examined for evaluating the international endeavours for ensuring this much talked about ‘Protection’. While assessing the conditions of the Internally Displaced Persons, one comes across a community of people who were uprooted from their place of origin, separated from families virtually shorn of their resource base and who find themselves stripped of their most basic means of security and survival. The importance of relief or support for the victims of any natural or man-made disaster can never be underestimated in this regard. In recent past increasing incidents of internal displacement has been posing one of the most critical crises before the human civilisation and the international community. However all efforts to confront it are inevitably stonewalled by the politicised notion of state sovereignty. So much so that even the issue of ethnic cleansing cannot be addressed properly. The prevalence of internal conflict or inter-ethnic strife becomes an obvious development owing to some kind of contestation between communities for either gaining more control over the sovereign power of the state or at least for gaining some accessibility to the decision making processes and resources which ultimately shape a communities life.

To face this challenge new normative developments such as development of concepts like protection of civilians or responsibility to protect doctrine have emerged but their enforcement is still awaited. The internally displaced persons are the most vulnerable lot as they cannot expect the much needed legal protection from the host government in most of the cases as the latter more often than not gives tacit support to the perpetrators of violent attack on the hapless victims in order to drive them away from their habitual place of residence for some reason or another. The common threats to the securities of the IDPs have been distinctly mentioned in a booklet published by the International Committee of The Red Cross. They are exposed to direct attacks and ill treatment. Their families might get separated in the process
of displacement; especially the children may get separated from their parents. The possibility of sexual abuses of the victim women increases many fold. Whatever little possession they are having may be looted. They are exposed to health hazards. The IDPs find it difficult to gain access to essential goods and services, including health care. There is also a risk of tension between the host communities and the displacees. Presence of militant elements carrying weapons in the relief camps may pose a serious problem. Exploitation of the victims is possible in the form of forced recruitment. And above all the places of settlement earmarked for the IDPs may be unfit and unsafe for them.\(^1\)

It was Mr. Francis M. Deng, the Representative of the Secretary General on IDPs, who took up the responsibility of developing the conceptual and legal framework for the protection of IDPs.

He raised the issue of the inability of the governments to fulfil their responsibilities in handling the problem of internal displacements. In such cases the governments may seek assistance of the international community. However when such governments deliberately resist such interventions notwithstanding the magnitude of the problem where lives of a huge number of people are at risk, then the international community will exercise its right to get involved to address that problem.\(^2\)

One has to acknowledge the fact that the primary responsibility of protecting the displaced ones rests with state. The role of the international community will be a supportive one. In case the state fails in its responsibility then it would be the responsibility of the international community to intervene. There will be ‘collective action’ to stop genocide, ethnic cleansing and other acts of violence by means of diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means.\(^3\)

Now the question is as to what would be the actual meaning of the term protection in the context of internal displacement? How much and to what extent of protection to be provided? UN’s Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), explained protection as “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law (human rights, humanitarian and refugee laws). Apart

\(^1\) Internally Displaced: Humanitarian Response to Internally Displaced People in Armed Conflict. International Committee of The Red Cross. June 2010 p.6


\(^3\) Ibid p 93
from ensuring their physical security, their fundamental economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights are to be protected. It should range from preventing action for reducing the chance of displacement to assistance during displacement and ultimately to ensuring their safe return to their original place of residence and integration."  

According to Principle 3 of the Guiding Principle the National Authority is obliged to provide humanitarian assistance to the IDPs within its political jurisdiction. Such assistance is extremely essential to enable the displacees to gain access to the basic amenities of human life like food, water, shelter, health service etc. Similarly Principle 23 of Guiding Principle the host authority should take steps to provide opportunities to the displaced children to acquire access to basic education and that ought to be free and compulsory. Their cultural identity, language and religion would be considered in this regard.

All the above mentioned benefits are to be given to the IDPs simply on the ground that as citizens of the state they are entitled to enjoy that. So as citizens they are expected to enjoy all political rights like the right to participate in the electoral process as they were enjoying prior to their displacement. That has been clearly mentioned in Principle 22(1)(d) of the Guiding Principle.

The effect of displacement is destabilising on the communities that host them. Any displacement violates human rights and on the top of that the hapless victims are robbed of their homes, lands, livelihoods, personal documents supporting their citizenship status, family members and social relationships which in turn deprive them of their fundamental rights. The victims are forced to rely on the host authority for food and water and shelter. The host community finds it tough to ensure their access to health care, education, employment, economic activities and other political rights as basic as that of right to take part in the electoral process. Prolonged displacement leads to the total breakdowns of family and social structures. The IDPs have no option left but to depend on outside aid. “One of the most encouraging signs of international acceptance of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement has been the proposal, adoption, and implementation of numerous laws, policies, and decrees addressing internal displacement in all regions of the world. Almost

4. Ibid p.99
twenty countries have enacted laws and policies explicitly based on the Guiding Principles to date, while other countries have acted to regulate specific problems related to displacement in a manner consistent with their international obligations without necessarily referencing the Guiding Principles.”

IDPs at least theoretically are citizens unlike the refugees; they are entitled to protection under the state. However unlike the refugee laws there is no such things relating to IDP status. In spite of that the IDPs are entitled to receive basic benefits such as food medical assistance and other benefits associated with right to education. As per Principle 18 (2)(a) of the Guiding Principles it is to be ensured that the IDPs irrespective of age or gender should have access to adequate food or the means for its procurement. That calls for the some definite arrangements to be made by the host authorities to provide food related aid and assistance. Through their status as displacees this assistance should remain, though from direct food aid it will be converted to making providing means for them to procure food for themselves. That in turn would make the IDPs self-reliant. The process may ultimately provide a durable solution to their problem. The host government may have to see to it that markets for obtaining food materials should be accessible to the IDPs. The quality of such food should be fit for human consumption and should not contain toxic materials.

Steady supply of water is one of the most important requirements for the displaced persons which have to be taken care of by the host authority. Safe, potable water is essential for both domestic use and for sanitation purpose. For ensuring adequate standard of living for the IDPs, the host government must see to it that safe potable water is available to them. That involves the question of physical access to water. The source of water should be within vicinity of the camps where the IDPs are living.

Once displaced, the IDPs are exposed to the vagaries of nature. The state should assist them by providing habitable housing facilities which would enable them to have access to potable water, fuel meant for cooking, heating, sanitation, health care services and related benefits necessary for civilized existence. In fact the houses should be situated in a place where

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6. Ibid p 338
7. Ibid p. 337
children can have opportunities to obtain education. Above all the structure should be strong enough to withstand natural disaster.

Several socio-politico-economic factors actually govern the efficacious distribution of relief and provision for allied support system. The question of political will becomes the most important in this regard. Persons affected by armed conflict or ethnic violence become virtually helpless unless their short, medium and long term needs are addressed by the Government of the state concerned where they have sought refuge to. The most cardinal needs of the displaced population, viz food, shelter, water and above all security, physical and psychological well-being, should be ensured. The government should try to restore their family links and should provide health care, education and economic and social rehabilitation. In fact most of them lack food, water, shelter and medical attention.

In fact the highest mortality and malnutrition rates recorded in humanitarian emergencies, this past decade have involved internally displaced persons.\(^8\) The displaced people are likely to fall victims of the unfriendly or apprehensive host communities who may refuse to accept them as prospective neighbours even temporarily. So it becomes difficult for the Government to provide relief to the displaced persons. Ultimately it is the consideration of state’s sovereignty that would determine that responsibility for providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons. Everything that way, rests with their government. More often than not relief or protection is restricted either by governmental authorities or by dominant group in the society which wants to drive them away from their region. Moreover for an economically less developed state Government, the task of bearing the burden of citizens from a neighbouring state, becomes all the more difficult. Above all the host government needs to show the political will to address the situation. In quite a few of cases of displacement it was seen that the settlement camps were put up in unfit or unsafe locations. It is to be remembered that protection fundamentally is a legal concept but most unfortunately internally displaced persons are not the concerns of international law. Though as human beings they are entitled to all kinds of protection for under human right laws. Since they are not stateless people their host government is under no obligation to preserve their human rights.

\(^8\) Ibid p. 337
Apparently providing relief and care may appear to be an ad-hoc arrangement, but a comprehensive management of displacement crisis should lead to a long term solution to this complex problem. The International community under United Nations had devised and reframed their policies to address these critical but unavoidable socio-political crises. UNHCR has assumed a leading role in providing protection to the victims of conflict induced displacements. After all "IDPs," fall within the category of broader civilian population that needs protection and assistance because of conflict and human rights abuses. The hapless people are virtually being forced to leave their natural place of residence either owing to armed conflict between two ethnic groups or armed rebellion against the state structure. Security consideration forces them to flee. They are exposed to the danger of armed attack and physical torture. Family separation and especially the children getting separated from their parents make the situation extremely pathetic and dangerous.

Chances of sexual abuses of women become extremely high. In most of the cases the displacees are forced to move to inhospitable environment. They as outsiders are never accepted by the local people and they are discriminated against and marginalized. Ultimately IDP protection could be ensured by the state in which they are displaced. This may lead one to the question of state sovereignty. The question is whether the International community could be allowed to assist the national state to provide protection to the IDPs. Indian Government would never allow the foreign agencies to provide relief to such IDPs as this may give an opportunity to such agencies to interfere in the internal matters of India. So relief to the IDPs may also involve a serious political question. It affects a state’s sovereignty.\(^9\) The International community is responsible for the broader international approach that seeks to protect and assist people uprooted within their own country. It is the primary responsibility of the government of a state where displacement has taken place to ensure the welfare and safety of the IDPs. However if the state fails in its task, then should the state seek assistance from outside? States like India would deliberately refuse or even obstruct such move to preserve their sovereignty. This would lead one to the question of the responsibility of the host state to provide relief, security and above all protection.

Although the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement cannot be taken as something binding on all the states under the UN, it addresses the urgent need for protection of human rights of the internally displaced persons. “Many of these Principles may best be construed as customary international law. ...... for the time being they serve as a morally binding statement.” according Francis Deng. Organised responses are recommended by these Principles though one may also look for unorganized responses to the problems of IDPs. However “organized responses face the perpetual challenge exercising power from the ethics of care and protection…..There is no denying that what we do in the name of care and protection is structured in the power relations prevailing in the society. This leads us to the very question of political options and decisions. One has to acknowledge the fact notwithstanding the public denial by the care giver, of the existence of power, ethics of care and protection ultimately may get shaped and structured by power. The question of care and protection in that sense can never be disentangled from that of power.”

Another way the problem of protracted displacement may be addressed by a comprehensive strategy of local integration. In a project report mentioned in an Expert seminar on protracted IDP situations under The Brookings – Bern Project on Internal Displacement it was pointed out that in protracted situations, local integration rests on at least two aspects, First, local integration may be projected as a durable/permanent solution, and secondly local integration may be viewed as a means of allowing people to live there pending a solution, which ultimately may support their ability to return.

This kind of ‘local integration’ is about realising and protecting rights during displacements, about building self-reliance and self-sufficiency. In this sense, the risks and needs of IDP to support local integration- and the corresponding activities of government, and of humanitarian and development actors, will be highly contextual.

However it largely depends on the relationships between the displacees and the people in host community. According to Principle 1 under Section 1 of the General Principles of The UN Guiding Principles “Internally displaced persons shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. They


11. Ibid 337
shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced.”

This very principle should automatically make the IDPs eligible to avail all the facilities enjoyed by the ordinary citizens including right to enjoy the benefits of Government’s distributive system like rations and related social amenities. Principle 3 further reinforces the responsibility of the national government to provide protection and all related humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their territory and jurisdiction. In fact the IDPs have every right to seek governmental assistance after their displacement. They can never be discriminated against, on the basis of race, sex, language, religion, ethnicity, belief, political or other opinion, social or legal status, age, property and similar other criteria. In fact special care to be taken about the disadvantaged group consisting of estranged minors, expectant mothers, mothers with infants, physically challenged persons as well as old people.

Under Section III of the UN Guiding Principles relating to the protection to be provided to the displacees, it has been specifically mentioned that the IDPs have the right to maintain adequate standard of living. In fact the host government, where the IDPs have taken shelter, are obliged to provide them with essential food, and potable water, basic shelter and housing, appropriate clothing and essential medical service and sanitation. Even the women in such group should be empowered to participate in the distribution of relief material. The host public authority should pay special attention to the wounded and sick persons. Health care of women should get prime consideration.

When people or a large section of a community flee to other places leaving behind their place of residence, they do so with the hope that it would be a purely temporary phenomenon and sooner or later the things will settle down and they would return to their place of origin. When they seek shelter in a place the lives of the host communities get affected in some way or other. Even for the governmental authority it may be burdensome. In most of the cases the host community finds it difficult to provide assistance or relief to these IDPs owing to the meagre resources they have for managing their own affair. The very idea of displacement has different implications for men and women in a group of displacees. All the IDPs are subjected to rampant human rights violations but for the women it is more obvious. Their

dignity is more often than not are compromised even in a host state. A makeshift arrangement like relief camps can hardly protect them from the people in a society where they have taken refuge. Even their position becomes vulnerable among their own people owing to the absence of an organized social structure. Displacement often leads to traumatic changes in family structures and gender roles. The burden on women gets increased as they are often forced to perform duties outside their homes apart from taking care of their regular household chores. In an entirely new setup the males may find it difficult to get jobs. In such situations the women often become soft targets of sexual abuses even rape. This gender dimension of displacement is acquiring importance in all the discussions of this human ordeal.

Moreover, domestic violence is extremely common in displaced families. The women and children are subjected to this kind of oppression and violence probably owing to the ever increasing tension and uncertainty about the future of the victims. The traditional family values do not have any taker. Gender dimensions can never be ignored while providing humanitarian aids relating to food, shelter, water and healthcare and other relief materials.

Owing to serious dearth of places to accommodate the surplus population, camps are put up mostly in inhospitable regions. The conditions of the camps are more often than not are highly uninhabitable. Moreover they cannot be considered as a good solution. Local resources are overstretched and weakened; even camps may not ensure a steady supply of food, water and other essential resources to the IDPs. Yet in case of acute stages of displacement camps are the only solutions. Under some circumstances the relief materials provided to the IDPs may create complex political problem, as such materials are not ordinarily available to the local people belonging to the host communities. Under such situations there may occur, resentment, tension and even rift between the displacees and the local people. It was found that the IDPs were losing the urge to earn a living for themselves. As a matter of fact the host government seldom make any effort to make them economically self-sufficient as they may not be or are not capable of providing jobs to their own people. The non-availability of financial assistance may open the flood gate of all kinds of problems starting from general violence, unlawful activities like stealing, rioting and above all sexual

abuses and related immoral activities. In most of the cases the IDPs found it difficult to fend for themselves as no jobs are available to them. The political authority can afford to ignore their appeal for aids as they do not constitute its vote bank. Insensitive indifference virtually provokes the IDPs to take recourse to radical politics or violence. The failure of the Government of the state in ensuring the security of a community against ethnic violence leads to their exodus and the failure of the host Government to provide relief and protection to them make the position of displacees untenable. In India and other South Asian countries militant movements by such hapless IDPs have been noticed.

The million dollar question is as to who would provide the much needed support to the internally displaced persons and how they could be provided with the immediate humanitarian assistance? It is expected that the states or authorities under which the displacees have sought refuge, would bear the primary responsibility of protecting them. The IDPs have moved to the areas under their jurisdiction only for shelter, so the governmental authorities must ensure that the hapless victims are taken care of and are protected. Their basic needs for their survival must be properly addressed. In this case the situation is an extremely complex one as the Mizoram state instead of providing assistance to the victims of ethnic strife is actively supporting the cause of the Mizo population who are hostile to the Bru community in general.

An assessment may be made about the role performance of the Tripura Government as a relief provider to the displaced Brus who started landing on the Northern part of Tripura in late 1997 following an inter-ethnic clash between the Bru (Reang) and Mizo communities. As it had been already pointed out that schism between the two communities began appearing after the formation of the Reang Democratic Convention Party (RDCP). The policy of this party was to safeguard the Bru culture, language and custom and to develop welfare of the Bru People. The first General Assembly was called upon by the RDCP on 3-6th, October 1990 at Damparengpui. The Assembly was attended by 551 delegates from different villages out of which 205 came from outside the state of Mizoram. Songkhar Reang, MLA of Tripura Legislative Assembly and Kripa Mohan Reang, a retired Pilot also attended the Assembly. The subsequent formation of Bru National Union and its political demand for having an Autonomous District Council for the Brus aggravated the already volatile political situation. The alleged killing of the Mizo Forest-Guard by the Reangs was the last nail on the coffin. In mid-October 1997, the Brus started fleeing Mizoram following rampant violence purported
by the Mizo youth against the Bru people and burning down of their houses and indiscriminate raping of Bru women. There has been a well-orchestrated retaliatory violence against Bru communities across Mizoram. While the extent of the violence remains undocumented, however the situation was threatening enough to force an estimated 45,000 Reangs to leave their lands and belongings in Mizoram, and flee to neighbouring Tripura and Assam. There was widespread arson, looting and rape.

The researcher had conducted a fortnight long survey on the Internally Displaced Brus residing in the relief camps in Kanchanpur subdivision of north Tripura for assessing the conditions of those hapless victims of ethnic violence in Mizoram. About 98% of the respondents had said that they had left Mizoram in mid-October 1997 and the rest said that they crossed over to Tripura in as late as, early 2010 and until recently they did not belong to the camps. Of the Bru families who had fled Mizoram in 1997, 15% told the researcher that they had initially gone to Assam before joining the relief camps in Tripura later. When the respondents were asked where exactly they took refuge to after crossing the Mizoram border the answers were varied. Some 50% of them replied that stayed under open sky in a field for two months in Anandabazar area of Kanchanpur. About 36% said that they had taken refuge to a jungle before switching over to the relief camps. A lone respondent said that he along with his family members went to a place called Gurguti in Assam.

However the most important part of the survey rested on queries about their position in the post-displacement scenario and the conditions they were faced with in the relief camps. The Reangs were asked whether they were facing problems in the camps, 100% answered in affirmative. The researcher then asked them about the types of problems they were faced with. The answers were varied. About 62% opined that apart from other problems the shortage of food was bothering them most. However of the total number of respondents 76% said that non-availability of drinking water was causing them great hardship. About 30% mentioned that scarcity of fuel was a big problem. By fuel they meant firewood and kerosene. The camp-dwellers generally expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the quantum of fuel that was made available to them. 46% of the Bru population in the camp felt that the availability of fuel was a grave problem. The supply of the same was inadequate. The otherwise friendly neighbours belonging to Tripura were not exactly willing to share forest wood with these displaced people, as that in their opinion would lead to scarcity of wood as
fuel. The quantum of Kerosene that was made available to the camps through the distribution system was not only insufficient but was extremely irregular.

The researcher further enquired about the most difficult problems they were facing in the camps. Respondents could not properly prioritize their problems and their responses widely overlapped. Some respondents felt that more than one problem were of equal importance. 57.89% felt that scarcity of water was the most critical problem they were faced with. 42.1% thought that non-availability of food was the worst problem they were faced with. 15.3% respondents expressed their unhappiness about the dearth of medical facilities in and around the relief camps. The remaining mentioned more than one or two critical problems as most important. Then the respondents were requested to explain their problems in details. The group discussions in different camps provided important information to the researcher. The respondents who belonged to Naisingpara, Ashapara and Kaskau camps were extremely vocal about the failure of the Tripura Government to provide drinking water to the camps. Some of them took the researcher to some waterholes near their camps from where they had to procure their water on a regular basis. As it is the camps are situated on remote areas and on the top of that the sources of water were virtually out of easy reach of the dwellers. Those so-called ponds or waterholes were at the bases of the hill tops where relief camps were situated. The Reang IDPs had to climb down nearly 180 to 200 feet for getting a bucket of water. As it is the process involved great risk even in summer or winter, one could imagine how it became during rainy season. The Government made hollow promises of solving the problem by sinking tube wells in and around the camps and they were never kept. In some camps there were a couple of tube wells but they were either non-functional or tended to dry up more often than not. Repeated requests from the Reang leadership yielded no results. In some of the places adjacent to the camps in Ashapara some tube wells were functional but those served as sources of water for the local residents too. As a result frequently the camp dwellers got embroiled in disputes with the local people there who otherwise were indifferent to their existence. As a result of this the relationship between the Brus and the local people got strained. In Kashirampara camp, out of five ring-wells, five had dried up while out of 13 tubewells, nine were out of order.

All the respondents were complaining about the meagre supply of food materials through the rationing system. The quantum of food was insufficient for the families. Moreover the
children born in the relief camps in the post-displacement period were not taken into account while distributing food grains. The size of the families increased during the last 12 years but the quantum of food materials to such families remained unaltered. One of the respondents pointed out that they were provided Rs 5/- as monetary relief per day while the cost of eggplant were Rs 40/- a kg.

59% were of the opinion that medicines are hardly available and there is an acute lack of medical facilities. 30% of the respondents complained about the non-availability of materials for setting up their huts. About 20% sounded cynical about the future of their children as there were no school available for their education. The researcher found out while interviewing the leaders of the Bru organisation that the Tripura government has done very little with regard to the educational facilities to children in the camps. 15% of the respondents expressed their helplessness owing to lack of jobs which could have improved their deplorable conditions in the relief camps in Kanchanpur subdivision.

With regard to medical facilities and availability of medicines, the camp dwellers pointed out that they approached the local health centres or hospitals in Kanchanpur, but during outbreak of epidemics like gastroenteritis medical assistance had never been adequate. As a result of this governmental apathy, huge number of deaths due to such outbreak had been quite common. The researcher was also informed that 25 camp-dwellers including children died of malaria within a fortnight. A local resident in Ashapara camp provided this information. The authority paid little attention to that problem. When the researcher had asked the respondents whether Government officials who were in charge of the relief camps regularly visited the camps for assessing the conditions of the displaced Brus, 42% of the respondents opined that such visits did not take place and their problems were never addressed. 31.57% said that they were aware of such visits and 10.52% pointed out that they had to travel upto Kanchanpur to meet the Sub-Divisional Magistrate to draw his attention to their problems. The remaining Brus did not respond. The problem of setting up of dwelling huts in the camp area was extremely acute owing to shortage of tin and bamboos. The situation worsened after the incidence fire in Naisingpara camp in 2011. The authority, the Reang leadership claimed, was reluctant to help them. As a result they had to depend on NGOs for assistance.
The respondents were asked whether they found their settlements in the camps worth living. The responses were mixed. Some 67.23% respondents opined that the huts were in deplorable conditions and the situation became unbearable during rainy season in particular. 15.67% of the respondents most cynically told the researcher that their huts were the best thing they could hope for under such trying circumstances. For some of them getting adequate rations for their families was more important than addressing that issue. 10% of the Reang families in Naisingpara felt that they always felt scared to reside in their huts after the dreadful fire incidence. They had pointed out that the lack of fire-fighting system made their stay in the camps most precarious. The researcher found out that the Government of Tripura was extremely slow in responding to the pathetic conditions of the Bru IDPs whose houses were completely destroyed by fire. They were virtually forced to live under open sky as the huts which escaped that ordeal were too small to accommodate the victims. Around 5.26% respondents said that they were having much better houses in Mizoram. The rest were reluctant to respond. When they were asked to find out whether their huts create more problems during rainy season in particular, 42.1% gave affirmative answers. The camp dwellers were then asked by the researcher about their interactions with the local people. 73.68% of the Bru families readily pointed out that they have regular interactions with the local people. only10.52% however said that they did not have the courage to interact with the local people. One of the respondents narrated how his family was provided with food by a local Bengali family when they had crossed over to Tripura from Mizoram in 1997. Those who said that they regularly interact with the local people also pointed out that the local people pick up conversation with the Brus in languages ranging from Kobru, Bengali to Hindi. When asked whether they were friendly or not, around 78.64% pointed out that they were generally indifferent. However the some of the office clerks in the office of Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Kanchanpur revealed the true picture, though they requested the researcher not to mention their name. They felt that the supply of food materials to the camps were highly inadequate. They also told the researcher that there was an under-current of tension between the local poor people and the displaced Brus. They were not supporting the steps taken by the state government in rehabilitating the Brus in relief camps even as a temporary measure. The local Reangs strongly felt that the Brus were responsible for large scale deforestation for meeting their requirement of fuel. Actually the local people too depended on forest resources. The researcher found out from some of the Bengalis in Kanchanpur that they would be happy to see the Brus going back to Mizoram as they felt that
the money meant for the development of Tripura state was diverted to the Relief camps of the Bru IDPs.

The critical aspect of relief camps relates to extent to which amenities for civilised existence are available or not. The researcher wanted to find out whether some of the basic facilities were made accessible or not. The Bru families were asked about the availability of medical facilities to the camp dwellers. All of them pointed out that immediate medical attention in case of emergency were never available. They have to travel considerable distance to see a doctor. 15.78% said that they have to go to Anandabazar for treatment of any sort. 31.57% told the researcher that they have to take the patient to either Kanchanpur or Kailashsahar Hospital for getting medical attention. The journey is both strenuous and costly. 10.52% opined that in minor cases they travel to Dasda Hospital to see a doctor. The respondents sounded cynical about the local health centres as the doctors are hardly available there. However 10.52% Bru respondents pointed out that local health centres sometimes attend patients with minor ailments. All the respondents in Naisingpara camp grumbled that in spite of frequent outbreak of gastroenteritis in the camp, the Government did not provide adequate medical facilities timely and sufficient medicines to tackle the situation. As a result large scale deaths occurred owing to that disease. Doctors from local hospitals visit their camps but lack of sufficient medications had made the situation absolutely critical. The Government officials in Kanchanpur SDM office evaded the questions when asked by the researcher in this regard. Notwithstanding the non-availability of proper medical attention, all the respondents in the camps visited by the researcher pointed out in unison that health centres are approachable.

The researcher enquired about the conditions of their makeshift huts in camps during torrential rain or hostile winter. 78% of the respondents were quick to reply that the conditions become unbearable especially during rainy season as the roads become highly slushy and movement from one place to another gets virtually impossible. Mr. Bruno Msha, the General Secretary of Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Forum pointed out that the supply of ration during such period gets affected as the roads leading to the camps become inaccessible for vehicles for a while. Some 41% of the Bru respondents complained about the short supply of blankets and other warm clothing during winter. A large family of ten members would get at the most four blankets. However the government officials in charge of
the camps were not ready to admit their failure in this regard. The role played by some of the NGOs was more helpful in this regard as per the MBDPF leadership.

The camp-dwellers were asked by the researcher whether the local police helped them to procure relief materials. Strangely enough they almost unanimously acknowledged the positive role played by the local police. However when they were asked whether the political leaders visit them there or not, some 47% of the respondents opined that notwithstanding their visits and promises made for further assistance, situations do not change at all. In fact they pointed out politicians cutting across party line just observe the situation and then they do nothing. The Continued presence of around 36000 extra populations in the Sub-Division (about 25% of total population of the Sub-Division) has created additional burden and problem from administrative, social and economic point of view. Local administration is under severe strain for attending relief work. The effort by the Govt. of India for return of these 36000 Reang Migrants has so far suffered due to a new controversy and hurdle on the question of the residential status of these Reang migrants sheltered in North Tripura. Over 500 deaths were reported in these camps due to gastro epidemic in June 1998. The Reangs have survived on the 450 grams of rice given by the Tripura Government.

As per the report of the Asian Indigenous Tribal People Network the displaced Brus have been living in miserable conditions. The new-born babies in camp are enlisted in the census yet they are not issued any relief cards thereby not making them entitled for food items. Even children who had turned adult long back are provided rations for minors. The ration quota is so inadequate that the Brus do not even report death, as such report may result in further reduction of the rations being provided.

It is held by Asian Indigenous And Tribal Peoples Network, that the Tripura government deliberately sought to make the lives of the Brus difficult by not providing humanitarian assistance in the initial stages. At present, a Bru adult gets cash dole of Rs 2.90 per day and a minor gets Rs 1.45 per day. 450 grams of rice is being provided to per adult Bru per day while 225 gram rice is being provided to per minor per day. This ration is highly inadequate for such a huge group of Bru displacees.. On the top of that, on 15 October 2007, the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department, Government of Tripura further reduced the monthly rice allocation to the relief camps under the Public Distribution System (PDS),
inter alia, on the ground that there is no separate allocation of rice from the Government of India for them.\textsuperscript{15}

The same body also observed that medical facilities are almost non-existent. Only after large scale deaths of the Brus take place in the camps in the form of an epidemic the medical team visits the spot. The children and pregnant women are most adversely affected by this indifference. As there are no primary health care centres, pregnant women were giving birth to their babies at the relief camps where the most basic medical facilities were unavailable. Maternal mortality is quite high and as are also the common diseases.\textsuperscript{16}

The lack of the most basic amenities like drinking water makes things more difficult for the Brus. Most of the tube wells are non-functioning in the camps. The researcher personally enquired and found out from the local population that they were not sunk deep enough for providing water. That leads to frequent outbreak of gastroenteritis in the camps. Minimum sanitation facilities were not made available to camp-dwellers. They sarcastically told the researcher that the government officials were more interested about counting the number of IDPs in camps whenever they visited them, than in providing relief materials to the Brus. Birth of Bru children in the camps never mattered to the officials. They were excluded while heads were counted. The Tripura government’s effort to enforce right to education was merely farcical as it has failed to provide educational facilities to the children in the camps. The primary education programme under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (Education for All) has been sketchily extended to the relief camps where negligible number of children gets the chance to avail it. There is no scope for higher education for their children. Effectively, over 5,000 minors have been denied the right to education and virtually an entire generation of the Brus has been kept virtually without any kind of education during the last decade.\textsuperscript{17} The failure of the policy of the Tripura Government in providing the right to education to the Brus was no less condemnable than the practices of the Mizoram government. In striking contrast the Kashmiri migrants are receiving much better treatment from the national government.

\textsuperscript{15} The problems of non-implementation of ESCR rights in India: The tribal dimension www2.ohchr.org/english/..../India-The\_tribal\_dimention-NCHRTM.doc p.7 Accessed on 12 September 2014

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid

Some seats are reserved in technical/professional institutions for them. Even the cut-off percentage is relaxed by 10% for the students of the Kashmiri displacees.

More over there is no security for the camp inmates. It has come to light that about 35 Bru children (aged between five and 15 years) went missing from the refugee camps during the last five years. The state government of Tripura has ordered an inquiry into the incident and to take all possible steps to trace the children.18

The government of India does not have any specific policy to deal with the problems of conflict induced displacement. Hence, ad hoc policies are applied while dealing with the IDPs and those who enjoy proximity with New Delhi enjoy more benefits while providing relief. So the IDPs who are marginally placed away from the mainstream political life can hardly hope for state relief.

There was a huge discontent among the leaders of the MBDPF that the relief distribution system was deliberately tampered with, by a few government officials who deleted a huge number of names from the list of Bru IDPs. They told the researcher they had to stage a demonstration to protest against such misdeeds. There was continuous tension involving the Government officials and the IDPs. They never agreed upon the list made by the Tripura administration. In fact the SDO’s office too was finding it difficult to control the ethnic clashes between the local people and the Bru IDPs over forest resources. Large scale deforestation resulted from the ever increasing demand for fuel, and in such vacant places the IDPs started their crude agricultural production. So the demographic balance got disturbed. Another point of conflict was caused by the displacees’ willingness to provide cheap labour to the agricultural and other mode of production. That was almost half the price of the standard local rate. Such developments adversely affected the local economy as the local labourers went jobless for quite some time. Sporadic clashes broke out in areas adjacent to the camps.

One may observe that the discrimination against the Internally Displaced Bru people is glaring. This would become evident when the Researcher compared the quantum of relief and assistance provided to the displaced Kashmiri Pundits and the amount provided to the Bru

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relief camp dwellers. In addition to basic dry rations, the Kashmiri Pandits are being provided with cash assistance of Rs 1,000/- per head per month subject to a maximum of Rs 4,000/- per family per month both at Jammu and Delhi relief camps. While the Bru adult person receives a cash dole of Rs. 2.90 per day (i.e. Rs 87 per month) and the minor gets Rs. 1.45 per day (i.e. Rs 43.5 per month). Apart from that the Kashmiri Pundits also received financial help from other State Governments. In contrast some kind of step-motherly treatment is meted to them according to the MBDPF leadership. On the top of that, on 15 October 2007, the government of Tripura further reduced the ration supply to the relief camps on the ground that there is no separate allocation of rice from the Government of India for the Brus displaced people.19 Perhaps this why Brus do not even report death as such reports may invariably resulting in further reduction of the meagre quantum of rations being provided. Although officials claimed that dal and coconut oil are being provided, it was news to the Brus. Their leaders ridiculed the claims of the Tripura Government.

The graveness of the situation becomes visible if one studies the High Court Order issued to the Tripura Government in this regard on the basis of a petition filed before it by Mangal Debbarma and Paromita Dhar on April 21, 2014 for the benefit of certain members of the Reang community living in relief camps of North Tripura district since 1997-1998. The petitions said that the Reang displacement victims are living in sub-human conditions in the relief camps for the past 16 years.

According to the petitioners the Brus are not illegal immigrants to India. They have been forced to leave their home state because of ethnic strife and because of the fact that the Government at their home state are unable to protect the basic rights of the members of this community forcing them to leave their home state. Yet the members of the Bru community are not treated like human beings.

A social justice bench headed by Justice Madan B Lokur was particularly shocked at an excerpt from the affidavit filed by the ministry of home affairs (MHA) which stated that, “Efforts now on creating additional facilities in the camp life would only incentivize the Brus to their camp life in Tripura and shift the focus away from rehabilitation in Mizoram to relief

19 Ibid
measures in the refugee camps.” 20 Terming the affidavit as “disturbing” the bench which also comprised of Justice Uday Umesh Lalit, who said, “Is this how you treat people of this country? The government cannot say ‘I don’t want to improve the condition in the camp, because if it is done they will never leave’. Can you say, tomorrow I am going to throw them in gutter.” 21 The Tripura High Court too has asked the Government of India on May 9th 2014 to constitute a committee to investigate the actual condition of six relief camps in North Tripura district, which is housing displaced Reangs from neighbouring Mizoram. The high court directed that the committee be constituted before May 31 to investigate health, sanitation and food given to the inmates and the education being imparted to the children in the camps. 22

As per the “UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacements” the internally displaced Brus were entitled to be protected during displacement. Principle 18 talks about making available essential food, potable water, basic shelter, essential medical services, etc. The conditions in the camps are not satisfactory as they lack basic amenities. There is no facility for education. The Central Government is meeting the expenditure in providing assistance in terms of essential food and other amenities but the same was not adequate enough considering their long stay in camps. The State Government of Tripura is also not able to provide adequate assistance as the State is currently afflicted with serious insurgency problems and ethnic conflicts. As the Reangs are not getting adequate assistance, Principle 18 stands violated to some extent.

After witnessing the plight of the Reang IDPs the Researcher felt that ultimately, what needs to be done is more than just facilitating the IDPs’ return home. India Government’s callous handling of IDP crises and its overall approach to this problem of internal displacement caused by inter-ethnic conflicts is more or less ineffective and insensitive. Though the Union Government alone cannot be held to be responsible for this, yet it can play a positive role in creating a national normative framework for the nation as whole. However one cannot ignore the fact that as India is a federal country and the IDPs are the primary responsibility of the


21 Ibid

22 Ibid
state governments. In the absence of any regional and national mechanism different IDPs receive different treatments on the basis of their caste/religious/ethnic identities.

Non-profit organizations and charities also provide services. But owing to India’s extremely competitive political climate it has sometimes been difficult to sustain political support for services to IDPs. This became evident when the some NGOs tried to provide relief to the victims of terrible inferno at the Naisingpara Relief Camp.

There is no reason to accept the general view that the Tripura Government had been thinking in terms of discontinuing the relief to the camps of displaced Brus only after the Union Government decided to reduce the quantum of assistance to the state in this regard. In fact as per the report by the Asian Indigenous Tribal Peoples Network way back in November 1997, the State of Tripura decided to stop rations and other basic facilities being provided to the Reangs/Brus in order to coerce them to return to their native place i.e. Mizoram. To prevent that the same Network sought the intervention by the National Human Rights Commission in order to protect the life and liberty of the Reangs/Brus.23

The Researcher while interviewing the MBDPF leaders learnt that there were virtually no medical facilities for the hapless Bru displacees. Large number women died while giving birth as no medical supervision is made available in the camps. Even new born children fall victims owing to the non-existence of Doctors in the vicinity. A large number of inmates, mainly children and old persons died in malaria, while the civil and health administration did nothing to provide adequate medical facilities to them. Inadequate availability of medicines and shortage of medical/health staff made situation critical for the camp dwellers. Even one doctor openly admitted his helplessness to tackle the situation.24

The MBDPF in its letters dated 26.06.07 and 20.07.07 addressed to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Kanchanpur, Tripura (N) respectively pointed out the lack of basic amenities etc. at the relief camps. But as of now adequate relief has not been provided. The copy of an application addressed to the then Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram was provided to the Researcher by the General

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Secretary of MBDPF demanding immediate attention to the problems of the displacees. The cardinal points may be mentioned here. One of their important demands related to the 622 Bru families who fled Mizoram in 2009 owing to violent attack on them by the Mizo people. The Bru leadership strongly claimed that those who were displaced recently must be granted relief in the form of cash-dole for their survival. The Mizoram Government had washed their hands off stating that they had already taken back the Brus who truly belonged to Mizoram.

The letter also appealed for an increase of the quantum of cash-dole paid to the displacees. Each adult displaced Reang was paid Rs.5.00 per day and a minor got Rs. 2.50 per day. While each displaced Kashmiri Pundit got Rs 1250.00 per month. This discrimination becomes more obvious in view of the rising price index.\(^{25}\)

In the year 2005 the financial assistance for construction or renovation of dwelling houses has been provided to the displaced persons at the rate of Rs. 2,000/- (Two thousand) in cash and Rs. 1,000/- (One thousand) as a materials per family. The houses constructed in the last 6 years have already been damaged and in dilapidated condition. At present, the widows and the vulnerable families do not have houses for sheltering and they are lying under the makeshift huts made up of leaves, thatches and polythene sheets. So, a request was made to grant a financial assistance at least Rs. 30,000/- (Thirty thousand) only to each family for reconstruction of their dwelling houses. The state government of Tripura also failed to provide any relief materials to the displaced persons for about a month. The situation was extremely precarious for their existence. The IDPs were living in deplorable camp conditions with tarpaulin sheets as the only roof for majority of the IDPs. The unfriendly weather condition during winter made matter unbearable. Ultimately the SDM Kanchanpur had to submit the application to the higher authority for providing financial assistance in December 2009. The Government had to react and it granted aid to the Brus on humanitarian grounds.\(^{26}\)

The situation has virtually remained unchanged. As per a news article published in Indian Express the conditions in the camps have deteriorated to a great extent. A Public Interest

\(^{25}\) Op.cit Asian Indigenous And Tribal Peoples Network

Litigation filed before the Learned High Court about the pitiable conditions of the relief camps in Kanchanpur virtually induced the Union Government to take a stock of the ground reality. The Committee constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs visited a large number of relief camps in Tripura and witnessed the abject conditions of the camps. The Bru IDPs are not even allowed to take the advantage of MGNREGA schemes launched by the Union Government. That made the survival of the camp dwellers even tougher. The IDPs were not provided with any cultivable land where they could procure their own means of subsistence. The Court order revealed that the IDP families were getting an abysmally low quantity of relief material from the Tripura Government. Each adult gets Rs 5 per day plus 600 grams of rice. Minors, meanwhile, get Rs 2.5 and 250 grams of rice. Each family is also given Rs 10 per month to purchase cooking oil. The court further observed that the camp dwellers were not even provided with death or birth certificates and thereby weakening their standing as Indian citizens.

The leaders of the Mizoram Bru Displaced People’s Forum (MBDPF) told the researcher that they were desperately trying to draw the attention of the Union Government and they conveyed to the Central Officials that they were sensing a conspiracy of the Tripura Government to oust them from Tripura even though no sign of any settlement with the Mizoram Government was in sight. The leadership felt that the State Government was trying to make the life in the camps as harsh as was possible so that the IDPs are practically coerced to leave the camps and go back to Mizoram. What was even more alarming for the leadership was that the ethnic Bengali population was becoming hostile to the Bru IDPs. The Bengalis were becoming apprehensive that finally the Brus will never leave Tripura again and would become their competitors seeking employment. Mr. Bruno Msha the General Secretary of MBDPF pointed out that a job done by a Bru IDP may fetch Rs. 100/- while the same done by a person belonging to any other community would fetch Rs. 200/-. Mr. Bruno Msha had candidly opined that the insufficient relief and the unavailability of employment had forced the Brus in the camps to settle for any kind of work at low wages.

While Mizoram Government claims that the money from the Central Government meant for the Bru IDPs are often diverted to militant Bru outfits viz. the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) and the Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram but the reality did not reveal that. The

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official and unofficial narrative in Mizoram claimed that the otherwise peace-loving Bru people were instigated by the BNLF and BNU. The IDPs lived on bare rations, were hardly got any opportunities for employment, education and health facilities, and no entitlement to agricultural or other land. The most important aspect the host government must address is the question of physical security of the displacees. The Tripura Government has failed to ensure the security of the Brus even in relief camps. In 2009 the IDPs staying in Kanchanpur relief camp were threatened by militant Mizo youths. The Khakchang camp was attacked by a group of Mizo youth on 15th November 2009 and as a result a large number of Brus were injured.

It appears quite strange that the Mizoram Government does not hesitate to allow a section of displaced Brus in the relief camp to participate in voting though they at the same time refuse to take them back to their place of origin in Mizoram. EVMs are dispatched to the remote areas of the North Tripura where the relief camps are situated to enable the Bru voters to vote. The researcher had interviewed a senior Government Official who had come down to Kanchanpur in North Tripura to initiate talks about the return of the Bru IDPs. He deliberately evaded the question about the hesitancy of the Mizoram Government to take back the entire displaced Bru population. He continued to argue that the voters’ list did not contain the names of most of the Bru camp dwellers and actually they belong to Tripura. Yet he supported the mode of voting by the displaced Brus. Their reluctance to take back the displacees had further derailed the process of relief supplies to the relief camps as the Government of Tripura started apprehending that the Brus will never be allowed to go back to Mizoram. The Sub Divisional Magistrate of Kanchanpur had informed the researcher that the Tripura Government was no longer in a position to bear the economic burden of this volume unless the Central government ensures the return of the Brus back to Mizoram or bears the entire financial burden of providing relief to the camps of the Bru IDPs.

A survey conducted on the Bru IDP camps revealed that the inmates are also becoming victims of AIDS. A survey at the refugee camps in Kanchanpur Sub-division of North-Tripura district conducted by the state health department has found that at least 6 Bru IDPs staying at these camps have been suffering from AIDS and 12 others are found to be HIV.

positive. Health department sources further say that a section of poverty stricken refugees were working as sex workers and a section of youth were drug addicts, who are contributing towards the spread of this disease.

The indifference shown to the IDPs by the host government becomes evident. Job opportunities were not made available to the displacees and the women had to get involved in flesh trade for mere existence. Under Principle 11 of the Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement it has been specifically mentioned that “Every human being has the right to dignity and physical, mental and moral integrity.”

A very recent news report involving the relief camps appears to be extremely shocking. Ten displaced Reang persons including eight young women were detained on the suspicion that the women were being trafficked to Gujarat from Kanchanpur. A conspiracy was hatched to send young Bru girls surreptitiously to Gujarat where they would be working in beauty parlour. Actually it was a smokescreen for flesh trade. The poverty-stricken Bru parents had fallen prey to such designs of some mischievous middlemen.

Notwithstanding the problems faced by the Government of Tripura the IDPs too are to enjoy the right to get protected against rape and other kinds of sexual violence, mutilation, torture inhuman treatment and acts undermining their dignity such as forced labour and forced prostitution in the community where they have been given shelter after displacement. The researcher while talking to some of the female camp dwellers in Naisingpara relief camp learnt that the problem of sexual harassment of women was quiet common and their male members were often exploited by the local neighbours in the host community by forcing them to do odd jobs by grossly under-paying them. The relief supply was further hit owing to the wide spread problem of insurgency and ethnic clashes.

As per an IDMC report a survey conducted by Asian Indigenous & Tribal People’s Network (AITPN) in January-February 2008 in the IDP relief camps situated in Kanchanpur of North Tripura revealed that 7204 Bru children did not receive any relief rations as they were not registered. The AITPN lodged a complaint to the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in this regard. The NCPCR found out that the conditions in the relief camps appear to be extremely shocking. Ten displaced Reang persons including eight young women were detained on the suspicion that the women were being trafficked to Gujarat from Kanchanpur. A conspiracy was hatched to send young Bru girls surreptitiously to Gujarat where they would be working in beauty parlour. Actually it was a smokescreen for flesh trade. The poverty-stricken Bru parents had fallen prey to such designs of some mischievous middlemen.

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camps were sub-human and pointed out that there was none or little if any, registration of births or deaths. They further noted that there was marginal immunisation, no health facilities or primary health centres, no safe drinking water poor sanitation and inadequate rations for the displaced Bru children. The situation remained unchanged even after March 2009.  

The role of National Human Rights Commission becomes extremely important in the context displacement problem in Mizoram. The NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) had visited the relief camps in Kanchanpur district of North Tripura. Only owing to pressure created by the NHRC the Central Government had started granting rations to the relief camps. In fact both the Central Government and Tripura State Government were forced to take step to address the critical problem of displaced Brus. Notwithstanding these efforts one may look at the result of a survey conducted among different displaced communities in India reveals that over 55 per cent of the internally displaced do not receive any support at all and only 13 per cent receive any assistance from the authorities. The report also reveals that more than 70 percent of the surveyed population believe that return will be impossible, a fact that underlines the need for the government to work out sustainable solutions.

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Chapter V

Politics of Return

Repatriation refers to a return to a country of origin. In these broad terms, it can refer to people, refugees or deportees.\(^1\) The very idea of going back to home sounds so reassuring yet the process involves an extremely complex, prolonged and tedious negotiation. It depends upon few very important factors, viz. a) *The location of the original home in relation to the displaced settlement area*: b) *Factions controlling the original homelands*: c) *The peace agreement*: d) *The International Community*.\(^2\) However the problem under this doctoral thesis involves the Internally Displaced Persons hence the term repatriation is technically not applicable. So the researcher uses the term “Return” instead of repatriation. However most of the media coverage used the term repatriation while describing the process of return of the Brus to Mizoram.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement have three specific principles which deal with the question of return, resettlement and reintegration. Principle 28.1 under Section V requires the competent authorities i.e. the host government should consider it as their primary responsibility of creating favourable conditions and providing the internally displaced persons the means and ability to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or place of habitual residence or to resettle voluntarily in any other part of the country of their origin. The Governmental authority shall try to ensure the integration of the returned or resettled and rehabilitated internally displaced persons. The authority needs to ensure that the IDPs are allowed in an unhindered manner to participate actively in the planning and management of their return or resettlement and reintegration. Principle 29.1 categorically states that such returned persons shall not be under any circumstance

\(^1\) Repatriation http://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/repatriation.asp Accessed on 12 October 2015
discriminated against, as a result of their status of being displaced persons. The authority should ensure that such persons enjoy their right to fully and equally participate in public affairs at all levels and shall have equal access to public services. The government and related competent authority have the duty and responsibility to help the returned or resettled IDPs to recover and salvage as far as possible, their property and possession which they were compelled to leave behind under the circumstances, while fleeing or were forcibly dispossessed of upon their displacement. In case such recovery is not possible the governmental authority should provide suitable and appropriate compensation or other form of just reparation. Principle 30 under Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement requires all authorities concerned, to grant and facilitate for international humanitarian organisations and other appropriate actors unimpeded access to internally displaced persons to assist in their return or resettlement and reintegration. However the Principle number 15 calls for protection of the IDPs against forcible return or resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty and/or health would be at risk.

However all the principles under the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement some way or other refer to the required ground work for a durable solution of the problem of displacement. It would be extremely relevant to address this process in the context of Practitioner’s Kit for Return, Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Development, as being mentioned in “An Agenda for a Call for Action” under by the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies & The Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement. The whole exercise emphasises on two fundamental goals to be pursued in this regard. 1) To provide assistance to those IDPs who want to return and 2) to assist the care givers of the host community and other stakeholders who are there to help and to promote the smooth and peaceful return and resettlement of the internally displaced persons. Return, resettlement and reintegration involves certain important questions viz.

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4. Ibid. p-340
I. Voluntary return in conditions of safety and dignity
II. Participation and management of return by IDPs
III. Non-discrimination
IV. Recovery of property or compensation
V. Access by humanitarian organizations

The very mention of the word voluntary means it disapproves any return under duress. In the context of displacement ‘Return’ would then mean the process of going back to one’s original place of residence. However ‘Resettlement’ is a term which means starting a new life in another part of the country. While ‘Reintegration’ may mean re-entry of previously internally displaced persons into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the community to which they originally belonged or to a new community where they are to be resettled.6

As has been mentioned earlier the return of the displacees should be voluntary and only when this is voluntary the possibility of a lasting and durable solution can emerge. The decision to return will be based on freedom of choice and proper information. The entire process should take place in an environment of safety and above all security. Security stands for physical security, material security and above all legal safety. At the same time dignity of the former displaced persons could be ensured when they are treated with respect and all their rights are duly restored. “The elements of “voluntariness” and “dignity” imply the participation of the internally displaced in the planning and management of their return or resettlement and reintegration involving the displaced will make their return or resettlement more successful as well as more sustainable.”7

Return and resettlement of IDPs require a condition which existed prior to the emergence of the conflict which forced the victims to flee from their natural place of residence. Under a changed circumstances they would be assured of the option for a safe, voluntary and dignified return to their home and if that is not possible then to a new place where they

6. Ibid. p. 13
7. Ibid. p. 13
would be resettled with all the benefits they were enjoying prior to their displacement. Once they reach their destinations, returnees should have the option for property restoration or compensation, and should receive strong reintegration and rehabilitation support to build their livelihoods and contribute to long-term economic and political development.\(^8\) If effective assistance is provided to them by the governmental authorities then that would enable the returnees to rebuild their disturbed socio-economic set up. Only a durable solution to such problem would permanently bring to an end to violent conflict and in the process the new legitimate political order would restore normalcy in the conflict-ridden area. Restoring the returnees the right to property and residency would establish a normal state-citizenship relationship. Reintegration with the local community will then surely be achievable.

Before initiating the process of return or resettlement the authority should carry out a thorough investigation for assessing the ground situation of the areas where the IDPs are to return or to be resettled. The possibility of any kind of resistance or challenge being offered to the victims may frustrate the entire endeavour. It is a very difficult task to acquire information about the undercurrents of social tension and the psychology of rejection. Unless such elements of dissonance are removed, all efforts for reintegration will fall flat.

“When the prospect of returning causes great fear, however, displaced populations should always have the option of a safe and assisted resettlement in their home country”\(^9\)

Actually the displacees are more often than not exposed to discrimination in every sphere of life. They are denied access to most important public services such as, education, health service, public affairs, and employment. Their women as the most vulnerable group and are always discriminated against. The returnees are viewed as enemy community. This situation should be totally altered and the existing society should enable the displaced community to return with safety and allow the process of reintegration to take place.


\(^9\) Ibid p.2
“The issue of property in the Guiding Principles is multidimensional, in that it is focused not only on the protection of property occupied before displacement but also property acquired during displacement.” The IDPs while fleeing apprehending threat to their life leave behind most of their possessions. The property left behind by the IDPs should be restored to them as far as practicable to enable them to have a dignified beginning. In fact efforts should be made to take back the returnees to the places of their origin. Those were the places where their original residences were situated and their land and similar possessions in those areas should be restored. Especially agricultural land should be given back to them for their immediate and long-time survival. Property is the root cause of all kinds of inter-ethnic conflict. This problem should be resolved.

The problem under discussion involves the internally displaced Brus of Mizoram who were forced to flee their original place of residence in Mizoram, to North of Tripura following an attack on them by some Mizo people way back in 1997. The Mizoram government at least once theoretically agreed to accept the Reang/Bru people who were displaced, owing to NHRC’s (National Human Rights Commission) strong approach. NHRC exerted tremendous pressure on the Governments of both Tripura and Mizoram. NHRC also asked the Government of India to actively intervene in the problem of displacement in Mizoram and facilitate the process of return of those Bru IDPs. The Indian government insisted that the Mizoram State Government should make adequate arrangement for ensuring safe return of the displaced Bru people. While the Mizos always claimed that most of the Brus or Reangs were never the original residents of Mizoram and only 16000 had a valid claim to reside in the state.

Sometime around 1998 the Mizoram Government’s Minister of Home claimed that the Bru Students’ Union had virtually blackmailed the Bru population to leave Mizoram threatening them that otherwise they would be excommunicated. That was why the Bru families had left their villages for Tripura. The researcher found out that there were no takers for of this logic

10 Ibid. p. 3
in the relief camp. However NHRC had put pressures on the stakeholders to go by the agreement between the Mizoram Government and the then Union Home Minister. NHRC also wanted to remain informed about the progress made in the process of return of the displaced Brus. However the Mizoram government always expressed its reluctance to abide by the directions of the NHRC. Though serious discussions continued between the Mizoram Government and the Union Home Ministry under Mr Lal Krishna Advani, but nothing concrete could be achieved. Serious points of disagreement between the Mizoram Government and Tripura Government about the estimated number of displaced Reangs became evident when the researcher interviewed the Sub Divisional Magistrate in Kanchanpur of North Tripura. The SDM emphatically told the interviewer that there were around 31000 displaced Brus residing in different relief camps of Tripura, while the Mizoram Government was bent on claiming that there were only about 10000 IDPs in the relief camps. This disagreement continues to exist till date. In a meeting between Mr. Manick Sarkar, the Chief Minister of Tripura and Union Home Minister Mr. L.K. Advani, the former expressed his dissatisfaction about the role played by his Mizoram counterpart regarding the process of return of the Bru IDPs. He had asked, “We have given shelter to the Bru/Reangs on humanitarian ground and how long one can provide help to them?”

The Mizoram government had laid down a precondition that unless the militant faction of the Bru, the BNLF surrenders before the government, no talk about the return of the Bru IDPs would begin. The related Memorandum of understanding was signed and BNLF guerrillas did surrender their arms to the Mizoram government. The Government of the North-eastern state of Mizoram and the rebel Bru National Liberation Front signed a peace agreement that would help to facilitate the return of thousands of Bru people from the relief camps in neighbouring Tripura state. The agreement was reached after a 13th rounds of talks between the two sides, in which the BNLF agreed to lay down arms and assimilate into civilian population. The BNLF has also agreed not to recruit new members or assist any other insurgent groups. In return, the Government agreed to take back verified originally ethnic Brus from the Tripura relief camps.

12. Ibid. p. 81
It was decided that the Bru returnees will be rehabilitated at a camp, within 3 months and be provided with long-term rehabilitation. According to officials, the rebels had agreed to relinquish their demand for an Autonomous District Council in return for strong development work in Bru-dominated districts in Mizoram. However, the question of return of the Brus to Mizoram remained ever-elusive. In fact Mr. Zoramthanga, the then Chief Minister of Mizoram had opined that primarily the Reangs were not citizens of his state and as such the Mizoram government was not obliged to take them back.

When fresh initiative was taken for reopening the discussions about the return of the Bru IDPs in 2001 under the guidance of Union Government to be precise with the active participation of Additional Home Secretary of Union Government, the Mizoram Government continued with their old logic that a large section of the Brus residing in the relief camps actually never belonged to Mizoram. So no negotiation was needed about that section.

Ever since then, efforts were made to facilitate their return to Mizoram by the Central Government as well as the Governments of both Tripura and Mizoram. However the entire process either got derailed at some point of times or it faced road blocks owing to critical political resistance of a section of the Mizoram’s civil society. It involved intense political negotiations between the stakeholders. The researcher also directly witnessed a process of return of a few Bru families from the Kaskau relief camp on 3rd of May 2011. As per plan some 90 families were to return to Mizoram, though only 40 families decided to travel back to Mizoram after hectic parley between the Tripura administration and the officers from Mizoram who had almost unwillingly come down to Tripura to take the displaced Reang families back to Mizoram. The jeeps were provided by the Tripura Government to facilitate the process of ‘Return’. On 1st May 2011 instead of 125 displaced Bru families only 22 families turned up for ‘Return’. The Government officials from Mizoram including one District Commissioner, were staying in a Circuit House in Kanchanpur, where the researcher

too was incidentally staying. In an informal conversation with the researcher the District Commissioner was repeatedly blaming the Central Government for pressurising the Mizoram Government to take back the displaced Brus, as he felt they do not originally belong to Mizoram and for that matter they actually are from Tripura. He felt that most of them constitute a terror outfit called Bru National Liberation Front or BNLF. He also claimed that his view is shared by the entire civil society of Mizoram.

The researcher had interviewed about 63 displaced Brus who were staying in the relief camps in Naisingpada, Ashapada, Anandabazar, Hezacherra, Kaskau, and Damchhera of North Tripura. Some of them researcher had met again in Mizoram after their return, in October 2013. He wanted to assess the views of the displaced Brus about their return to Mizoram. The opinion was divided and diverse. Of the 63 odd respondents some were quite reluctant to answer and after some friendly chat sessions they started to open up. When they were asked about their perception about their prospective return to Mizoram about 52.38% respondents expressed that their decision to go back to Mizoram was a wise one and the rest 47.61% refused to return. The Researcher was quite taken aback to receive so many negative answers as almost all the respondents were extremely unhappy about the living conditions in the camps and expressed their urge to fight for an Autonomous Council for the Brus in Mizoram. As expected most of the displaced Bru respondents who answered in negative were women. On the other hand the male members in the family were eager to take a chance of rebuilding their lives after going back to Mizoram. However their answers were diverse. One Mr. Hamachhuani who belonged to Kolasiv district in Mizoram prior to his displacement strongly opined that all of them should go back to Mizoram if their demand for an Autonomous Council is met by the Mizoram Government. He felt that the displaced Brus have no future in Tripura and the next generation will suffer immensely owing to the lack of proper educational facilities for the children notwithstanding the fact that Tripura too was a tribal land. Mr Ramhaki too shared his opinion. One Ms. Ishwari Reang said that her family was quite secured in Tripura and peace is what she looked for, even ignoring the absence of certain basic facilities in the relief camp. While one young lady Ms. Lalkomi Reang opined
that if Tripura Government could take good care of us for some time we may become self-reliant and rebuild our lives here.

One elderly lady called Ms. Buramati (name changed) narrated in detail the harassment she faced in Mizoram in the hands of some young Mizo villagers as well as the local Mizo police. She said that she felt claustrophobic in Mizoram. She, as well as some young Bru girls got raped by Mizo hooligans and nobody came to their rescue. She would never get back to that hell again. Ms. Souinorum lamented that she had a rice mill in Nathiazole village which was destroyed before her own eyes. So she felt that even if she goes back she would not survive without having anything of her own to fall back upon. Ms. Roblati Bru too said that she will never get over her traumatic experience in Mizoram. She saw there local Bru leaders getting brutally tortured. She also added that she was working as a daily labour in a local construction site far from her relief camp. She had to travel a bit leaving behind her three little children.

A Christian Bru lady who could speak Hindi fluently informed the researcher that if the political charter of demands of the Bru communities are met then she along with her neighbours were ready to go back to their village in Mizoram and if that was possible she was ready to get resettled anywhere in Mizoram. One elderly gentleman Mr Jiorong appeared to the researcher as an extremely religious person narrated his ordeal in the hands of YMA (Young Mizo Association) activists. They had allegedly destroyed the sacred Hindu scripture (Omkat) belonging to him. Yet he firmly pointed out that if everything settles down, he would be glad to go back to his village. He felt that the Mizoram Government would ultimately give in to the demands of the Bru community. A young Bru boy from Tuipuibari wanted to get back to Mizoram to complete his studies. He told interviewer that he wanted to become an engineer to help his community. Another gentleman from Bethani village of Mizoram who had been a jhum cultivator said that he could get back to his vocation only in Mizoram. So he was keen about the process of return. He was particular about the nomenclature used by the Government. One Mr. Burang from Tuipuibari however felt that the amount Rs 80000/- offered by the Mizoram Government as
cash dole for his resettlement in Mizoram was simply meagre. If no agricultural land is allotted to them they would not survive. A forty year old lady emphatically said that life in Tripura was meaningless and life in Mizoram was much better than that of the relief camp in Tripura. So she would avail the first chance to go back there notwithstanding the tension of inter-ethnic clashes. She was supported by another lady whose elder daughter got married to a Mizo youth. She felt that she would not be harmed if she decided to go back to her village in Mizoram. The researcher met a displaced Bru in the Naishingpara relief camp who was doing brisk business there as a shopkeeper. He had reasonably spacious and clean shop selling tea and groceries. His brother was working in BSF after completing his school education in Uttar Pradesh. His sister was running a tiny tailoring shop that served the camp dwellers. He vowed never to return to Mizoram even if the relief camps are closed down by the Tripura Government. The young tots are malnourished, their parents jobless and their grandparents ailing. The eagerness to return to Mizoram is almost palpable among the older generation. The researcher came across an online article describing the attitude of the older generation of the Bru displacees. The author quoted from a conversation he had with one person called Phoroti. “I do not know when our sorrows will end. Two generations have almost been lost in this darkness. Now in the name of repatriation a lot of politics is being played...” says 102-year-old Phoroti, breaking into tears.14

The researcher also took recourse to group chatting sessions as a part of his research method. Such discussions started when all male members came back to their camps after desperately searching for daily wage earning jobs. Most of them were quite vocal about the difficulties they were facing in the relief camp. However most of them were quite conscious of their political demands for an Autonomous Council in Mizoram. Some of them were also hopeful about winning this battle. Regarding the possibility of their return to Mizoram the opinions of the displaced Brus lack unanimity. Some were keen about returning to Mizoram first and only then they would start negotiating with the Mizoram Government for their political demands. Some were apprehensive of further attacks on them the moment they

would go back. Rest wanted the Mizoram Government to accede to their demands for the Autonomous Council and only then they felt, that the question of their return to Mizoram should arise. However there was a very few takers of this logic of this third group.

In this regard the opinion of the leaders of the MBDPF appeared to be most important. Their opinion mattered most as they were on the one hand negotiating with the Government of Tripura for putting pressure on the Mizoram Government so that they accede to the demands of the Bru IDPs. On the other hand they were directly negotiating with the Mizoram government for getting the lives of post-returned Brus, secured. After all they would take the final call. They were also engaged in constant bargaining with Government of India for facilitating an honourable return of the IDP Brus to Mizoram with the declared economic benefits and above all with full security and protection. Both Mr. Bruno Msha and Mr Swaibunga emphatically said that unless a written agreement is signed between the Government of Mizoram and the Bru leadership, the return of the displaced Brus will be a failed process. They wanted the Government of Mizoram to provide the returnees, with reasonable cash dole enabling them to start life from the scratch and reallocate land for them in their respective villages if possible or any other suitable place. As the displaced Brus primarily were engaged in agriculture, they should be provided with land for their traditional pattern of farming. Ultimately the leadership stuck to their points relating to their political demands. At the initial stage they were absolutely against any attempt to begin the process of return. After a prolong process of negotiation, bargaining and persuasion the decision to initiate the process of return was taken. However the leaders of MBDPF have rejected the financial assistance offer made by the Mizoram government to the Bru returnees. They felt that Rs. 80,000/- is too meagre an amount which would not help the Brus as that would not enable them to get resettled. Mr Bruno Msha the General Secretary of MBDPF felt that the money given for rehabilitation will finish soon and then if the returnees do not find the means of sustaining themselves, what would they do? They would again have to migrate for food and work. Their position would soon become untenable. Unfortunately despite their demands for decades, Mizoram government never gave the Brus permanent land ‘patta’ (land deeds).
The researcher had taken the initiative to bring Mr. Bruno Msha, the General secretary of MBDPF and his assistant to Kolkata where they were given chance to address the participants in a “Workshop cum Winter-course on Forced Migration” organised by Mahanirvan Calcutta Research Group and supported by the UNHCR, The Government of Finland, The Brookings Institution, USA held at Swabhumi Kolkata, from 1st December 2011 to 15th December 2011, for describing their position as a displaced community from Mizoram. On that occasion the researcher interviewed him for gathering information about the latest stance taken by the Tripura Government about their problem. Mr. Bruno Msha complained to the interviewer that the Bru returnees were not at all looked after by the Mizoram Government and they were virtually asked to buy their houses from the local people without hoping for any Governmental assistance. So the Government was not willing to keep its promises it made on earlier occasions. Moreover Bruno had pointed out that unless the Authority provided the returnees with cultivable land, they would not survive as the Brus were a land based community. In order to address this problem on a long term basis the Government should make provisions for education of the Bru children so that in future they could compete for Government jobs. He lamented that in order to get any job whatsoever a Bru would have adopt a Mizo name. He further mentioned that the Bru families were asked to settle down in areas which fall under State Reserve Forest Area. So any decision about their permanent resettlement there was an impossible proposition. They could be evicted at any time the Government wanted them to be.

In that workshop Mr Bruno Msha presented a written paper which may be referred to for a better understanding their political position with regard to the process of return. He mentioned there that after 13 long years the Union Government had started putting pressure on the Mizoram Government to ensure the return of all the displaced Brus languishing in the relief camps in Kanchanpur, Tripura. However he felt that the Government had hatched a conspiracy against the community by following a divide and rule policy. They had managed to create a split between two factions of the Brus. One section led by Mr Elvis Chorkhy started accepting the proposals of the Mizoram Government seriously, while allowing the
Government to neglect and side line the Bru leaders who he claimed, were working for the greater interest of the Bru people in the camp. He while presenting his paper said that the Central Government and the Governments of Mizoram and Tripura had forced the displaced leaders to accept the return process without any written agreement. They were informed by the authority that otherwise they would face dire consequences such as random arresting by the police or discontinuation of relief assistance. Under such circumstances the MBDPF leaders could not raise their legitimate and humanitarian demands which they had been placing before the Central and Mizoram Government for more than a decade.

The researcher learnt from a newspaper correspondent that Bruno’s opinion was partially correct. The process of return took place under some kind of duress. It was described as forced process of return. In a news article, Joyless Homecoming by Mr. Rastnadip Chowdhury, one Mr. A Lalbiakthanga of Khakchan relief camp commented, “We were threatened not only by Mizo officials but also by Tripura officials and cops. They told us that we must go back with whatever we get otherwise the camps will be closed, we will be arrested. Tripura officials were creating a lot of pressure on us to even start for Mizoram in darkness.”

However it was decided by both Mizoram and Tripura Governments to begin the process of return way back in 2009. Since then the process had been facing so many hurdles that even in 2016 it is yet to reach an effective stage. Electronic media and especially the national and local print media were constantly reporting about the abortive attempts made by the Governments to make this process a comprehensive and continuous one. The researcher referred to a series of news paper reports revealing the uncertainties about the entire processes of return of the IDPs. The periodic Press Reports of Asian Centre For Human Rights (ACHR) have been quite effective in depicting the true picture in this regard. In January 2006 Mr. Suhas Chakma, the Director of ACHR in a press release had told the reporters in Agartala Press Club, “The Central government and the State government of Tripura have failed both to ensure honourable return of the displaced Brus from Mizoram
and to improve sub-human conditions of the camps”. Mr. Suhas Chakma had expressed his complete disappointment about the MOU signed between the militant Bru outfit, Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) and the Mizoram Government which ensured the surrender of the BNLF members but did little about the honourable return of more than 30,000 displaced Brus languishing in the relief camps of North Tripura under sub-human conditions. The Mizoram Government in his opinion had done nothing about hapless Bru population. Their security was not ensured and no effort was made on their part to talk about restoring the lost or stolen/damaged properties of the displaced Brus or about the restoration of land to its original Bru owner. He had also blamed the Central Government for granting Rs. 28 crore for the displaced Brus without determining a time-frame for their return to Mizoram.

However subsequently it was decided that the first phase of return of the Brus would start from 21st May 2010. It was decided also that the transportation facilities for their return would be jointly organized by both Tripura and Mizoram government and some 210 families were identified for return. The Mizoram Government was expected to provide housing assistance to each Bru family which amounted to Rs. 38,500 per family and free ration for 9 months. As per the decision, the armed police would be deployed to ensure security in those areas where the returnees would be rehabilitated. In April 2011 another press release by ACHR revealed that the process was to resume. Around 142 families were to return from Naisingpara, which were to be resettled in Damidial, Khandhuam, Bawngva, Damparengpui and Tuipuibari, in Mamit district of Mizoram. This was to take place after some kind of dialogue between pro-return and anti-return displaced Brus on the basis of Kanchanjupur agreement and subsequent decision of the Indian Ministry Of Home affairs to expand the relief package.

17. Ibid
However this process involves complex political bargaining and the very political will of the Mizoram Government, for taking back the displaced Brus was significantly missing and at the same time the MBDPF leadership was also carrying on hard bargaining for getting maximum political mileage from this frequently impaired process of return. The Mizoram Chief Minister had said that the process of return would begin only after it was clear that the returnees belonged to Mizoram. All displaced people would have to produce documents like ration cards, voter ID cards, birth certificates, citizenship certificates, etc. NGOs would be engaged to help in the identification process. Mr. Elvis Chorkhy of MBDPF had claimed that everyone in the camps, except the new born babies belongs to Mizoram and that all have official proof in the form of citizenship certificates, bank pass books, ration cards and birth certificates.\(^{20}\) The negotiations about the return process were going on notwithstanding the widespread disagreement between the Governments of Tripura and Mizoram as well as between Mizoram Government and the MBDPF leadership. The return process from Tripura to Mizoram faced roadblocks on several occasions. The effort to begin in 2009 was frustrated after 700 houses in an area inhabited by the Brus in western Mizoram were burnt down following an alleged murder of an 18 year Mizo youth by unidentified assailants. Widespread arson, looting and violence some 5500 displaced Brus took shelter in Tripura. However this group returned to Mizoram in 2010 again after the Mizoram Government’s assurance for their security. The then Union Home Minister Mr. Chidambaram had exerted pressure on both the Mizoram Government and the Bru leadership to complete the process on an emergency basis. The situation did not change much since then. In fact repeated attempts had been made to restart this process and it is yet to be completed.

Chronologically the efforts in this regard could be arranged on the basis of the media reports for substantiating the claim of the researcher that all such efforts lacked genuine political will of the stakeholders. In an article ‘The Bru Homecoming’ by Ben Schonveld it was mentioned that, on 12 January 2010, Bru leaders had communicated to Chief Minister Lalthanhawla and expressed their willingness to return. Lalthanhawla’s government

responded positively by inviting Bru leaders for talks on 22 February. The government again vacillated, however, arguing that New Delhi had not allocated funds to support the return process. The following day, the Mizoram police arrested R Laldangliana, vice-president of the MBDPF, under a false allegation against him. It was claimed that he was involved in a serious crime. This had revealed the political design of the Mizoram Government to sabotage the entire prospect of return of the displaced Brus to Mizoram. In June 2011 the Mizoram Government had tried to stall the return process owing to the increasing pressure of a large section of Mizo civil society represented by Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) as well as the political parties which depended on these organisations for their support. These NGOs and the political parties demanded that Ministry of Home Affairs under Union Government should in the first place provide compensation to those 80 Mizo families who had to flee their homes in the Sakhan range in Tripura after being forced by the Brus in 1997 and 1998. After that all of these the social and political organizations initiated the ‘identification processes’ for virtually endangering the future of the prospective Bru returnees. They tried to determine whether the returnees in Mamit District really were from Mizoram and to demand the deportation to Tripura of all those who were not. While Mr. Elvis Chorkhy, president of Bru Coordination Committee, who was looking after the return process, wanted resettlement of the refugees in large groups under separate village councils with restoration of their land. As pointed out earlier that the claim of the Mizoram Government that the major portion of the Bru population did not belong to Mizoram state was absolutely wrong as 94.22% of the displaced Reangs in the relief camp in Tripura had have at least one document issued by the State of Mizoram, its local authorities, as well as constitutional bodies like the election Commission of India, supporting their claim that their bonafide as permanent residents of Mizoram is proven beyond any doubt. In 2011 itself, the Government of India agreed to increase the economic package for the home bound immigrants and that had created a conducive political climate

22. “This is our land” India Ethnic violence and internal displacement in north-east India: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre Nov 2011.
for return. In fact at that time, the Delhi based rights group Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) played the role of a mediator. The proposals for a cash dole of Rs. 80,000/- per returnee Bru family and free ration to each of the Bru returnees from the Mizoram Government was taken at that time. The Central government too decided to support self-employment schemes to be initiated by the Brus and offered developmental projects for the Western Regions of Mizoram where the Bru families are to be resettled.24

In spite of all claims and counter claims made by MBDPF and Mizoram government the issues of security and land for rehabilitation of the Bru IDPs, were still hanging in the air according to the opinion of the MBDPF leadership. They felt that until the amount of cash dole could be significantly enhanced the returnees would be forced to migrate again as the amount that offered for each Bru family was too little to start afresh in a place where everything they possessed in Mizoram prior to their displacement was either destroyed or for that matter forcibly taken away by the local Mizo population. On the top of that no job would be available to them after they return. At the same time the Tripura officials were pressurising them to go back to Mizoram with whatever money they would be getting form the authorities in Aizawl, otherwise the Tripura Government would be forced to close down the camps immediately. Mr Bruno Msha had informed the researcher about this threat over a telephonic conversation he had with him. He also told the researcher that the Authorities in Aizawl had been able to create a wedge between two factions of the Bru leadership and they had virtually convinced the Mr. Elvis Chorkhy of Bru Coordination Committee (BCC) to support their arrangements of return. However the conversation which the researcher had with Mr.Chorkhy over that issue did not give him that impression. In fact the Mizoram Government was making things difficult for the Brus in general. The officials were trying to wash their hands off about the Bru families which were unwilling to return to Mizoram. The Mizoram government officials claimed that it was Tripura’s headache to handle the situation and the unwilling section could very well stay back in Tripura.

The proposal which were laid down before the Mizoram Government and the Union Government by the ACHR included some of the following suggestions

1) Identification of Bonafide Brus by Joint Verification Team prior to their return.
2) Deployment of Central security forces during and after their return
3) Joint verification for identification of sites meant for resettlement
4) Land restoration and allotment to the Brus
5) Setting up of Central Schools like Kendriya Vidyalaya/ Navodaya Schools
6) Supply of GCI sheets to each Bru family. Provide at least five bundles to construct houses.
7) For each Bru family cash grant of at least Rs 50,000/- to re-build their lives
8) Guaranteed free ration for at least one year
9) Job reservation and reinstatement of former government employees, who have lost their jobs after displacement

No positive commitment was made by the Mizoram Government in this regard. The situation continued to remain uncertain. In 2012 the researcher was in constant touch with Mr. Bruno Msha the secretary of MBDPF who was kind enough to send him a copy of a Press Release by the MBDPF dated 3rd April 2012, by post. It gave a vivid description of a huge demonstration by the relief camp dwellers in Naisingpara, Ashapara, Hazacherra, Kaskaupara, Kakchangpara, Naisaopara and Hamsapara under North Tripura district. The rally presented a memorandum containing an 18 point demands to the BDO of Dasda. The main objective was to pressurise the Tripura Government to pay attention to the unreasonable conditions laid down by the Mizoram Government about the process of return of the Brus to Mizoram. The attention of the Central Government was also sought. The Memorandum was signed by President of all NGOs like Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples’ Forum (MBDPF), Bru Displaced Welfare Organisation (BDWO), Bru Displaced Women Welfare Committee (BDWWC), Camp Defence Committee (CDC), Civil Society on Monitoring Group (CMG), Young Bru Association (YBA), All Choudhury Committee (ACC), Presbyterian Church, Adventist Church, Bru Baptist Church, Shiv Mandali and Ram Mandali. The memorandum contained demands about the safety and security of the Bru
returnees. The main charters of demands which they have highlighted in the Memorandum are as follows:

The memorandum contained a strong demand before the Mizoram Government to ensure the return of each and every Bru family to Mizoram from the relief camps in Tripura. Not a single family could be refused by Government. Moreover the memorandum asked for the formation of grouping or model or cluster villages to rehabilitate the returnees for bringing them under all Governmental development schemes. It also asked for the introduction of Primitive Group Programme (PGP) as the Reangs were one of the primitive tribal groups in Mizoram as specified by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India. The memorandum contained a demand for a healthy rehabilitation package for the Brus such as providing them with land for Jhum cultivation. The MBDPF leadership wanted the Mizoram Government to clearly identify areas where rehabilitation centres would be set up, before the formal process of return starts. They rejected the idea of keeping the returnees in transit camps indefinitely. The memorandum strongly opposed the alleged interference by the Mizo NGOs in the process of return. The procedure of re-identifications of the prospective returnees by the Mizo NGOs like MZP and YMA was forthrightly rejected as that would deny many returnees the facilities which were due to them. The memorandum wanted the process of return to take place in a well-organised manner and in a friendly ambience, so that the returnees don’t become apprehensive about their future. It also gave a proposal for setting up of Joint Monitoring Cell involving the Union Government and the Governments of both Mizoram and Tripura as well as the representatives of the Bru displacees for monitoring the developmental activities of the Government as it was decided earlier by the Ministry of Home Affairs at the Centre. The charter of demands also included the need for the formation of permanent development project for the Bru community in general who were oppressed and suppressed in their home state. Such projects would enable the Brus to get placed themselves at par with other communities in Mizoram. It contained a firm demand for a ‘Four Corner Agreement’ involving the Union Government, Governments of Mizoram and Tripura and the MBDPF leadership to ensure a successful and dignified implementation of the rehabilitation package for the returnees.
The memorandum of MBDPF contained a demand asking for a specific quantum of compensation of Rs. 1.5 Lakh to be paid to each Bru family, matching the amount already paid to 83 displaced Mizo families by the Central Government. An appeal was made to Mr. Chidambaram, the Union Home Minister to revisit the relief camps at Tripura before the process of return begins. Similar appeal was made to him for visiting the rehabilitation centres in Mizoram. The demands for comprehensive rehabilitation package included a claim for two years of free rations for the returnees as because when the process of return would start, the season of slash and burnt cultivation would be over. Till they are in a position to reap their own harvest those illiterate and extremely poor Brus would have to survive on that cash dole. The MBDPF leadership had pointed out in that memorandum that the 1995 electoral roll will not be accepted for identification of the bonafide Brus of Mizoram and they had asked for its immediate withdrawal as a parameter for identification. A demand was made for stalling the implementations of the Special Development Projects till the process of return is completed in order to prevent the misuse of funds by vested interest. There was a demand for economic benefits for those 116 displaced Bru families who were not receiving any aid from the Government and took shelter in different parts of Tripura. The memorandum also contained demands favouring the 2925 displaced Brus who were forced to quit Mizoram following the 2009 inter-ethnic clashes there. A similar charter of demands was handed over to the Central authority by Bru Co-ordination Committee (BCC) which along with the standard demands had asked for distribution of seeds to the returnees for their Jhum Cultivation. Demands were also placed for GI sheets, utensils and blankets for a successful rehabilitation of the Bru returnees. BCC also wanted the Government to arrange for Central Police Forces in the Bru villages for ensuring the security of the Brus.

However the researcher found the language of the Memorandum slightly under prepared. The content revealed the firm position of the MBDPF leadership while negotiating with the Aizawl.

After the second phase of return, the process again faced a roadblock. The President of MBDPF, Mr. Swaibunga had mentioned to the researcher about the insensitive role played by the then Joint Secretary in-charge, of Northeast in the Union Ministry of Health, Mr Shambhu Singh. He described this Bureaucrat as a tyrant who would always snub any Bru leader whenever they tried to draw his attention to the ordeals of the displaced Brus with regard to the abortive prospect of return. Mr Singh always was quite adamant and was bent on fixing a deadline for this process to complete even though the financial assistance was not exactly available. Mr. Swaibunga had confided with the researcher that Mr. Singh once remarked that if the Brus don’t go back on their own, they would be kicked out of Tripura. The Forum president said all their reasoned arguments for critical examination of their problems here and those which would occur on their return were ignored by Shambhu Singh. One of the serious problems being faced by them was in respect of the identification process of the IDPs on the basis of electoral rolls. The Bru leader was anxious about the boys and girls who could not get themselves enrolled in the voters’ list, as the officials of Mizoram showed no concern. However Mr. Singh too showed a callous attitude.

After a long time the process again started in October 2013. 98 families crossed over to Mizoram without having a specific roadmap about their future life. The week-long fifth phase of process of return and resettlement that had only progressed in fits and starts and had been often disrupted by violence, eventually created an air of uncertainty about the prospective resettlement of more than 35,000 people for the time being. However the officials heaved a sigh of relief when out of 121 families expected to return in this phase, about 98 families got themselves registered. Last year, only seven out of 500 families did so. Till date, 1,035 Bru families have been resettled in 35 villages of Mizoram, but an estimated 5,000-odd remain in the camps. The news report published in The Indian Express gave a vivid and comprehensive account of that process. It described the way the returnees were taken to Kanhmun in Mizoram, through the bridge (linking Tripura to Mizoram) over Langkaih river. There the Mizo Officials verified their identities and handed them their new

26. Adam Halliday : *After 16 years, 98 families making their way from Tripura to Mizoram.* in The Indian Express
ration cards on the basis of the criterion of having been on the State’s electoral rolls between 1995 and 2013.\textsuperscript{27}

The Hindu, a frontline newspaper reported in September 2013 that the IDPs were convinced by the Tripura Government officials to support the much awaited return process which they wilfully blocked under some pretext or another. In fact the paper reported that the MBDPF leadership had been claiming that unless the problem of displacement is solved politically permanent settlement of this problem can never be achieved. The Mizoram Government however rejected their political demands forthright. It was only ready to pay Rs. 85000/- per family and temporarily accommodate them in a designated transit camps at Mamit district pending their permanent resettlement. This proposal sounded quite elusive. Anyhow the newspaper further reported that some 54 families had gone back to Mizoram as a part of the return process though 73 families were expected to go back.\textsuperscript{28} There were definite reasons behind this decision of some families to abort the plan for return. The researcher tried to find those reasons way back in 2011 when he witnessed this process in Kaskau camp. He had to take the help of an interpreter as none of the prospective returnees knew English, Hindi or Bengali. A Reang gentleman who was working in the Sub-Divisional Magistrate’s office came to his help. What the researcher learnt from him had convinced him about the futility of this much hyped process of return under the prevailing circumstances. Some were apprehensive of facing an unfriendly rainy season in the transit camps in Mizoram. Some simply felt that once they return they would get dispersed and their strength for collective negotiation would automatically cease to exist. They would be entirely at the mercy of the fellow Mizo villagers. An elderly lady having a daughter, who was carrying, thought that she would not get any medical attention if she decided to return. A few were extremely scared of the Mizo officials who had come to take them back to Mizoram. A handful of them trusted the MBDPF leaders that unless the final political settlement could be reached it was of no use of going back just for the sake of it. The researcher met a Bengali news correspondent from Aajkal Patrika who also was covering the return process. He had strange stories to tell. According to him there was high degree of sexual crimes in the camps. As a

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid
result of which young girls get pregnant. That was preventing their families to return to Mizoram, as their children in future would not be registered as residents of Mizoram State. Moreover the Brus had a very strong espionage network of their own. Prior information about the lives of the returnees virtually discouraged them from switching over to Mizoram. The transit camps for the returnees were barely habitable.

In October 2013 the researcher went to Mizoram to assess the ground situation in post return scenario in Western Mizoram. He had visited some of the camps in Mamit. He had interviewed around 30 respondents in the transit camps in and around the Damdiaialai. Initially they were not opening up taking the researcher as a spy planted by the Mizoram Government. After that the ice was broken and the purpose of the interviews was explained to them, they started interacting with the researcher. The researcher asked them to give their opinion about the problem of displacement. Only 10% of the respondents were hopeful about a long term solution of the problem in near future. A couple of them remained absolutely tight lipped fearing backlash if they at all gave any opinion. About 40% of the returnees felt that there was no major problem at all. These kinds of inter-ethnic clashes were normal in a tribal state. 6% felt that for the time being peace was prevailing everywhere. The remaining respondents were apprehensive about their future as nothing could be predicted. They were aware of the fact that it was a complex problem which could not be solved easily. The respondents were asked whether they were treated well before their return to Mizoram. Most of them gave an affirmative answer but two of them complained that they were virtually forced to leave Tripura as the Government had stopped supplying ration to their families. However they could not explain why they were treated differently from the others. However all of them said that the Mizoram Government was treating them well. One said that the officials are sympathetic in their dealing and another felt it was just better than nothing. When they were asked whether Mizoram Government was providing building materials to them as had been promised earlier, 10% of the respondents denied having received any such material. About 88% said they received only one tarpaulin sheet or polythene sheet per family which were virtually useless as a long term measure. Only one of them admitted that his family received money for that. They were also asked to clarify
whether they were getting the facilities as returnees, which they were expected to get as per Mizoram government’s notification. About 14% said they received nothing. But the rest of them said they received rice from the authority. Few of them said that they also received little monetary assistance. However they were not unanimous about the time period they would be provided with free ration. With regard to the financial assistance promised by the Mizoram Government all of them admitted that they were given Rs 85500/- per family inclusive of their cost of travelling from the relief camps in North Tripura to the transit camps in Mizoram. But they added that the money was insufficient for starting life afresh in a new place where they would be resettled. Regarding the question about their perception of security in Mizoram only a couple of them said that they felt absolutely safe in Mizoram after their ‘return’. Others were quite sceptical about their security. One of them candidly admitted that only for the time being they were safe but nothing could be said about the future. They were asked they were apprehensive of their fellow Mizo villagers, the respondents replied since most of them belonged to the transit camps so it was too early to answer that question. A few talked about a helpful and sympathetic Mizo school master. The responses were divided regarding the role played by the Mizo Police force. For some of the returnees they were not exactly unhelpful but few others opined that they could never be trusted as they were passing obscene comments when their groups were moving towards the transit camps. Barring a few of the respondents none of them were hopeful of getting a chance to return to the villages which they originally belonged to. One lamented that there was nothing left in his original place of residence hence there was no point of going there. However they were still hopeful that after some time they would be provided with suitable land for Jhum cultivation in places where they would be resettled, as per the promise made by the government. One respondent talked about the relevance of MNREGA scheme. One Bru gentleman the researcher met near the camp was a former BNLF activist who subsequently became a SSC teacher. He too was hopeful of a peaceful solution to the problem of displacement.

During his trip to Mizoram the researcher had an appointment with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Mamit district in west Mizoram where most of the Bru villages were
located. The DC was extremely reluctant to discuss IDP problem just like any other hard core bureaucrat. After a long informal chatting session he became less formal and even less diplomatic in answering few queries. He admitted that he had very little knowledge about the problem as he had been posted in New Delhi for a long time. After he took charge of DC Office in Mamit he got acquainted with the problem. He had narrated his ideas about the Brus as a community. He felt that they were by nature nomadic. They would occasionally shift their residences. He mentioned a joke in this regard. The story went like this; a Bru gentleman would wake up in one fine morning and would ask his wife after having his morning meal whether he should go out to catch fish or would pack their things and move to another place.

He expressed his frustration about the repeated logjam on the process of return caused only by the adamant leaders of MBDPF. He blamed them for not accepting the 1995 voters’ list as the cut off point for identifying actual Bru residents of Mizoram. The Mizoram civil society, especially the NGOs like Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) felt that if all of them are indiscriminately taken back then Brus from Tripura and even from Bangladesh would sneak into Mizoram. The MBDPF leaders wanted this process to fail and that was why they were asking for Rs. 1,50,000/- as monetary assistance per family knowing well that it would never be permissible. The DC claimed that actually the leaders were having a gala time in camps so they did not want their fellowmen to return. He informed the researcher that after making so many abortive attempts to facilitate the process the Government had decided that would not make any more arrangements of cars to bring back the displaced Reangs. The Reangs would have to make their own arrangement for getting back to Mizoram. The Government would pay each family an extra amount of Rs. 5,500/- on the top of Rs.80,000/-. In spite of that the number of returnees never reached the expected level. He cited an example of voluntary return in 2009, when around 500 Brus fled to Tripura following the alleged murder of a Mizo boy by militant Brus. When everything settled down they came back on their own without any formal process of return.

The entire interview revealed the arrogant attitude of the Mizoram Bureaucracy and their strong support for their militant factions of the Mizos led by both YMA and MZP. He
strongly denounced the political aspirations of the Brus as if they were destined to be treated like that. It was a different kind of racism.

The researcher also took the opportunity to meet the Bru Co-ordination Committee leader and former MBDPF secretary, Mr. Elvis Chorkhy. In a detailed interview he appeared to be self-critical. He felt that the conditions in the relief camp were unbearable and unfit for human habitation. So return was the only available means for providing an alternative existence to the displacees. He claimed that the MBDPF leadership was carrying on a misinformation campaign to mislead the displaced Reang population languishing in the camps. The people belonging to this tribal community were mostly uneducated and poor and they could be misguided easily by their leaders. They were told that if they could wait for a year so the assistance could reach to Rs.1,50,000/- or more. That was absolutely an impossible proposition. Mr. Chorkhy a person who received higher education from North Eastern Hill University realised that it was high time that the Brus started to return. Their claim to their lost properties and wealth could not be substantiated because their properties were not legally registered. Mr. Chorkhy never supported the idea of voluntary return as that would lack any legal validity. With regard to the question of rehabilitation of the Brus he told the researcher that the returnees might not be given a chance to go back to their respective villages as either their villages had become inaccessible or the Mizoram Government might have acquired it for the purpose of reserved forest.

In Aizawl the researcher met, Mr. Lalhmachhuana, the then President of MZP at his office. They had an informal chatting session there which gave the researcher a clear idea about the views of the MZP in particular and the civil society of Mizoram in general. He said that the Brus left on their own after they were forced by their leader to quit. He believed that their opinion was manipulated by MBDPF leaders. He strongly mentioned his preference for the idea of self-repatriation/return. Mr. Lalhmachhuana felt Government sponsored return was bound to fail because the Bru leadership could use it for provoking them against the Mizoram Government by spreading all kinds of lies. He told the researcher that the process had been stalled only for the election and would resume soon. All the Mizo NGOs would approach the Election Commission to strike off the names of those Brus, who would hesitate
to come back to Mizoram, from the voters’ list. He also added that the MBDPF leadership was clandestinely sponsoring the Militant Bru organisations like BNLF to carry on terrorist activities in Mizoram. He accepted that Mr Elvis Chorkhy was having the only sane voice among the Bru leaders. Though he apparently was in favour of the participation of the Brus in the electoral process he was bent on supporting the claim of making the 1995 electoral roll as the base point for identifying the Brus who in their opinion would be allowed to come back to Mizoram. He handed over a document of MZP published from its General Headquarter, Aizawl, to the researcher which contained their official views about the Bru community in general. The researcher thought that it was necessary to mention some cardinal points of that handout which concerned the process of return of the Brus. With regard to the process of return the MZP had certain typical ideas stemming from their extreme antipathy towards the Bru community. They are as follows:-

i. The MZP stressed on the electoral roll as basis of the return process.

ii. The number of displaced Brus residing in the relief camps in North Tripura had been highly exaggerated by their leaders for making easy money out of rehabilitation package.

iii. Some leaders were making fast money by fleecing the uneducated Bru displacees and that was why they were sabotaging the return process. Those allegations should be probed before the process starts again.

iv. Mizos were wrongly portrayed as anti-Bru and they were stalling the return process.

v. The Bru leaders, who opposed the return process in 2009, killed a Mizo young boy on 16th November 2009, for jeopardising the process, in order to shift the blame on the Government.

vi. MZP was appreciative of the effort of the ACHR to conduct unbiased survey about the displacement problem. As if the organisation was confident that ACHR would surely find out the generous attitude of the Mizos towards the Bru community.
vii. All the allegations made by the Brus about the incidents of sexual assaults and rapes of 44 Bru women by the Mizo men could never be substantiated as the so-called victims could not identify the assailants.

The entire newsletter was full of allegations about the Bru community in general. It betrayed MZP’s hatred towards them and the NGOs political design to frustrate all efforts of the Union Government to settle the problem of displacement on a long term basis. Mr. Lalthmachiuanau, could not hide his disliking for all non-Mizo tribes in his conversation with the researcher.

Congress leader LalThanhawla, after taking oath as the Chief Minister of Mizoram for the second term, declared at his swearing-in ceremony, on December 14, 2013, that the displacement problem of the Brus would be properly addressed and that his Government would try its level best to take back the camp dwellers in six relief camps in North Tripura. He, however, asserted that the Government would take steps to delete the names of those who refused to be return. However the incident of abduction of one Mr. Deep Mondal along with two Mizo gentlemen from Dampa Tiger Reserve Forest area under Mamit district, by the Tripura-based National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and Bru Democratic Front of Mizoram (BDFM) militants had created another logjam on the process of return of the Bru displacees. The Mizoram police conducted wide spread search operation for rescuing the abducted trio. Even Mizoram’s top NGOs like YMA and MZP joined in that search operation and subsequently they issued threat to the alleged abductors that unless they release the kidnapped persons, stern measure would be taken against them. Apprehending a Mizo backlash similar to that of 1997, Over 2,423 men, women and children comprising 368 families late January 19 evening fled and took shelter in four villages in Tripura, a Tripura relief department official disclosed. The Brus from at least three villages - Damdiah, Tumpanglui and New Eden - in Mamit District, fled to Tripura or

29. Furquan Ameen Siddiqui  *Pushed to the boundaries: The Brus of Mizoram* Hindusthan Times
23rd February 2014 Accessed on 22 October 2015
had taken refuge in nearby villages. On January 16, 2014, MBDPF President Swaibunga alleged that a group of Mizo youth had perpetrated violence against Brus living in the three villages on January 13, and blamed the Brus of maintaining clandestine relations with banned Bru militant outfits. Swaibunga alleged, "They beat up the Brus and set at least 13 house on fire, forcing the Bru families to flee the place and take shelter in camps in Tripura." Mr. Swaibunga, the President of MBDPF alleged that a group of Mizo youth took advantage of this kidnapping incident and launched a fierce attack on three villages in Mizoram, inhabited by the Brus and set their houses on fire.

This violent attack and arson made a fresh batch of Brus to flee from Mizoram. This group too took shelter in the relief camps in North Tripura. However soon those two Mizo abducted Mizo persons were released by the Kidnappers and later Mr Deep Mondal too came back after successful, behind the cover bargaining, with the abductors.

In January 2015 Union Home Ministry, Mizoram Government and the Tripura Government agreed to start the return process. It was generally decided that Brus who would still refuse to return would be removed from Mizoram’s electoral rolls, and rations and relief to them would be discontinued. It was supposed to begin in June 2015. The office was set up at Kaskau for verification of the willing Bru returnees. But there was hardly any response and the Mizo officials decided to visit the relief camps.

The talk about the return process began with some kind of urgency felt by all the parties involved. In 2015 the Mizoram Government asked the Home Ministry under Union Government to expedite release of funds for bearing the expenses of the resumption of the process of return of the Brus from the relief camps in North Tripura. The Additional Home Secretary for Home, Mr. Lalbiakzama, had submitted a memorandum to Mr. Kiren Rijiju, the Union Minister of State for Home in Union Government, stating that the amount Rs. 4.70 crore was too little for bearing the ever increasing cost of the return process of the Brus.

31. Ibid
from Tripura. Earlier they had asked for Rs. 68 crore for this massive operation.\(^3\) The researcher found this financial bargaining with the centre was actually a ploy for further demoralising the willing Brus who wanted to come back.

The Union Home Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh had assured all the parties that the Union Government would provide all possible help to make the process successful. The Home Minister had a long interaction with the representatives of the Bru displacees in Kanchanpur. The Union Government had released Rs. 242.25 crore for the year 2014-15 for maintenance of the displaced Brus living in the relief camps.\(^3\)

The All NGOs Joint Committee of Brus (ANJS) had claimed that the Mizoram Government had not accepted a single demand of the Brus. The demands included larger compensation packages, land for every family, free ration and grouping of villages for their society. Mr. Bruno Msha informed the researcher over telephone that the Home Ministry began what might be the last attempt at integration. The Bru leaders were firmly told that unless the Brus decided to return within six months, the relief camps would be shut down and the Central Government provided supply of rations would be discontinued. Moreover their names would be struck off from the voters’ list in Mizoram. Virtually a threat issued by the state to its citizens that they would become stateless unless they comply with its command.

The problem still persists as the Mizoram Government is not ready to move from its old decision of checking the credentials of the Brus who want to go back to Mizoram, at the border before allowing them to enter Mizoram. The MBDPF leadership want all the Brus living in the relief camps to be accommodated in the package while the Authorities in Aizawl are only relying on stringent verification. It may be their ploy to delay the return process, so that the remaining Brus become truly stateless. Moreover the mode of resettling the returnees reveals a mischievous political manoeuvring on their part. The forum's leader


\(^3\) Home Minister Rajnath Singh assures all possible help in repatriation of all Bru migrants http://pib.nic.in/newssite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115464 Accessed on 2 December 2015
said they had demanded at the meeting that the returning families must be settled down in 16 villages and not in a scattered form as conspiratorially planned by the Mizoram government.\textsuperscript{34} This was clearly done to prevent any possibility of the Brus getting united in a particular zone, so that they are never in a position to fight for autonomy.

MBDPF have smelt a rat about relocation plan by not allowing the community to live together. Villages have been identified in three districts: 48 villages in North Mamit to house 2,594 families, eight in Kolasib for 628 families and 233 families will move to Southern Lunglei. The Mizoram Government claims that new sites have been earmarked according to ‘available space’. The returnees would be allotted a new address only after their verification process is over at the Kaskau camp. The Chief Minister Mr. Lal Thanawalaha has claimed that there is a design behind their mammoth effort to rehabilitate the Brus. He felt that it was nothing but a conspiracy hatched by a Hindu organisation. Perhaps he was referring to the Vanavasi Kalyan Kendra (a frontal organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) which was protesting against the hegemonic Christian Mizo society. The Chief Minister was even very much against the system of postal voting by the Brus residing in the relief camps in North Tripura.\textsuperscript{35}

The researcher firmly believes that the total planning by the Mizoram Government for resettlement was made to prevent mobilisation of the people from Bru community in particular region so that they can never get united enough to raise a political demand for an Autonomous District Council. They were in hand in gloves with the Mizo NGOs to arrange for a relocation of the Bru families where they would always remain marginalised.

Although rare in practice, the displaced may also play an active role in negotiating the terms of their return and creating conditions conducive to return. Indeed, for many displaced communities, planning for and making decisions about return is intertwined with their active


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid
engagement in peace processes. The displaced Brus were virtually forced to accept all decisions taken by the Central Government and the two Governments of Tripura and Mizoram about their future. Their much needed involvement in the peace process never took place. As a result of that the possibility of recurrence of violence remains quite high. It was seen that in many cases returnees are provided with an initial cash grant to facilitate their immediate resettlement. Alternatively, they may be provided with kits containing basic subsistence items, tools and seeds, or access to work. In this case the first option was taken. However it would have been better if that could be supplemented by the second option. The Bru returnees would find it extremely difficult to rebuild their lives in a new place where they would be allowed to resettle.

As per the latest available information the process of ‘Return’ would begin again in November 2016. It was decided that a team from Union Ministry of Home Affairs would visit Aizawl for discussing with the government there, about preparing a roadmap for the process of return. The Tripura government would extend logistic support to Mizoram government for the return process.

37 Ibid
Chapter-VI

Internal Displacement and Issues of Citizenship

The very term citizen carries a connotation involving a host of civil, political economic as well as some more less well defined rights enjoyed by a person having citizenship of a country. Citizenship is a fundamental element of human security. A person’s status as a citizen provides him/her with a sense of belonging and identity, it entitles the individual to the protection of the state and it produces an authorized framework, within which an individual citizen can become a claimant of different kinds of rights and privileges he/she is ordinarily entitled to. These rights are more often than not are in a codified form in a constitution of a country and other books of statutes and laws. In spite of that in any such countries a few groups may be singled out and may be deprived of all such rights by denying them citizenship under some pretext or other. In such a situation they virtually become nobody’s children, they are stateless. This results in huge socio-political tension and unrests owing to the unceasing struggle for such rights which the marginalised groups are being unjustly denied of. Such situations had become a part of a state or political society which has experienced forced displacement of any kind. The conflict between the dominant group and the less powerful one often take the shape of an inter-ethnic conflict and violence which occasionally end up in a widespread displacement of a section of the people from the place of original residence of that relatively weak community, who have been forced to leave their habitual residence and they have to seek refuge to some other part of the country. The former group would refuse to consider the other community as an original part of their own civil society and would resist any attempt by the latter group to return, and would blatantly reject their claim for any share of political power or economic resources. The people belonging to the second group may even become at least transitionally, non-citizens. All rights and privileges enjoyed by the citizens are denied to them.

These victims of displacement have their own perception about this problem and they try to develop ways of coping with their problematic or non-citizen status. The internally displaced persons may try to put pressure on the governmental authorities of host society or on the government of the place where from they were displaced and even on national government for restoring their rights and their original status as citizens, in the context of their habitual
The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement deals with persons who are still under the sovereignty of the state to which they belong. The states are not legally obliged to protect the IDPs as per the UN Guidelines. Yet they come under the purview of International Human Rights law. If the state becomes indifferent towards the predicament of the IDPs then their positions as citizens may become untenable and consequently they may be denied of all basic rights. Usually the dominant community in the civil society can control the political machinery of the state, if the government therein is willingly support that force.

There are many nations which have groups who apparently do not belong to them and are deprived of citizenship rights although formally they have citizenship. North-east India stands as a classic example. A large numbers of tribal groups and sub-tribes had settled down here since a long time. Yet the dominant race or even tribes deprive these marginalised people of most of the civil-political rights under some pretext or other. The existence of the IDPs in such a state disturbs the state-nation-territory trinity. They remain within the territory, but the nation-state might not consider them as part of it, and more importantly they might not consider themselves parts of the nation state. Francis Deng, former Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, felt that in his contact with IDPs and their governments, it was not uncommon to hear IDPs say that those in power were ‘not our leaders’, and to hear government leaders say that IDPs were ‘not my people’ So even territory cannot become the final determinant of citizens’ rights.

Such humanitarian crisis is not only a source of human insecurity and a cause of forced displacement, but may also jeopardise national and regional stability. As this chapter indicates, citizenship disputes have become a critical predicament of the 21st century world, causing unbearable stress and tension and even resulting in violence between different states and communities. Humanitarian organisations must take the initiative and address these crises for averting such situations, protecting victims of forced displacement and finding just solutions to

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2 Ibid p.15
3 Ibid p.16
4 Ibid p.20
their plight. That is why citizenship is a fundamental element of human security. On the basis of this the people acquires a sense of belonging and identity, and it entitles them to the protection of the state and provides a legal basis for the exercise of many civil and political rights.\(^5\) Hannah Arendt once observed that the tragedy of stateless people was that they no longer belonged to any community whatsoever and that they were often forced into the role of outlaws, living on the margins of society, without the right to residence and without the right to work.\(^6\)

The issue of citizenship is of immense interest especially at a time when the people of a state find themselves deprived of all the rights and privileges associated with their legal status as citizens of that state. “Crucial for displaced people is citizenship (or the lack of it). In conventional terms, citizenship is seen as political membership in a given nation-state through which citizens possess civil, political, economic and social rights. Most states, however, have groups within them who do not belong and are denied citizenship rights, even though they may have formal citizenship. In particular, displaced people (both within and crossing borders) are denied formal citizenship and rights but are claiming them, subjectively seeing their \textit{de facto} experience as lived citizenship.”\(^7\)

The issue of citizenship is intrinsically related to the question of the right to vote. In fact the right to participate in the affairs of the state is certainly one of the most, if not the most important right enjoyed by the citizen of a state. This entitlement to vote differentiates the citizens from the non-citizens in a country. “However the relationship between voting rights and citizenship is often contentious. Reformers believe that non-citizens, who are often just as involved in their communities as citizens, should be afforded equal voting rights. Opponents of voting-rights expansion argue that voting is the crux of citizenship and should be limited to those who have lived and worked in the country for a substantial amount of time. ….. Opponents of non-citizen voting rights also argue that immigrants should put in the work to obtain citizenship if they hope


\(^6\) Ibid P 11

\(^7\) Lyla Mehta and Rebebecca Napier-Moore, Op.cit p.5
The concepts of citizenship, voter identification and voter registration have been explained in Public International Law. The United Nations Human rights Committee’s General Comment on the right to participate in public affairs and voting rights, for example, puts emphasis on the essential part of electoral proceedings viz. voter registration. Registration is possible only on the basis of some sort of identification requirement. However the standards ought to be flexible and broad as that could vary according to the diverse contexts of the respective state-citizen relationship. It would also depend on the trustworthiness of the electoral system in the eyes of the citizens.

The first part of the Principle 1 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement says that the “Internally displaced persons shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. They shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced.” The document treats the IDPs as formal citizens in every sense of the term irrespective of their status as displacees. So the society which displaces the victims by treating them as outsiders in their territory does not have any right to deny them of their status as citizens of the state.

However the problem relating to the status of the internally displaced persons is much more complex than it appears to be. If the society of the tormentors has to accept them as citizens then the question of their displacement should not arise. Conflict induced displacement occurs where the state authorities are either unable or unwilling to protect people, and they are forced to flee because of a) armed conflict including civil war, b) generalised violence and c) persecution on the grounds of nationality, race, religion, political opinion and social group.

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9 General Comment No. 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (Art. 25) : . 07/12/1996. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, General Comment No. 25. (General Comments) quoted in Harmonizing Observation Methodologies: The Challenges of Legal Identity, Citizenship and Voting, The Carter Centre September 27 – 28, 2012


community is very clear about the basic rights of the IDPs in any state but the community which had displaced them would never going to accept them as an integral part of their society so the question of granting the IDPs any right whatsoever would not arise. The interests of the tormentors and the displacees are always mutually exclusive. While Principle 22 (1) (D) under Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement categorically point out, "Internally displaced persons, whether or not they are living in camps, shall not be discriminated against as a result of their displacement in the enjoyment of...the right to vote and to participate in governmental and public affairs, including the right to have access to the means necessary to exercise this right." Principle 29(1) reaffirms the right of IDPs quite strongly as well.

The importance of right to vote for the citizens is easily understandable because only by exercising that right the citizens can participate in the public affairs of their country. Their very positions as citizens too would largely depend on that right. By the act of manipulation the government of a state can exclude certain communities or groups from the voters’ list and thereby making their status as citizens of that state concerned, untenable. Public international Laws have mentioned certain Obligations and Principles on voter identification and registration. So on the basis of some reasonable and objective criteria the right to vote should be determined. The process of registration of voters should be introduced in all the states and an opportunity must exist for citizens to register to vote, where that is a prerequisite to the enjoyment of this right. There should be no abusive interference in the registration process otherwise the very basis of democratic participation gets violated. It is the primary responsibility of the state to ensure that the citizens are able to cast their vote. The authority should make the necessary arrangement for voter identification and registration. Voters should have the right to an effective remedy regarding voter ID and registration practices. Sometimes IDP women and girls are often unable to procure documentation in their own names. This is especially true in patriarchal tribal societies where the women members are just taken as a part of the families without assigning any special status to them as separate individual entities. Their names are registered in the voters’ list as dependants of their husbands or male relatives. The outdated values of patriarchy rule

12 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement op.cit

supreme in such families. This lands them in a situation where they don’t have the means to prove their identity, especially in case of family separation or death of these relatives.

These provisions acquire an added importance in the cases of internal displacement. The onus lies with the society which has displaced them and also on the host society where the IDPs have taken shelter, to restore this right as soon as is possible. Their status as citizens largely depends on this right. The state should take steps to enable IDPs to register and vote in the area of displacement. Provisions should be made to incorporate the names of the IDP voters in the electoral roll in absentia so that they can participate in elections in their area of origin while they remain displaced.

The UN Human Rights Commission has affirmed that the people should have the right to remain at peace in their own homes, on their own lands and in their own countries. Similarly, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has asserted that "the right to live in one’s native land is a very precious and fundamental right." Displacement and expulsion, he observes, "by its very nature deprives victims of the exercise of many other rights and is frequently accompanied by physical abuse and even by the ultimate violation of the right to life.""\textsuperscript{14} According to the Guiding Principle the decision which the IDPs are going to take regarding their return to their place of origin or to settle or even to integrate with the host society should be a voluntary one taken exclusively by the IDPs themselves. To secure the legal-politico positions of the IDPs after their return to their place of origin, special arrangements ought to be made to enable them to acquire all legal documents such as passports, personal identification documents, birth certificates and marriage certificates. As formal citizens they should be able to enjoy all those rights including right to take part in the electoral processes of the country, like all other citizens of the state. Strategies should be framed to enable the IDPs to participate in community, governmental and public affairs. The displaced community should have unhindered freedom to participate equally in all such activities and they should enjoy the right to vote.

However the real picture is far from encouraging. It can very well be assumed that the predicaments of the IDPs do not end with their return. “Upon return, the displaced would

continue to claim the entitlements specific to IDPs in addition to all other rights as other citizens of the country, as end of displacement does not take place immediately upon return, and so long as the specific needs and vulnerabilities resulting from their displacement persist, the returnees would continue to require special attention and support.”\textsuperscript{15} The need for approaching the humanitarian problem with utmost sincerity and political commitment becomes all the more evident. The state has to ensure that it has the political will to fulfil its responsibility in this regard.

Yet in order to achieve a durable solution to the problem of internal displacement the state should allow the victims of displacement to start their lives afresh on a sustainable basis. The sovereign authority should fulfil its responsibilities in creating a congenial political environment which would enable the displaced victims to enjoy all rights ordinarily enjoyed by all other citizens. Under no circumstances they can be deprived of their basic rights even for attaining a short-term peace.

According to the Principle 22(1)(d) of the Guiding Principles the IDPs should be enabled to participate in local and national politics, including participation in periodic and genuine elections. They should not be discriminated against in this regard, and like all other fellow citizens they should continue to enjoy all political rights even though they cannot return to their place of habitual residence. Such steps would surely help in conflict resolution and peace building. “By moving from armed clashes to electoral competition, the parties to conflict create the conditions for political mobilisations, facilitating the reintegration of IDPs into society.”\textsuperscript{16} However to make the electoral process a means for controlling conflict situation, it should be a completely legitimate arrangement acceptable to all the parties including the displaced populations. All these would be done to have the interests of the IDPs properly represented in the political society of their place of habitual residence. In accordance with the principle of universal and equal suffrage, no citizen in ‘Democratic political system’ can be denied of his/her rights as a result of being displaced. Political participation is one such right which is inalienable

\textsuperscript{15} Chathuri, Jayasooriya \textit{The Right to Return} in Policies And Practices Vol -15 Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (October 2007) p.43

irrespective of age, sex, religion, ethnicity or minority status. The problem occurs when the internally displaced people do not get access to the places where their documentation supporting their status as voters had been left behind owing to their displacement. In such cases their right to vote gets technically untenable. This situation becomes further complicated owing to their dislocation from their habitual places of residence where elections are being held. As a result their chances to return to their place of origin get slightly jeopardised as the elections may primarily involve such cardinal issues.  

The Government of an area where the displacement had taken place is legally, politically and above all morally obliged to provide mechanisms for the IDPs to register as voters even during displacement, such as through facilitated procedures to maintain existing registration, to transfer registration, or to waive requirements that would prevent IDPs from registering at the site of displacement. The government must allow the IDPs to cast their votes at the location of displacement, for either the constituency of origin (absentee vote) or the constituency of displacement.  

It had been further pointed out in the ‘Manual for Law and Policy Makers: Protecting Internally Displace Persons’ that in situations of displacement, election management bodies should establish an IDP specific polling unit or focal point. The unit should be chaired by a member of the election management authority and include staff with expertise in the legal, logistical, training, and information technology aspects of elections and referenda. Representatives from other relevant public agencies should be included, and the relationship between an IDP electoral unit and any ministry or coordination body responsible for IDPs must be clearly defined. In some cases, representatives of domestic monitoring bodies such as national human rights institutions (NHRIs), international agencies, or regional intergovernmental organizations might also be invited to participate in the unit’s work. Where return movements are likely to continue beyond even extended registration deadlines, the only way to preserve returnees’ voting rights may be to allow them to cast provisional or tendered ballots. Enabling the IDPs to freely and fully

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17 Ibid P.212
18 Ibid P.213
19 Ibid P.214
exercise this right to vote is an essential duty of the state. It is extremely “... important not only on own merits but also for enabling the internally displaced, who so often are marginalised, to have a say in decisions that affect their lives.” Article 21 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights stipulates that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives” and through “periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal suffrage.” This right has been codified in a range of international and regional human rights instruments. In particular, Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides that “every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity … to vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage.” The very act of enfranchisement of the IDPs provides legitimacy to the entire electoral process of the state.

The conflict-induced displacement situations have frequently occurred in most of the states under Indian union. However, the intensity and magnitude of such displacement varies amongst states. The Northeast, Kashmir, Gujarat and Chattisgarh have bore the brunt of this problem in recent times. Conflict-induced displacement situations are a not temporary but perennial problem that requires immediate attention.

IDPs legally and ideally remain under the protection of their own government even though the same government might be the responsible for their ordeal i.e. forced displacement. As citizens, they are expected to retain all of their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law. In post-colonial North east India inter-ethnic conflicts became a regular phenomenon. Violent strife took place on the basis of ethnicity, language, religion and even on shares of the meagre resources available to the North-eastern states of India. A particular conflict situation may involve only one of the grounds and in some other cases they may involve all three grounds simultaneously. Among the North Eastern states, internal displacement has been quite high in Assam. Conflict has been the main cause of major displacement of population in Assam. About 30,000 to 40,000 Brus/ also called Reangs fled from Mizoram State of India to Erin Mooney and Balkees Jarrah The Voting Rights of Internally Displaced Persons: The OSCE Region http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/20041105_osce.pdf Accessed on 22 September 2013

21 Ibid
Tripura to escape from a violent attack and onslaught on them allegedly by the members of the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (Mizo Students Union) and Young Mizo Association (YMA). From 15 October 1997 onwards, Reangs from Tungbagin, Kawnmun, Pheileng, Laxmicheraa, Kwartha, Rangdil, Fileng and Tuipuibari areas of Aizwal district of Mizoram fled to neighbouring states to escape from persecution from the non-state actors. It is alleged that the state too remained as silent spectator. The ACHR Fact Finding team met the delegations from Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) the two leading NGOs of Mizoram. They mentioned their three conditions for the Brus to make the return process successful. They were (1). Brus have to shun violence and militant activities against the Mizos (2). Brus in the camps should be identified based on 1995 electoral rolls; and (3). Brus must not be allowed to settle in one compact area. Answering to specific question as to whether those Brus who were in electoral rolls prior to 1995 and those Brus who can establish that their parents were in electoral rolls prior to 1995 would be accepted.22 The researcher would try to assess the positions of the displaced Brus/Reangs regarding the questions of their rights and their constitutional status as citizens of India. The role of the Mizoram Government in treating the displacees as the inhabitants of Mizoram will be examined. Actual picture derived reveals that the hapless Bru victims of ethnic conflicts have been denied of all the basic rights the citizens of India are entitled to enjoy. So the very idea enshrined in the Principle 1 of the Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement stands denied by the Mizoram Government. In fact all the recommendations of the Guiding Principles are not enforced by the Government of Mizoram notwithstanding the pressure exerted on them by the Union Government of India and above all by the leadership of the Mizo.

A more coherent response to situations resulting in forced displacement owing to conflicts called for the creation of a national institutional approach which should also include the creation of national institutional centre on internal displacement and a national policy and a supporting legal framework ensuring the rights of internally displaced. In brief, there is increasing demand to draft a national policy on internally displaced person targeting conflict-induced IDPs.23 Mizoram

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Government had been quite adamant while dealing with the Bru displacement crises and on several occasions Aizawl virtually ignored directives issued by the Union Government and other National organisation and even International organisation working for the protection of human rights in India. Their attitude towards the Bru IDPs was far from being sympathetic, to be precise somewhat step motherly. The Brus even prior to their displacement were deprived of their basic human rights, as if they were not Indian citizens. Several reports on this problem revealed that the Mizoram Government was unwilling to accept them as Indian citizens living on Mizoram’s soil. The authorities there manipulated the governmental machineries in several ways to delay if not stall the process of return of the displaced Brus to Mizoram from the relief camps of Tripura. The researcher had taken into consideration innumerable media reports, documents, and interviews with the stake holders and reports of human rights organisations to find out the real causes behind the attempts made by the Mizoram Government to deprive the Bru displacees of all the rights otherwise enjoyed by all the citizens of India.

According to a report published in ‘Asian Centre For Human Rights’ (ACHR) in 2006, the Mizoram Government did not pay any heed to the direction issued by the National Human rights Commission of India in October 1999 to take back the Reangs. The Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) started insisting on using the voters’ list in Mizoram for identifying the Brus/Reangs. It was a ploy for categorising them as outsiders. However on the direction of the Election Commission of India many were enrolled in the voters’ list. Yet only 1733 voters out of 2406 voters in Kawrthah and 971 voters out of 1240 voters in Phuldungsei constituencies could cast their votes through postal ballot in the bye-elections held in December 2005 owing to the stiff resistance of the YMA and MZP. Other voters were physically threatened and prevented from exercising their electoral right.24 Mr. Swaibunga the President of Mizoram’s Bru Displaced People’s Forum had told the researcher umpteen number of times that the violence against the Reangs was part of a calculated move for ethnic cleansing. He alleged that first the names of 20,000 Reangs were deleted from the voters' list. Then there began state-sponsored atrocities against the Brus. The researcher too felt that the design to disenfranchise a

large number of Brus actually aimed at robbing them of the status of complete citizens. So that they could never get politically mobilised and strive for some kind of political autonomy in Mizoram. MBDPF leaders claimed that everyone at the camps, except newborn babies, belongs to Mizoram and that they all have official proof in the form of citizenship certificates, bank passbooks, ration cards and birth certificates. Although in Mizoram the Mizos are known for their high rate of literacy, they have always prevented the Brus from gaining access to the domain of education. Only five Bru persons could obtain a graduation degree. One Mr. Tuisarai Bru commented "Against this backdrop, we wanted to free ourselves from the domination of Mizos and raised our voice for constitutional provisions to become civilised citizens."\(^{25}\)

Notwithstanding the stiff resistance of YMA and MZP the leading NGOs of Mizoram the Bru IDPs had started taking parts in the elections held in Mizoram. Authorities in Aizawl constantly questioned the bonafide status of the Brus staying in the relief camps in North Tripura. They refused to accept them as inhabitants of Mizoram.

The Reang IDPs staying in the relief camps in North Tripura since 1997 after being displaced from Mizoram had started casting their votes through postal ballots for the 2014 Lok Sabha polls in Mizoram. Tripura’s Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mr. Asutosh Jindal said that, “Tight security measures have been undertaken in six of the seven relief camps, where facilitation centres were set up to enable the eligible refugee voters to cast their votes by postal ballots.”\(^{26}\) It is quite strange that a government official is most ignorantly using the term ‘refugee’ to refer to the Bru IDPs. He also mentioned that the facilitation centres were set up only after the Election Commission of India had put tremendous pressure. Election Commission of India had also appointed seven observers to oversee the electoral process there. The voters represented 10 assembly constituencies in western Mizoram, but their voting was crucial for lone Lok Sabha constituency of the state. Mizoram National Font (MNF) was expected to put up a fight against Congress which won the last Lok Sabha poll. As decided by the ECI earlier Altogether seven observers, Sukumar Gana (special observer), Devashish Chakraborty, observer for Naisingpara


camp, Lekh Raj Sharma, observer for Ashapara camp, R P Mehandiya, observer for Hazacherra camp, Ashwini Kumar Mohal, observer for Khakchangpara camp, Soumayajit Ghosh, observer for Kaskau camp and Santosh Kumar Dubey, observer for Hamsapara camp earlier visited the Kanchanpur sub-division to supervise the postal ballot-casting process by the Reang voters which began at 8 am of April 01. A group of Mizoram government officials had also arrived to supervise the process.\(^{27}\) With this the election commission had established rights of Bru or Reang IDPs housed in camps in north Tripura to participate in ensuing elections in Mizoram.\(^{28}\)

For some strange reason the names of only 11500 out of about 32000 Bru IDPS were found in the electoral roll. The roles of both YMA and MZP became obvious in this regard. They were holding protest rallies against the decision of the ECI allowing the displaced BRUs to cast their votes through postal ballots and demanded immediate annulment of the decision. They sent a memorandum to the ECI informed the MZP President, Mr. Lalhmachhuana, during his conversation with the researcher. According to him, the MZP, YMA and other youth bodies wanted the return process of the displaced Brus to be completed before the Lok Sabha poll so that only those Brus, who were the real inhabitants of Mizoram, before getting displaced, could come back to Mizoram. And the unwilling rest can stay back in Tripura and the names of those would be deleted from the electoral rolls of Mizoram. He had handed over a document to the researcher which contained their forthright rejection of idea that the Brus belong to Mizoram. As per the document the Brus were settlers from Tripura who started staying in Mizoram only since 1895. So they do not deserve to enjoy voting rights in Mizoram. Thus he was in a way hinting at the need for withdrawing all the rights of the Brus, which are normally granted to all Indian citizens. What was more alarming was that even the Chief Minister of Mizoram, Mr. Lal Thanhawla, had urged the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. Sampath to disallow the Brus to vote through postal ballots. However the ECI did not oblige him and continued with the voting process.\(^{29}\) Earlier, the Mizoram Bru Displaced People’s Forum, which had its headquarters in the


\(^{29}\) Op.cit Tribal refugees in Tripura cast postal ballot for Mizoram: NDTV
Naisingpara relief camp situated in North Tripura district (Kanchanpur), had requested the Election Commission to conduct polling for the Lok Sabha polls in the camps. The Election Commission had consented to the requests made by the Bru representatives.

This tension regarding the voting rights of the displaced Brus is continuing till date. Several media reports have covered this problem over a period of five years which are helpful in understanding the attitude of the authorities in Aizawl towards the Bru inhabitants. Regarding the Assembly election in Mizoram the officials from State Electoral Authority had informed the press that a highly placed source in the state election authority today said that the Mizoram state assembly election held in November last year had a 74 % turnout in the Reang relief camps of Tripura. The camp inmates boycotted the previous assembly election of Mizoram in 2008 as they were disgusted with the politics played by the Mizo officials in manipulating the voters list in Mizoram.

Once again in 2015 the Mizoram’s NGOs Co-ordination Committee comprising five major civil groups requested the ECI to disenfranchise all the displaced Brus who would refuse to return to Mizoram from the relief camps in Kanchanpur of North Tripura. Accordingly their names, ought be struck off from the electoral roll of Mizoram. The Brus whose bonafide was not questionable were repeatedly asked by the authorities in Mizoram to return and necessary arrangements were made in this regard but most of them decided against the decision of returning to Mizoram and that was why the Mizo NGO groups wanted to get their names deleted from the voters’ list with immediate effect. The NGOs further claimed that the unwilling Brus could very well stay back in Tripura as they originally belonged to that state. So as Indian citizens their names should not in Mizoram’s electoral roll. Ignoring their claim the ECI decided to conduct hearing in the six Bru relief camps in Tripura with a view to carrying out a special revision of electoral rolls.30 As an act of defiance a meeting was convened by Manisha Saxena, the Chief Electoral Officer of Mizoram, where the NGO Coordination Committee leaders said they would not allow conduct of special summary revision of voters' lists in the relief camps as they are situated outside the state. The reaction of the Election Commission of India was strong and assertive one. The Commission

30 Mizoram NGOs for deleting Brus from voters' list: nelive http://www.nelive.in/mizoram/news/mizoram-ngos-deleting-brus-voters-list
Accessed on 12 Jan 2015
had ordered the Mizoram Government to conduct special summary revision of the electoral roll including the six relief camps situated in Kanchanpur of North Tripura. This had led to widespread protest movements by the Mizo NGOs across Mizoram. The Election Commission issued the instruction to the state election department on 14th September. The State Joint Chief Electoral Officer Mr. F. J. Liantluanga commented while talking to the press "We have forwarded the instruction from the ECI to the District Electoral Officers (Deputy Commissioners) of Mamit, Kolasib and Lunglei districts to take necessary action." He further added that those descendants of the Bru IDPs enrolled in the electoral rolls in Mizoram in 1995 and who would attain the age of 18 on January one 2016, would get registered by the election officials while holding hearing in the relief camps. The Mizo civil society organizations vehemently criticised this decision. They pointed out that the Brus who want to get registered as voters should come to Mizoram first to complete the formalities. They cannot ask for their enrolment from the relief camps in Tripura. Mr. Vanlalruata, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the YMA commented that this rule was applicable for non-resident Mizos too and the Brus cannot get special treatment from the ECI. In a similar manner the MZP too strongly opposed the decision of the ECI of giving the displaced Brus the opportunity of getting themselves enrolled in the electoral roll of Mizoram state. The Brus who were not quite ready to come back to Mizoram through the official return process should never be allowed to get themselves registered as prospective voters in the elections held in Mizoram. The decision to allow them to vote through postal ballots was blasted by the MZP leadership. They had called for wide-spread agitation programme to resist the directives issued by the ECI. They strongly felt that the ECI was granting them undue favour. The Chief Minister of Mizoram Mr. Lal Thanhawla and various political parties of the state had demanded that the Bru people who had refused to return to Mizoram despite a series of attempts to ensure their return to Mizoram should be excluded from the voters’ list. The defiance of the Mizoram Government reached its zenith when Mizoram's NGO Coordination Committee and representatives of all major political parties urged the state chief electoral officer not to entertain any order from the ECI related to the hearing on claims and objections of Bru voters in the six Tripura relief camps till the return


32 Ibid
process is completed. Meanwhile, the Election Commission of India instructed the state election department not to release final publication of the voters' list until the hearings on IDP relief camps in Kanchanpur were completed. The state election department notified the final publication of voters' lists only in 31 assembly constituencies and was forced to abstain from publishing the voters’ list of nine assembly constituencies covering three districts till April 30, as directed by the ECI.\footnote{Election official asked not to hear claims of Bru voters in Mizoram: Posted on: 04:26 PM IST Feb 15, 2016 PRESS TRUST OF INDIA http://www.ibnlive.com/news/india/election-official-asked-not-to-hear-claims-of-bru-voters-in-mizoram-1203396.html Accessed on 16/ March 2015} They were three assembly constituencies under Mamit district, three under Kolasib and three under Lunglei district of Mizoram. The firm decision taken by the ECI had been widely appreciated by the human rights organizations in India.

The MBDPF President Swaibunga had every reason to be disgusted with the conspiracy hatched by the Mizoram Government regarding the voters’ list issue. He raised his objection about the deletion of one hundred Bru voters’ name from the electoral rolls of Mizoram when postal ballots were polled in the Lok Sabha election. He told the researcher that the matter was brought to the notice of the nodal officer from the Election commission, and he had told him that the issue would be examined by the Commission officials, but till date nothing was done about it. Mr. Swaibunga felt that in a mischievous manner the officials in Mizoram have not deleted the names of Bru returnees from the electoral rolls of Mizoram but the names of a large number of IDPs staying in the relief camps were tactfully deleted. The MBDPF leadership strongly expressed their displeasure about the way the electoral rolls of Mizoram were manipulated to reduce the Bru population in Mizoram.

Now the million dollar question is, what would be status of the Bru IDPs who would not feel secured enough to return to a hostile society in Mizoram where chances are there that they would be persecuted by the Mizo people and above all by the Mizoram Government. In a modern democratic state system if a section of the people is not enfranchised by the political authority then they can never consider themselves as citizens. Right to vote is an integral part of the relationships between the rulers and the ruled ones. On this rests the very idea of a responsible government. When a government directly or in a covert manner tries to hatch a conspiracy for depriving a community of its basic rights and privileges, ordinarily enjoyed by the citizens in a more or less liberal democratic set up, then it becomes obvious that the government is not willing...
to accept them as free citizens of that country. In case of refugees that design is a manifested one because the government of a state does want the community to quit in most of the cases. However in states where internal displacement takes place owing to inter-ethnic conflicts or other acts of violence the apparent role of the governmental authorities is often undefined. Till the full-blown conflict draws their attention to the problem, the government does little to resolve the crisis. However large-scale displacements may take place only with the tacit support of the government behind the perpetrators of violence.

In case of the present problem the covert role of the Mizoram Government became evident with the passage of time. The internal displacement which took place way back in 1997 became a protracted displacement and till date the problem could not be solved in spite of the pro-active roles played by the Union Government, the Government of Tripura, the National Human Rights commission, the Election Commission of India, and other NGOs. As has been mentioned earlier neither the Mizoram Government nor the Mizo NGOs were seriously interested about taking all displaced Reangs back to Mizoram as citizens of India and that is why they wanted to disenfranchise a large number of them. By doing that they could prevent them from entering Mizoram again with all their rights intact. Their insistence on the 1995 electoral roll is a ploy to put the future of a large number of displaced Brus in jeopardy.

One may make an assessment of the actual character of this problem of displacement in the context of International recommendations and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal displacement. Accepting the fact that the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were not legally binding on the sovereign states facing the problem of displacement yet the Human Right Laws make them reasonably enforceable. The problem became a complex one in this case for more than two reasons. First of all, Indian Government’s diplomatic position with regard to these Principles makes things difficult for the IDPs. Secondly, even by strongly supporting the Principles, the Union Government could not do much in convincing the Mizoram Government to abide by the ideals enshrined in the body of the Guiding Principles. The Brus are not ready to accept the Mizoram Government as their proper leaders and the authorities in Aizawl never considered the Brus as original inhabitants of Mizoram. So the schism between the two communities is indeed deep-rooted. The United Nations Human rights Committee’s emphasis on the importance of voters’ registration for facilitating the participations of the IDPs in public
affairs and voting has been systematically ignored and violated by the Mizoram government. The government there tried their level best to deny official documents to the whole generations of Brus languishing in the relief camps in North Tripura so that their names could be struck off from the voters’ list in Mizoram. The Government even tried to obliterate the names of those Brus from that list, who had valid documents to establish their bonafide. Owing to immensely strained relationships between the tribal (Bru) citizens and the Mizoram state, the room for any accommodation or adjustment between the stakeholders in the matters relating to the electoral process was not there. The importance and trustworthiness of the manipulated electoral system in Mizoram were greatly reduced in the eyes of the Bru IDPs and they felt alienated from the public affairs of Mizoram. The society which could not ensure their basic physical security could not ask for their allegiance. Here even territory cannot be a strong determinant of citizens’ rights.

One of the most important rights of the citizens in a democratic country is the right to participate in the electoral process. Getting registered as voters is the principal precondition for the citizens for becoming eligible voters in that state to which they belong. Again for becoming legitimate voters the citizens are required to produce certain documents as a proof of their identities as citizens. As has been mentioned earlier, the concepts of citizenship, voter identification and voter registration have been explained in Public International Law. The Mizoram Government virtually had left no stones unturned for denying these valuable documents to a large number of Bru voters who incidentally were displaced and were staying in the relief camps of North Tripura. A large number of eligible Bru voters were deprived of their right to vote in spite of possessing all valid documents and certificates issued by the Mizoram Government prior to their displacement in 1997 because the authorities in Aizawl systematically deleted their names from the electoral rolls of Mizoram state. By these conspiratorial acts the Mizoram Government had defeated the very first Principle under “The Guiding Principles on Internal displacement” They had violated the principle of equality while treating the displaced Brus and denied them of every possible right and freedom under the sun including the most basic human rights. The governmental authorities in Aizawl had been showing step motherly attitude towards this community even prior to their displacement. The researcher while interviewing the IDPs in relief camps could find out that they were widely discriminated against in public life. No step was ever taken by the government for providing education to their children while the Mizos had ample access to modern education. The health system in the areas inhabited by the Brus was in abysmal
state. No developmental was visible in Bru dominated areas. The situation deteriorated after the displacement of the Bru families in 1997. The government had started treating them as outsiders and their apathy towards this community became more evident when the reluctance of taking them back came to the fore. The attitude shown by the NGOs of Mizoram, who had the backing of the state authority, towards the Bru community revealed a thoroughly xenophobic design. The Brus were considered to be non-citizens, aliens. On several times while talking to the researcher the MZP leaders were trying to convince him that most of the Brus belong to Bangladesh just like the Chakmas. According to them most of the Brus should belong to Tripura and a small section could be accommodated in Mizoram who actually belong to their state.

Principle 22(1)(D) under “The Guiding Principles on Internal displacement” clearly states that even while the displacees are staying in relief camps they cannot be discriminated against as IDPs and they should be empowered to enjoy all the rights including the right to vote. They would continue to enjoy the right to participate in public and governmental affairs including the right to have access to the means necessary to exercise this right. These guidelines were ignored by the Mizoram Government and to be more precise even Union Government could not exert enough pressure on Aizawl to follow these. Some of the Central Government Officials instead of supporting the hapless IDPs in Kanchanpur relief camps, threatened them to go back to Mizoram according to the conditions put forward by the Mizoram Government. There had been a sustained conspiracy to sabotage the registration process. When the Election Commission of India directed the Election Officials in Mizoram to go for a summary revision of the electoral rolls in Mizoram there was a huge and wide spread movement against that directives, by the Mizo civil society groups. Stiff resistance was also offered at bureaucratic levels to that directive. Every possible effort was made to frustrate all the attempts enabling the Bru IDPs to exercise their franchise. In spite of all the steps taken by the ECI only a small section of displaced Brus could cast their votes from the relief camps of Tripura. Arrangements were made to send the Electronic Voting machines (EVM) to camps yet the desired results could not be obtained. This was solely because of the nefarious design of the Mizo authorities for keeping the stakeholders away from the manipulated registration process.

By their acts of omission the Government in Mizoram had not only ignored the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement but they had also violated Article 21 of Universal
Declaration of Human Rights (Article 21) which says that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives and through periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal suffrage. Since India is not a signatory but had ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights way back in 1979, the covenant applies to her. Article 25 of the Covenant says that every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity...to vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage. So once again the host Government can be blamed for violating this very important international document. A chart showing on subsequent page would give a clear picture about the politics behind the discriminatory policies of the Mizoram Government for depriving the Bru IDPs of their most basic political right, the right to vote. It reflects on the obstacles created by the Mizoram State Government for denying the Brus the opportunities to live as complete citizens of India with all their civil and political rights. On each of these grounds the role of the authorities in Aizawl can be assessed. The Government there had been creating all kinds of fuss about the cut of year for allowing them to return. Conflict and tension between the Mizos and the Brus had always resulted in attacks on the Bru villages which jeopardised the lives of the Brus. This community’s excessive dependence on Jhum cultivation and their life style were strongly disapproved by the Mizo society. As a majority tribe they never wanted other minority tribes to gain control over their state. Earlier three Autonomous District Councils were created in Mizoram and the Mizos resisted all efforts to go for the formation of one for the Brus. The Brus would feel insecure if they are asked to cast their votes in polling stations far from their places of residences. The displaced Brus in Kanchanpur relief camps in North Tripura almost unanimously pointed out to the researcher that they do not have the courage to visit the offices of Mizo officers as they are never entertained there. Even the Mizo police refused to accept complaints from the Brus. Few Bru ladies told the researcher that whenever they lodged complaints against the Bru youths for sexual harassment, they would react by saying the boys are having innocent fun so why are you complaining? You are too fussy. In

view of this the Brus can hardly hope for gaining access to the electoral officials for seeking their registration.

During the phases of their displacement at least a section of them could exercise their rights as voters in the camps as the EVMs could be sent to those places but it is highly doubtful whether they would allowed to vote at all after their return to Mizoram. After all law and order is a state subject, and the track record of Mizoram’s police force may discourage the Brus from participating in the electoral politics of Mizoram.

The Brus have to suffer in Mizoram for speaking in Kau Bru language which happened to be their mother tongue. More often than not they remain oblivious about the policies and decisions of the Government for not knowing Mizo language. Basic literacy education for youth and adults is a critical area of need among displaced communities. Currently, The Brus are mostly an uneducated and to be more precise illiterate tribe. Special efforts ought to be made to provide them with basic education particularly in conflict-affected areas. Basic literacy is an

important tool for all IDPS as it enables them to understand the world around them and would assist them to make informed decisions. “Furthermore, literacy is not only a human right but also an ‘enabling’ right – the key that unlocks the door to the enjoyment of many other human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to participate in public affairs, the right to work, and the right to participate in cultural life.”

A person’s political identity does not only depend on his right to participate in the electoral processes of the society to which he/she belongs. A citizen has the most important right to be heard. He/she should possess the right to communicate his/her views, demands and expectations either to the policy-making authorities or to the fellow citizens. Otherwise, the very idea of freedom will be defeated. But what is the precise meaning of the right to communicate. It means right to language, the right to use, preserve, maintain, impart and protect the language of the community to which the citizens belong. Language forms the basis of one’s capacity to express oneself. The importance of the right to freedom of expression can never be underestimated by any civilised democratic society. This is particularly relevant in the cases of conflict-induced displacement.

Politically, socially and culturally estranged IDPs are faced with trying situations. They remain at the mercy of the governments for protection and relief. In most of the cases these people are placed under unresponsive political authorities. As a result it becomes extremely necessary for the victims to raise their voices in order to get heard. Proper communication on their part can make the governments aware of their responsibilities as care-givers of the IDPs. The IDPs should have the right to conduct their internal and external affairs in language of their choice. The displaced people should have the right to hold, impart and receive opinions through all media. Not only that they should get the power to handle their own media so that they can preserve their own culture and the unity of their own community. Especially print media can improve their connectivity in cases estranged families.


In the present study it was found that the Mizoram Government was particularly reluctant about giving recognition to the Kau-bru language. So the Reangs’ clamour for justice always went unheard. In fact the Bru children never got the chance of obtaining education in their mother-tongue. The language of dominance (Mizo) virtually had robbed the entire Bru community of their fundamental right to freedom of expression. All avenues for higher education were blocked for this community.

While the International organisations are suggesting that states faced with the problem of internal displacement should device strategies which would improve access to public affairs and encourages public participation by the IDPs, Mizoram is moving in the opposite direction. As a Government it is trying to keep the Bru IDPs beyond the domain of public affairs. Ironically these Bru IDPs do not constitute any special legal category. Their status as internally displaced would not require any legal recognition in order to get certain legal entitlement. As citizens of India they are covered by human right laws and are entitled to similar humanitarian legal protection that is available to them and all other Indian citizens. Yet there had been rampant violation of such laws with regard to them because of extreme discriminatory policies pursued by the authorities in Aizawl. Their continuous marginalisation by the unfriendly Government in Mizoram for a sustained period had virtually left them as unwanted citizens of India.
The critical humanitarian crises of internal displacement had put the human civilisation in quandary. Uprooted communities who were forcibly evicted from their natural place of habitat are left to suffer immensely and would seldom have a secured future for themselves and for their coming generations. The role of the state as a sovereign authority, in fulfilling its responsibility of taking care of the victims is rarely praiseworthy. The much needed initiative by the state, for preventing this phenomenon of internal displacement is hardly visible. The IDPs while suffering the ordeal have very little hope of being looked after well by the host society. Relief is very hard to come by and the hope of getting transitional justice remains ever elusive. The dream that they foster of going back to their place of origin is rarely realised. They are left at the mercy of their political authority and its unhindered step motherly treatment.

The entire research exercise on the internally displaced Brus/Reangs of Mizoram, lasted for almost four and a half year. The findings were more complex than it was expected at the initial stages of this intellectual endeavour. However in the process, enough information and data could be obtained for examining the validity of the hypotheses framed on this problem. The problem of language barrier and the unfriendly terrains in the camp areas did not deter the researcher for carrying on his work there.

A fortnight long interaction with the Bru IDPs in their relief camps and prolonged chatting sessions with them had provided the researcher with a rich collection of data. The third chapter of this paper dealt with the underlying politics behind the large scale displacement of the Brus in 1997 and subsequently in 2009. While investigating the root causes behind this huge exodus of Brus from Mizoram the researcher found several knotty dimensions in the inter-ethnic relationship between the dominant Mizos and the Brus. The former never considered the Brus as a part of Mizoram and in their eyes they were settlers from Tripura and even Bangladesh and hence their position in Mizoram should not be of any political significance. The state of Mizoram, its Government machinery, the civil society in general and the NGOs like YMA and
MZP share this sentiment. When the Bru National Union (BNU) raised its claim for an Autonomous District Council (ADC) like those of the Chakmas or Mara communities, the Mizoram Government as well as the Mizo civil society reacted sharply and dismissed such demand instantly describing it as a conspiracy to disintegrate Mizoram. It is extremely strange that the Mizo people, who had struggled for years to gain much awaited autonomy for their community, were extremely hostile to the very idea of granting autonomy for other groups within Mizoram. They had taken the path of violence and insurgency to achieve autonomy for their own ethnic identity. So much so at one point of time they wanted to secede from India. Yet they are so insensitive to the demand of the Reang people. The prolonged interactions with Brus in relief camps and wide spread media reports revealed that the Brus were treated as secondary citizens in Mizoram. No attention was paid to their needs for socio-economic and other developments. The Government was showing quite indifferent attitudes towards the Brus with regard to their health and educational needs. The Reang or BRU community was extremely marginalised and persecuted in Mizoram and was deprived of all kinds of social, cultural and in particular political rights. The numerical status of the Brus was overlooked even though they constitute the second largest tribal community in Mizoram. Special efforts were made in Mizoram to strike off a large number of Bru names from the electoral rolls in Mizoram in order to disenfranchise them. This was done to frustrate their political ambition for securing autonomy. The findings overwhelmingly validate the first hypothesis which states that the greater the marginalisation of the Reang Community in Mizoram the lower was the degree of their human right indices.

The Bru IDPs in the relief camps were facing innumerable problems with regard to the cash dole and other relief materials like fuel, blankets, medicines, food grains and allied things they were expected to get from the Tripura Government. Initially they were facing no problem with regard to their relationships with the local population. They were not keen to talk about this before the researcher. However the Researcher could find out from the neighbourhood that the prolonged presence of the IDPs in Kachanpur was creating serious problems for the local people. Even the local newspaper reports suggested that the desperate Brus were working as daily labourers for their survival against a poultry sum of Rs.100/- only per head for which a local person would have charged Rs. 200/- to 250/-. This had disturbed the local economy. Moreover rampant
cutting of trees for meeting their requirements of fuel had irreversibly damaged the ecology in that region of North Tripura. These had led to hostility between the original inhabitants and the IDPs. As a consequence the local people started campaigning for their ouster from those areas affecting the peaceful existence of the already distressed Brus. However the findings could not prove beyond doubt that the Reang people find the cultural milieu of Kanchanpur to be hostile to their socio-cultural rights, notwithstanding the fact that the cultural similarities between the two communities living in neighbouring states were striking.

It can never be denied that since 1997 the Government of Tripura had been dealing with this humanitarian crisis to best of its abilities. However a small state burdened with its own problems of economic development and insurgency it could pay very little attention to all the needs of the displaced community. Even the most basic rights enjoyed by other citizens of India as enshrined in the Constitution of India, like right to life, right to practice any profession or to pursue any occupation or trade or business, right to education, freedom of movement, right to participate in public affairs etc could not be ensured to them. The Tripura Government does not have the resources to address this problem. In fact the authority there, does very little to provide the IDPs, the basic opportunities for earning their daily bread as it cannot provide the people of Tripura enough employment opportunities. The education scenario is dismal in the relief camps. The Sarva Shiksha Abhijan is highly insufficient for providing elementary education to the children of the displaced Brus in the camps. The host Government also fails to provide the minimal medical facilities to the camp dwellers. The Government of Tripura could not restore the basic human rights to the hapless Brus who were forced to flee Mizoram.

The fate of the Bru IDPs appears to be extremely bleak owing to the uncompromising attitude shown by the Mizoram Government on the question of return and resettlement of the Bru IDPs in Mizoram. In spite of constant intervention by the Union Government and the pressure exerted by the Tripura Government, the unrelenting resistance offered by the authorities in Aizawl had sabotaged the process of return of the displaced Brus. From the very beginning the officials from Mizoram expressed doubts about the number of displaced Brus from Mizoram state. They claimed that the numbers in relief camps were highly inflated. According to them the Reangs from Tripura and even from Bangladesh were trying to sneak into Mizoram under the cover of displacement crisis. When their logic was dismissed and challenged by both the Union
Government and the Tripura Government the Mizoram officials raised all kinds of objections against taking all the displaced Brus back to Mizoram. It is strange that every time a plan is formulated to ensure the return of the Brus some violent incidents take place to derail the process. It is a ploy to stall it indefinitely. The Mizoram Government dithers to take any step lest the NGOs like YMA and MZP get offended. However the Mizoram Bru Displaced People’s Forum leadership have always tried to draw the attention of the Union Government to the dubious political game played by Mizoram. Then the politics of electoral roll came to the surface. The civil society organisations like the YMA and the MZP had started demanding that the 1995 electoral roll of Mizoram should be used to denote as a cut off year for determining the bonafide of the actual Bru residents of Mizoram state. Moreover the Mizo NGOs felt that the Brus who were not willing to return to Mizoram on the basis of the conditions laid down by the Mizoram Government, they should very well stay back in Tripura permanently. The politics of subverting the process of return of the Brus clearly validates the hypothesis of the researcher which presumed that the Government of Mizoram’s political will to take back the Reang people to Mizoram was hardly evident. However the concept of ‘Return’ itself cannot be taken as an end in itself. A much more important question relates to the problem of their resettlement and finally that of rehabilitation of the Bru returnees. The present researcher is highly sceptical about the lofty promises made by the Mizoram Government before the Central Authorities about the Development Projects to be undertaken by it in areas where the Brus are going to get resettled.

Karitas was funding a project where Tata Institute Of Social Science (TISS) was trying to impart vocational training to the displaced Brus through the Anganwari system. A major incidence of fire destroyed a large number of huts in the relief camp area at Naisingpara of Kanchanapur. The researcher found that one French NGO supplied a large consignment of relief materials to the distressed Brus who had lost everything in that devastating inferno. Vanabasi Kalyan Ashram a branch of Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS) had been providing some assistance to the Bru IDPs in their camps. They are trying to mobilise the Brus against the Christian dominated Mizoram state for strengthening their bargaining position. The most important role had been played by Asian Centre For Human Rights (ACHR) as mediator in this humanitarian crisis. They had been relentlessly putting pressure on both the Union Government and the Mizoram Government to complete the process of returns of all displaced Brus languishing in the relief
camps in Kanchanpur of North Tripura. They wanted the MBDPF leaders to sit with the Mizo civil society organisations like YMA and MZP for resolving this long standing problem. The ACHR had also carried on surveys for assessing the extent of damages caused by the violent attack by the Mizos on the Bru villages which led to a fresh spurt of displacement of the Brus in 2009. Their interventions had some sobering effect on the ever aggressive Mizos. So it may be deduced from that, the NGOs if not the international organisations can play effective role in resolving this crisis. So the final hypothesis of the researcher stands validated which holds that the roles of Non-Governmental Organisations in India and the International Organisations in restoring the human rights of the internally displaced Reangs and in ensuring their return are vital.

A similar situation was evident in Assam involving the dominant Bodo community and the Santals who had become living there for ages. The violent attack on them by the Bodos has given rise to a critical crisis. A large number (around 110000) of Santhals were displaced from their place of habitual residence and they are living in relief camps in Assam's Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon sub-divisions. The displacees cannot go back to their own villages as the Bodos have forcibly occupied them. Even if they try to return, no police protection would be provided to them. On the top of that the Government of Assam are closing down the relief camps leaving the Santhals in absolutely hopeless condition. In fact the present study shows that the displaced Reangs may face similar situation if the Tripura Government carries out its threat of closing down the camps and the Mizoram Government prevents the process of return of the Bru IDPs.

The post-Godhra communal riots in Gujarat had led to massive internal displacement of people belonging to the Indian Muslim community owing to an alleged Hindu backlash. Widespread killing of people belonging to the minority community coupled with arsons and looting of their property took place. They took refuge to relief camps which could not even provide the most basic amenities to them like food, medical assistance and sanitation. Notwithstanding condemnation at national and international level Indian Government did not allow any external agency to provide any assistance. After a while the camps were closed down without ensuring the security of the victims.
For some strange reason India has no national IDP policy for conflict-induced IDPs, and the Central Government passes on the responsibility of looking after the IDP on the respective state governments where such problems occur. The states, especially the economically not so developed ones are given the duty of protecting the IDPs. Above all the Indian Government refuses to accept the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as something moral imperative under the pretext of safeguarding her sovereignty. However owing to some persuasion by Asian Centre for Human Rights the National Human Rights Commission has started visiting the relief camps in North East India where displacements have taken place.

Another kind of displacement resulted from violent inter-ethnic conflict between the Karbis and Dimasas. These tribes peacefully co-existed for ages suddenly became extremely hostile towards each other. Perhaps their clamour for more autonomy and resources has resulted in large scale killing and looting. Houses were set on fire. These violent attacks occurred mostly during 2005.

However the Naga-Kuki conflict has some similarities as well as dissimilarities with the present study on displaced Bru population of Mizoram. The Kuki-Naga conflict has just like the Bru-Mizo conflict has resulted in the destruction of hundreds of houses, villages and loss of property and livelihood and ultimately widespread forced displacement. Just like the Nagas and the Kukis there is an emergence of some kind of ethnic nationalism among the Brus. Their demand for autonomy emanated from their newly acquired awareness about their distinct ethnic identity. As a community they have come to realise that without socio-economic development their future will never be secured. That is why they have raised their claim for an Autonomous District Council under which the all round progress of the Bru community in general could be ensured. However just like the Mizos the Nagas too wanted to secede from India and were extremely independent minded. Whereas the Brus, helplessly suffered as victims of internal displacement have never thought of seceding from Indian Union. However at different points of time they have launched militant movements yet their target was Mizoram State Government rather than India. Likewise the Kukis too wanted to establish their supremacy within the framework of Indian Constitution. The Kuki-Naga conflict has a distinct feature which is absent in the case of this present study. Both the tribes match each other in terms of their capacity to inflict damage on the other. They forcibly displace each other. The Reangs on the other hand are too weak to displace
the dominant Mizos from their place. On the contrary they were hooted out of Mizoram quite easily.

Again in both the cases the poor displaced people do not received sympathy from the authority. There seems to be absolutely no will on the part of the government to look into their problems. However the Nagas and the Kukis have no real difference on the basis of religion. They are by and large Christians. Some NGOs try to provide some relief materials to the victims of displacement though that was absolutely inadequate. Moreover the relief camps are set up formally only on papers. They do not provide any assistance to the Nag/Kuki IDPs and without any means of survival they are displaced from their original place of residence and they wander around taking temporary shelter here and there and they are exposed to all sorts of dangers. In a way the displacees of Kuki- Naga conflict have to face more complex crises than those faced by the Brus.

A comprehensive approach to this problem of conflict-induced internal displacement in Indian context may reveal certain features underlying the position of the Union Government. The Government has always manifested a laidback if not callous attitude while addressing this humanitarian problem. This is particularly true in the case of the tribal population be it North-East India or Chhattisgarh. This is also evident in the case of forced displacement involving the religious minority. The state governments too show this kind of indifference if the dominant communities within their respective territories are not adversely affected. In Gujarat post-Godhra riots had displaced a huge number of Muslims. The Government there did nothing to rehabilitate them. Same are the situations in Northeastern Indian states like Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram or Manipur, where lakhs of people get displaced owing to either inter-ethnic conflicts or militant movements and insurgency. When it comes to the question of protecting the displacees or providing relief and shelter to them, the Union Government irrespective of the party in power would address the problems most nonchalantly. As if the tribes residing in that part are the children of the lesser God. The Union Government generally has played and is still playing a pro-active role in the case of displaced Kashmiri Pundits. This becomes obvious when the quantum of financial assistance extended to this privileged community is considered. Each Kashmiri Pundit is receiving around Rs.12000/- per month whereas each adult Bru is destined to get only around Rs.150/- per month. And minors are receiving even less than that. The Kashmiri
children are receiving preferential treatment at the time of admission to educational institutions. The Sarva Shiksha Avijan is conducted in a lacklustre manner as a result of which generations of tribal children will always remain virtually illiterate and uneducated.

The problem which the Bru returnees are faced with is related to the question of rehabilitation rather than mere resettlement. Resettlement of Brus in Mizoram started, though at a very slow pace after the strong interventional efforts by the Union Government. The Mizoram Government was under tremendous pressure from the Union Government, Government of Tripura and national and local media, for initiating the process of return and resettlement of the displaced Brus, notwithstanding a strong resistance of the general Mizo society and the NGOs like MZP and YMA. The Bru returnees were at first taken to the transit camps which were not equipped enough to withstand the vagaries of nature especially in monsoon. Moreover this exercise carried very little meaning as it involved no serious Governmental effort for rehabilitating them in Mizoram. Resettlement only focussed on mere physical relocation. The Mizoram Government paid no attention to the much needed governmental role for ensuring their economic and social development. The question of livelihoods is a major issue in resettlement and rehabilitation policy. However the researcher learnt after his prolonged telephonic conversation with Mr. Elvis Chorkhy, the Chairman of Bru Coordination Committee (BCC), that in meeting of the Committee consisting of the Union Government’s representatives, representatives of the Mizoram and Tripura Governments, the members from MBDSPF and BCC and the members of NGOs from Mizoram, held in Agartala, it was decided that the Bru returnees would be included under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. That would enable them to obtain at least 1,30,000 rupees, per family for the construction of their homes on plots provided by the Mizoram Government. It would certainly benefit them marginally as it was decided initially that only 80,000/- would be given to them as cash dole (for house building and financial assistance). However Mr. Chorkhy informed the Researcher afterwards that in a similar meeting held later in Delhi the Government of India remain absolutely non-committal on the same issue. So the quantum of cash dole will not be enhanced. The settlements were going to take place in Mamit, Kolasib and Lunglei districts. This is done in order to place the Bru community in a scattered form so that they remain at least geographically separated. Moreover the farmlands in those areas are situated in far off places from villages where these Bru families are going to get resettled. The Bru leadership is
now demanding cluster settlements for the returnees. However their demand for settlements in the erstwhile villages in the Dampa Tiger Reserve Forest Area was instantly rejected by the Mizoram Government.

The Mizoram Government tried to conduct identification in Naisingpara, Asapara, Kaskau, Khakchangpara, Hamsapara and Hazacherra relief camps and it was decided by them that those willing to return would be resettled in 13 villages in Mizoram-Tripura-Bangladesh border in Mamit district. But the problem lies in the fact that no specific measure was taken with regard to their livelihood. Mr Elvis Chorkhy, the Chairman of BCC, admitted that almost all the Bru families depend on jhum cultivation. So absence of arable land would leave their lives in a miserable state as it had been in the relief camps in Tripura. Resettlement sites selected by the Mizoram Government had no reference whatsoever to the availability of livelihood opportunities, or the preferences of displaced Brus themselves. Their lands and properties had already been captured and occupied by the hostile Mizo community and these Bru people are induced to get resettled in unknown areas where arable land was not available. Even there was no certainty that they would be given menial jobs by the unfriendly Mizo community. The earmarked Dampa Reserve Forest Area would always remain out of reach of the Bru people though prior to their displacement a large portion of the same had been the habitats of this community. A large area containing arable land will not be allowed to be used by this extremely economically vulnerable community. Mr. Elvis Chorkhy expressed his disappointment about the absence of any effort of the Mizoram Government to help the Bru returnees to acquire some vocational skills, so that they can shift from their original occupation of jhum cultivation. Moreover there is no certainty that the Bru returnees will get any chance to work as daily labourers on a regular basis. They have to move around and wait for weeks to get such jobs which hardly ensure a decent wage.

The problem becomes more acute as the community of Brus is largely uneducated if not illiterate barring those who could attend schools and colleges under trying circumstances. Few generations had to go without proper education owing to their displacement. Neither the Union Government nor the Tripura Government could provide even basic education to the children and young Brus living in the relief camps of North Tripura. So no employment opportunity was
available to this community in other vocational field. Under such circumstances the future of this community appears as extremely precarious. The prospect of meaningful rehabilitation would ever remain so elusive.
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**Articles**


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6. Deccan Herald  
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8. Highlander  
9. Hindustan Times  
10. Indian Express  
11. India Today  
12. Mizoram Post  
13. Sentinel  
14. The Shillong Times  
15. The Telegraph  
16. The Times of India  
17. The Hindu  
18. The Week
ANNEXURE

Schedules meant for the Bru IDPs in the relief camps.

Section-A

1) What is your name?
2) How many members are there in your family?
3) When did you come over to Tripura? a) 1997-98 b) Later
4) Where exactly did you stay in Mizoram?
5) Why did you leave Mizoram?
6) What kind of torture you were subjected to?
7) Who were torturing you? a) The Mizo civilian people b) The Mizo Police c) The Government Officials
8) Were getting food through rationing system?
9) Were your children being allowed to attend schools?
10) What was your language of communication with the non-Reang people there?
11) What is your mother-tongue?
12) Were you allowed to cast your votes?
13) Did you ever have a leader at local level?
14) Do know what an Autonomous District Council is?
15) Did you feel free to move around when you were in Mizoram.
16) Did you get access to the local markets run by the Mizos for addressing your daily requirements?
17) Were you ever being harassed by Mizo persons in a market place?
18) Have you ever contacted the Government Officials?
19) Did you get access to Government Health Centre when you had fallen sick?
20) Were you ever being treated by a Mizo doctor?
21) Did you practice your religious rituals in Mizoram?
22) What is your religion? a) Hindu b) Christian
23) Are you a convert?
24) If yes, since when?
25) How did you conduct your ceremonies in Mizoram?
26) Did you mix with Mizo people?
27) Were the Reang women safe in Mizoram?
28) Did the police help you when you were in problem?

Section-B

29) Since when you have started to reside in this relief camp?
30) Where did you stay when you first arrived in Tripura?
31) What are the problems you are facing in these relief camps?
32) Could you mention four most crucial problems you are facing these days?
33) Do the people in charge of these relief camps listen to you about your problems?
34) Do you get enough food materials for sustaining you and your family members?
35) Is the hut that you are living in, good enough to protect you throughout the year?
36) Does it become uninhabitable during winter and rainy season?
37) Do the Government officials, who are in charge of these camps visit you regularly?
38) When did they last visit you?
39) Do you interact with the local people here?
40) Do they talk to you?
41) How do you communicate with them?
42) Are they friendly people?
43) Who treats you when you fall sick?
44) Can you approach any local health centre?
45) How do you rate the local police here?
46) Are they helpful?
47) Are allowed to procure anything from the local market?
48) Are you allowed to work anywhere to earn some money?
49) Are the camps safe for you women here?
50) Do the local people bother you?
51) Can you practice your religion here?
52) Do local political party leaders pay you visits?
Questions addressed to the Government Official at Mamit Mizoram

1) How do you plan to solve the nagging problem involving the displaced Brus?
2) Do you think that the Government of India is putting pressure on you to take back the Bru families which in your opinion do not belong to Mizoram?
3) So far how many Bru families have returned to Mizoram and how do you plan to rehabilitate them?
4) Is the Tripura Government making things difficult for your government?
5) Will it be burdensome on your Government if you take back all the Bru families from the relief camps in Tripura?

Questions addressed to the Bru returnees

1) How do you view this present problem?
2) Is the Tripura Government hostile to your interest?
3) How do you feel the Mizoram Government is treating the Bru returnees?
4) Are you getting materials for building your home?
5) Are you getting the amenities the Government had promised to provide to Bru returnees?
6) How much are you receiving as financial assistance from the Government?
7) Do the Bru families feel safe after getting back from Tripura?
8) Are the Mizos in your neighbourhood still hostile?
9) Are the police helpful?
10) Are you allowed to go back to your original place of residence?
11) Will you be allotted land for Jhum cultivation?
12) Do you hope to get any alternative employment if land is not made available?
13) Will you participate/vote in the ensuing election?

Questions addressed to the YMA and MZP Office Bearers

1) What is your perception of the Bru/Reang displacement problem?
2) Do you think other communities in other parts of India face similar problems of unwanted occupation?
3) Why do you think that they would vitiate Mizo culture?

4) What is your idea of process of return?

5) Do you think Mr. Elvis Chorkhy is talking sense?

6) Do you want them to participate in the electoral process of your state?

Mizo Zirlai Pawl

General Headquarters

Mizoram Aizawl

The Brus At A Glance

1. The so-called Brus are one of the sub-tribes of Tripuri who originated from Tripura. While they are called Reangs in Tripura, those in Mizoram adopted the nomenclature Bru.

2. As stated by the leaders of Mizoram Bru Welfare Association (MBWA) during a meeting with the MZP leaders, the first five families of Brus migrated to and settled in Mizoram in 1895.

3. Mizos in western Mizoram, particularly in Mamit district were in great demand for the manual labour of the Brus.

4. The Bru Students’ Conference called a meeting on March 8, 1998 at Riflemara in Cachar district (Assam) wherein it issued an order to all Bru villages in Mizoram to quit Mizoram before March 22, 1998.

5. The people of Mamit district earnestly requested the Brus to defy the quit order and remain in Mizoram even as Mizoram Government also sent two Cabinet ministers to all Bru villages pleading them not to leave. The concerned Superintendent of Police visited all the Bru villages and assured them there were no dangers.
6. The Brus turned deaf ear to the promised security and efforts to persuade not to leave Mizoram. The Mizos, therefore, considered that Brus did not flee Mizoram but leave at their own will.

7. The Brus, who left Mizoram at their own will, went on accusing the Mizos in general and the YMA and MZP in particular before the national media and human rights organisations. The media and human rights organisations readily accepted the Brus’ accusation as genuine without bothering to find out the facts.

8. The Brus who left Mizoram drove away five Mizo villages from their ancestral homes in Lungthir Serhmun, Tiangsang, Tualsen and Upper Dosda villages in Sakhan range in North Tripura.

9. The Brus, who fled Mizoram were lodged at six relief camps in North Tripura. These refugees were joined by Reangs from Cachar (Assam), Bangladesh, and Tripura. Then they demanded repatriation to Mizoram and resettlement in compact area including all these people who are not from Mizoram.

10. The Mizos welcome repatriation of Bru who left Mizoram at their own will provided they shun violence.

11. If repatriation is to be done the electoral roll of Mizoram before the Brus left Mizoram should be based.

12. The number of Brus in Tripura’s relief camps have also being greatly exaggerated by their leaders to make easy money out of rehabilitation package.

13. Since some Bru leaders have been making easy money out of the Bru refugees; they are never interested in coming back to Mizoram. Whenever a repatriation plan was made, they created troubles to derail the process. It is interesting that Bru leaders in the camps lived in luxury with assets while they lived with subsistence before they left Mizoram. MZP firmly believes that this should be investigated to solve the Bru problem.

14. Mizos have been pictured as opposing to the repatriation of the Brus. It was always them who did not want to come back.
15. The Bru leaders had already expressed their intention to boycott the repatriation which was scheduled to begin from November 16, 2009. However as boycotting the repatriation would mean putting the blame on themselves, the Bru leaders hurriedly hatched a plot to kill Mizo youth in the name of Bru Revolutionary Union on November 13. Subsequent to this incident, the Brus torched their own huts and left Mizoram for Tripura. By doing this, it appeared that a situation had been created by the Mizos to prevent repatriation.

16. On a daily basis, around 50-80 Brus went to Bungthuam village to get daily employment with the peak hour being 7:00 am-8:00 am. Interestingly, not single Bru went to Bungthuam village on the day while the Bungthuam youth was gunned down by the Brus around 9:45 am. This was a clear proof that the incident had been pre-planned.

17. The Brus always exaggerated their number. Contrary to their claims in their letter to the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram that more than 5000 Brus have been displaced in the wake of of the communal tension, a Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council MDC, Smt. Muankung (Chairman of PAC) informed Mizoram assembly Speaker R Romawia who visited the area on November 17 that 270 Brus had so far arrived at Tripura. Thirty more Brus arrived at Tripura later in the afternoon of that day, the MDC told the Mizoram official.

18. The MZP warmly welcomes the ACHR for having decided to visit Mizoram to find the ground realities, unlike other media and Human Rights Organisations who had never bothered to look the other side of the coin. The MZP expects that the ACHR is concerned about the rights of the Mizos as much as it is about the rights of the Brus. The MZP firmly believes that if the ACHR conducts unbiased study into the situation, Mizos’ unceasing hospitality towards the Brus and how the Brus on the contrary has continuously created troubles with the Mizos will be discovered.

19. Thw Bru National Union (BNU) and Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram submitted a memorandum to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Hon’ble Home Minister against Mizoram
20. They alleged that 44 Bru women were raped by Mizos in the aftermath of the disturbance. 28 persons were physically allocated and examined by police. 12 other Bru women whose names did not figure in the memorandum but claimed to have been raped were also examined.

21. The so-called victims could not identify the assailants and gave vague implications only. It was revealed that in all the alleged cases the rape mentioned not a single evidence could be established.

22. They listed 8 names who had been allegedly killed by Mizos, but the police found out that the allegations were wrong.

23. The Bru National Union, in their memorandum also alleged that 8 Brus have been missing and their whereabouts were not known. But reliable persons from Hilmen (Parsenchhip) and from Chhippui Kawnmawi were contacted by police; of the 8 persons listed, none except 2 really existed. They are Dinamohan (70) and his son Phaisaral; (!$). They had gone to Aizawl in order to purchase school textbooks.

*Issued by: MZP Gen.Hqrs. Aizawl*