CHAPTER - IV
CONFLICT INDUCED DISPLACEMENT
Chapter IV
Conflicts induced displacement

4.1. Internal displacement in Assam since 1947:

Northeastern India has been facing the problem of ethnic crisis after the independence of the country. The region is ethnically and linguistically more diverse than the rest of India. There are about 430 recognized tribes in India and some 200 tribes live in the hills and the plains of the North East India. The British sowed the seeds of conflict by bringing various ethnic outsiders to work in the tea industries as cheap labour or to sow the extensive fallow areas of the Brahmaputra valley. The colonial province soon evolved into a shared homeland of Assamias, tribals and migrants resulting in marked changes in the demographic composition of the states in the Northeast (Nath, 2005).

In the postcolonial period, a new dimension was added to the already complex scenario of India's North East as much undocumented immigration from across the porous border took place (Das, 2002). In the past century the region received immigrants as refugees, economic migrants and ecological victims from the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal. This has caused the North East India's population to increase from one million to 20. Throughout this century Assam has been the fastest growing area and its population has grown nearly six fold since 1901 when it had a population of 3.3 million. During this period India’s population has grown less than three fold. Had Assam’s population
increased at the same rate as the rest of India from 1901 to 1981, the population of Assam would have been 9.5 million rather than 19.9 million (Weiner, 1983). The increase in population led to a competition for resources and jobs as both land and opportunities became scarce and as such migrant communities were identified as the cause of pressure on the limited resources. The anti-outsiders movement started by the sons of the soil to thwart the immigrants also became a point of reference for many of the subsequent movements in the rest of the North Eastern region. The agitation not only targeted the immigrants but also some indigenous citizens of India because the categories to be deported were never clearly defined and perhaps intentionally left hazy and these soon included the local tribals and descendant of migrants in the various parts of North East India. What began as ethnic conflict between indigenous and foreign groups turned into ethnic clashes between populations that had essentially become local to the area (Bhaumik, 2000). In most cases the violence has often been directed against civilians, as the rebels attack villages, massacre residents and burn houses to compel other ethnic groups to vacate disputed territory and move to inadequately protected displacement camps.

Different ethnic groups of the region such as Mizo, Naga, Tripura tribals, Meities of Manipur and recently the movement for deportation of illegal migrants by the Assamese, ethnic assertion of the Karbis, Garos, Khasis, Arunachalis in the hills, and the demands for autonomy or statehood by Bodos, Rabhas, Rajbongshis, Mishings, Chutiyas, Sonowals,
Thengals etc. in the plains are the manifestation of their urges and aspirations for all round development. The movements launched by different groups in the hills and the plains should not be treated as the outburst of emotive and irrational sentiments; but in truth through such movements elites compete and struggle for power (Brass, 1991).

Most of the ethnic movements in the region are controlled and led by the elite groups. This elite group is the educated middle class of the society who has the influence in the society. Most often the cultural forms, values, practices of the ethnic groups become the political resources for the elites in competition for political power. Paul Brass points out “the process by which elite mobilize ethnic identities simplifies those beliefs and values, distorts them, and select those which are politically useful rather than central to the belief system of the group concerned.” (Brass, 1991).

Ethnic conflicts do not remain confined to particular places but spread like wild fire. There is no sign of abatement but the intensity and magnitude of conflict appears to have been rising day by day.

Ethnic conflict in Northeast India includes the conflict between the states and ethnic groups, inter ethnic and intra ethnic conflicts. Among the northeastern states, internal displacement has been quite high in Assam particularly in the western part of Assam. Conflict has been the main cause of major displacement of population in Assam.

North East India today comprises of eight states including Sikkim. It is estimated that about 25% of the total 31 million population of
Northeast India belong to tribal groups. Had there been no immigrants in the region, the population of Northeast would have been lower than what it is today. When the government of India announced for holding of election into the Assam legislature and for 12 unfilled parliamentary seats, the All Assam Students Union (ASSU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) declared that they would boycott the election as large number of illegal migrants name have been included in the voter list. What particularly alarmed the Assamese was foe growth of number of registered voters in the electoral rolls. The number of voters in Assam in the year 1972 was 6.3 million but it had gone to 8.7 million in the year 1979. There was an increase of 2.4 million voters within a span of 7 years. This forced people to believe that the number of illegal migrants was increasing alarmingly (Weiner, 1983). The anti-foreigners movement of 1979-1985 in Assam was launched by the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). The issue for Assamese was not only the jobs but also the preservation of language and culture in the face of the demographic change that threatened to make the Assamese a minority in their own soil. Bengalis had been migrating into Assam for more than a century but since 1971, the influx of foreigners from East Pakistan now Bangladesh deepened ethnic insecurity and acted as a catalyst for a movement that engulfed Assam in violence.

In the six-year Assam movement, more than five thousand people were killed in ethnic conflict. In 1985, the Government of India reached a
settlement with the movement leaders. The agreement promised— in addition to commitments for the deportation of illegal immigrants and enhanced economic development— to provide “legislative and administrative safeguards to protect the cultural, social and linguistic identity and heritage” of the Assamese people. The problem of Assam did not end with the signing of the Assam accord (Hardgrave, 1993).

It is widely believed that the movement was an outcome of the continued immigration to Assam from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) region since the colonial period (Kimura, 2003). The continued flow of immigration to the Brahmaputra valley has pushed the population of the region to 31 million. The increase in population led to a competition for limited resources and the jobs, as both land and opportunities ceased to be abundant and soon such competition singled out migrant communities as the people to be sent back to their countries of origin. Almost all the states of North East India experienced political mobilization and organized violence from time to time. The identity politics, which became the defining theme of postcolonial North East Indian political agenda, laid an exclusive claim to a land that has emerged as a shared homeland since the earliest times (Nath, 2005).

There has been at least eleven major case of conflict induced internal displacement in Assam since 1947. These are the displacement of Na-Assamia, Hindu Bengalis, Nepalis, Santals, Bodos, Rabhas, Garos etc.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Population groups affected</th>
<th>No. of displaced persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Partition/Riots</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>53,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Assamia language movement</td>
<td>Hindu Bengalis</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Assamia language movement (AASS)</td>
<td>Hindu Bengalis</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Assam movement (Nellie massacre)</td>
<td>Na Assamia Muslims</td>
<td>1200-3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Choulkhowa Chapori (Darrang) Silapathar (Lakhimpur) Gohpur</td>
<td>Bengali Hindu ethnic Nepalis</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1991-93</td>
<td>Bodoland movement</td>
<td>Bengalis</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Massacre at Kokrajhar, Barpeta and Bongaignaon</td>
<td>Na Assamia Muslim peasants</td>
<td>1000 (60 villages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Massacre at Relief camp at Bansbari in Barpeta</td>
<td>Na Assamia, Muslims, Hindu Bengalis</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Santal-Bodo conflict</td>
<td>Ethnic Santal, Bodo, Rabha</td>
<td>2,50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Reoccurrence of Santal-Bodo conflict</td>
<td>Santals, Bodos, Rabhas</td>
<td>82,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Indigenous/Muslim conflict</td>
<td>Bodos, Muslims, Garos, Aassamiyas, Nepalis, Biharis, Rabhas</td>
<td>97,090 (Udalguri district only)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: (i) Joshua Thomas, C. (2002)  
(ii) USCR (1999)  
(iii) Hussain, M (2000)  
(iv) Deputy Commissioner, Kokrajhar and Deputy Commissioner, Udalguri, 2008.

4.2 The Bodo-Santal Ethnic Conflict:

The conflict, which erupted between the Bodos and the Santals, is one of the largest in terms of scale in India in recent decades. Displacement of population due to ethnic conflict causes more damage than the
displacement caused by the developmental activities. When conflict erupts in a particular area, people have to run for their lives without prior notice and at the same time the future is also unknown. Whereas in case of development -induced displacement, people are informed well in advance before they are to move. In one of the relief camps in Saraibil, an IDP stated to this researcher, “One evening when I was returning back from the paddy field, suddenly I saw our villagers running towards the other village, so I also followed them. Only by noon the next day, I could find my wife and children and till now I am staying in a relief camp. So how can I improve my economic condition?”.

There were two rounds of conflict between the Bodos and Santals. The first spell of this ethnic conflict made about one fourth of the district’s population internally displaced persons and by the second spell about 40 percent of the district’s population was internally displaced. The figure would have been higher as the government kept the records of only those displaced people who stayed in the camp. The data for the people who got displaced for a week, two weeks or a month and came back to their villages could not be maintained. Besides, in some of the villages only children and women fled, but the men folk stayed back in the village guarding their properties. Children and women took shelter in other village schools or any other public buildings and returned within two or three days but this exercise continued many times. This type of displacement record could not
be maintained. It is obviously a difficult task to keep record of such
displaced persons.

The inter-ethnic conflict in the Bodo heartland of Kokrajhar and
Bongaigaon district displaced a large number of people. At one stage the
number of IDPs crossed more than 3 lakhs. It is to be noted here that the
Bodo-Muslim violence that erupted in 1993 displaced about 3568 families
consisting of some 18000 persons. These people were displaced from
Bengtol, Durgapur, Patabari, Anandabazar, Malvita, Jamunaguri, Amteka,
Koilamoila and other villages of both Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon district.
On March 5, 2004 the state government stated that it would rehabilitate
them in Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Goalpara and Bongaigaon district (The
Sentinel, 2004). However, these IDPs declined to accept the proposal on
the ground that the state government did not fulfill its promise of providing
genuine rehabilitation aid (The Sentinel, 2004). Again a series of major
incidents took place throughout the Kokrajhar district in May 1996, where
many Santals and Bodos got displaced from their original habitats. This
conflict has resulted in the displacement of 42,518 families consisting of
about 2,78,687 persons.

These victims were sheltered in 78 relief camps in Kokrajhar and
Gossaigaon Sub-division respectively of Kokrajhar district. After staying in
the camps for some time, the inmates returned to their villages in the year
1997 with small grants provided by the Government of India. The grant
included Rs.10, 000/- for some affected families and one bundle tin with
Rs. 7,500/- for some families respectively. The nominal relief grants provided to the affected people did not reach everyone in the temporary relief camp arranged by the government. Some of the inmates went back to their villages without any assistance from the government. However, in 1998 again a major conflict erupted between the two communities resulting in the displacement of 48,556 families consisting of 3,14,342 villagers. Till December 2006 in Kokrajhar district, 10666 families comprising 57386 inmates were living in the 26 state sponsored relief camps of the district.

Table 4.2. Distribution of population in the relief camps of Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon Sub-divisions following the ethnic violence of 1996 and 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-division</th>
<th>Number of relief camps</th>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6020</td>
<td>21225</td>
<td>11460</td>
<td>32685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossaigaon</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4646</td>
<td>16160</td>
<td>8541</td>
<td>24701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10666</td>
<td>37385</td>
<td>20001</td>
<td>57386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Table 4.2 reveals that the number of inmates of the relief camp decreased from 41,999 to 32,685 on December 2005. This is the report provided by the district administration. However, it is likely that the number of IDPs would be higher if detailed information was collected. The difficulty in acquiring accurate data on IDPs arises because the organizations and researchers engaged in compiling IDP statistics need to know when to stop counting. The administration closed down the camps after providing the relief grants but the affected families could not be
rehabilitated with the meager amount provided by the government. Although the government stops considering these people as the IDPs but in reality they were not rehabilitated as they still needed assistance and protection from the authority concerned. They point out that one of the reasons why it has been difficult to reach an agreement on IDP figures is the lack of clarity as to when an IDP should cease to be considered as such. Operational agencies, NGOs, donors and governments require data on the IDPs in order to formulate programmes, policies and budgets for effectively addressing their needs. Yet owing to varying interpretations as to when displacement ends, the figures used by the aforesaid organizations often differs dramatically (Mooney, 2003).

As such, the data provided by the administration on the IDPs could not be verified. After the settlement of the Bodo issue on 10th February 2003, the Bodoland movement leaders currently heading the BTAD and the state government has not paid sufficient attention to the rehabilitation of the IDPs who remain in the camps and have been unable to return to their pre-displaced sites. Although the new arrangement has been authorized to have a special rehabilitation programme for the affected people supported by the state government. The special rehabilitation programme for the people affected by ethnic disturbances in Assam who are living in the relief camps in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon should have been taken up by the state and the BTAD government. It was agreed upon between the centre and the BTAD council in the MoS that necessary funds for the rehabilitation would
be provided by the Government of India and lands which are free from all encumbrances required for such rehabilitation will be made available by the BTC (Pathak, 2007). But the state government and the BTAD authorities could not do much in this respect. That is why there are still many displaced people in the camps and other areas, who could not go back to their places of origin.

The Santal-Bodo conflict erupted again in the year 1998 as the process initiated by the state government did not follow some of the criteria for rehabilitation. The process initiated by the government raised some thorny issues such as firstly, what was the real number of IDPs in the camps, relatives houses and other buildings. Many of the IDPs could not register themselves as displaced persons. This was very important because only registered IDPs were eligible for assistance in the camps and for resettlement packages. With registration itself unreliable, there may still be many unknown displaces and these will not be assisted to return home. Secondly, there are also many IDPs who do not wish to be resettled. Reasons are many, such as some are traumatized by violent incidents, some have fears of security related to their areas of origin, some have lost their coping mechanism and have become dependent on camp life, while others are still unwilling to return to their areas of origin as they know that there is a lack of infrastructure and other basic services. Thirdly, some IDPs may have been resettled to unsafe areas. The declaration of areas as safe for resettlement is the main factor in effectively ending displacement. Thus,
before taking up any resettlement strategy, the government should clearly state the criteria for resettlement. These criteria should include the complete absence of hostilities, unhindered and safe access of humanitarian workers and sizable and spontaneous return movement. Virtually, the entire area should be officially declared as safe for resettlement after applying the above criteria (McGoldrick, 2003). If the areas for resettlement are declared by the government as safe without proper application of the above criteria then there is a possibility of re-occurrence of conflict as it happened with the Bodos and Santals in 1998.

Further a cause of concern is that inadequate resettlement packages, combined with a chronic lack of shelter and basic services in areas of return, have forced many resettlers to drift back to urban areas. Plans for community rehabilitation programmes have not yet been developed partly due to insufficient donor funding. Initially the displaced persons were shifted from the relief camp to the place near the original village so that the poor affected people could look after their lands and undertake agriculture in their lands. From the shifted camps the poor villagers moved to their original homesteads but there were still a feeling of insecurity in the minds of the people.
Table 4.3. Relief camp wise inmates position of Kokrajahr sub-division following the ethnic violence of 1996-1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Riot</th>
<th>Name of relief camp</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>No. of family</th>
<th>Total persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1. Joypur</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>1551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Bishmuri</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Deoshri</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>3570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1051</td>
<td>5710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1. Vety. Complex (Bengtol)</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Joypur(A)</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>9832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Amguri</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Bhunka-Maligaon</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Joypur (B)</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>4240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Shantipur</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>1406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Deoshri (B)</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>1364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Bishmuri (B)</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>1745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Runikhata, Bhurpar</td>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>5595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>6020</td>
<td>32685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Kokrajhar.

Table 4.4. Statement showing the total number of affected population during the time of ethnic conflict between the Bodos and Adivasis in Gossaigaon Sub-division in 1996 and 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of conflict</th>
<th>No. of families affected</th>
<th>Total population affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>22150</td>
<td>1,65,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>34,391</td>
<td>2,30,922</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: S.D.O (Civil), Gossaigaon Sub-division.

Some of the conflict-induced displaced persons were found to be living in the relief camps for more than a decade now. As per the information provided by the camp inmates that they were supplied with 10 days ration in a month, which included rice, salt and dal. An adult and a minor displaced person received 600 grams and 400 grams of rice per day respectively for 10 days in a month. That means an adult could manage to get 6 kgs. of rice and a minor got 4 kgs. of rice in a month, which was not at
all sufficient for the affected people. Some of the camp inmates received the ration provided by the government up to 1997, some up to 1998 and thereafter the supply of ration was stopped.

**Table 4.5.**
Requirement of rice for 10 days Gratuitous Relief (G.R.) and its cost etc in a month as per arrangement as on 1st December 2006 in Gossaigaon Sub-division.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>1311.24 quintals</td>
<td>Rs. 11,53,891/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying Charges</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 24,295/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. 11,78,186/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SDO, Civil, Gossaigaon Sub-division, Gossaigaon.

**Table 4.6**
Communities affected during the year 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Community</th>
<th>No. of families</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>21,290</td>
<td>1,33,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td>12,837</td>
<td>95,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>2,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total affected</td>
<td>34,391</td>
<td>2,30,922</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SDO (Civil), Gossaigaon.

Table 4.6 shows the community wise breakup of the inmates of the IDP relief camps in Gossaigaon Sub-division. When compared the community wise break up data, it was found that the Adivasi have been the major victims of the ethnic violence. The largest numbers of the IDPs within this category were mainly Santals and Oraons.

Although the Kokrajhar district is the focus of the present study, a brief look at the IDP situation in the neighbouring Bongaigaon district is desirable. In the year 1993, 3658 families or about 18,000 persons from the East Bengal community had been displaced (Deputy Commissioner, Bongaigaon). This was not the first time; the indigenous and native
communities of Assam had targeted the immigrant Muslim community. Recently in April 2005, a group under the banner of Chiring Chaporoi Youth Mancha led a campaign of economic blockade against illegal Bangladeshi nationals in upper Assam and about 10,000 people left the upper Assam districts\(^1\) (Assam Tribune, 2005). Official figures however say that their number is 600-700 (Internal Monitoring Displacement Center 2006).

The Muslim displaces of 1993 had officially been declared as encroachers on forestlands. Their settlements having been set up since 1960s when they reportedly migrated from neighbouring districts of Assam and West Bengal. As a result of their status as encroachers, their rehabilitation has been delayed and responsibility of rehabilitation shifted to district administrations in their places of origin (Goswami, 2006).

Such dualism relating to the status of displacees does not apply only with the Muslim disposes of 1993 conflict. After the Santal-Bodo conflict of 1996, about 1057 families in Sapkata Relief camp and 378 families of Kachugaon relief camp belonging to Adivasi community were identified as encroachers on forest land (Anon, 2006). The families, who were declared as encroachers, were still living in the temporary relief camps (since May 1996)

\(^1\) Assam Tribune, 2005, Shahabuddin flays Singh’s comment on influx. May 25. not having been rehabilitated till date like numerous other displacees.
Plate: 4.1

Encroachers on forestland who are still remain in the relief camp
Table 4.7 Jaraguri Relief Camp as on 10.5.2005 under Gossaigaon sub-division, Kokrajhar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>No. of families</th>
<th>Deaths in the village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Majadabri</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shymaguri</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Srirampur</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey, data provided by the Secretary, Jaraguri relief camp.

Table 4.7 deals with the Jaraguri relief camp belonging to Bodo community. There are 113 families belonging to Bodo community of the village Majadabri, Shymaguri and Srirampur respectively under Gossaigaon Sub-division in the district of Kokrajhar who are still living in and around Bajugaon under Gossaigaon Sub-division. These affected people shifted their camps five times. When the first conflict erupted in 1996, they were uprooted from their villages and housed at Dongphangbari relief camp. After staying there for sometime, they moved to Bajugaon and again after a year, came back to Dongphangbari. From there again they moved to Balagaon, where they stayed for quite some time. While staying at Balagaon, they started cultivating the lands belonging to the Adivasis. They were very much sure that they would not be able to go back to their villages anymore. But when the second conflict erupted, they were again displaced from Balagaon and came back to Bajugaon. Since then they have been living in the Bajugaon area under Gossaigaon sub-division. Although all of them are said to be genuine patta holders, they could not go back to their
original villages due to fear of attack by the Adivasis. Adivasis comprise of Santals, Mundas, Oraons, tea tribes etc. whereas Santal is a sub group of Adivasi. The lands belonging to the Bodos of the above villages are being illegally occupied by the Santals who are not willing to return the lands to the Bodos. The sub-divisional administration had not taken any initiative to rehabilitate these people who remained displaced for more than a decade now. The difficulty in rehabilitating these people is the location of the villages. The aforesaid villages are situated in the Santal colony tribal block, where Santals happen to be in majority. Since the administration is not seen taking any interest, the villagers themselves approached the Santal leaders to sort out the differences but in vain. As these displaced people are compelled to live in the temporary relief camps for more than a decade and not allowed to cultivate their lands, they have become highly impoverished.

Although the government reports claim that the number of IDPs has decreased but in reality this is not so. The displaces are forced to leave the camps. Many tribal leaders allege that the administration was stopping the ration to force these people out of the camps. One of the Santal inmates of the Nabinagar Camp Mr. Joachim Baxla (an Adivasi leader) said, “they have been chased out of the camps by the officials. The officials said we have to go or else we will have to starve”.

The immigrant Muslims of Bengali origin who got displaced in 1994 from the northern part of Bijni under Bongaigaon district are living along the National Highway near Bijni. Another man belonging to Santal
community in the Matiajuri relief camp under Gossaigaon sub-division stated “We are uncertain about our future. We may not get back our cultivable lands from the Bodos who occupied it after we fled the violence in 1996”. (Bhaumik, 2005). He went on adding that “we cannot go and work in the fields because the Bodos threaten us, we cannot buy lands anywhere under the new autonomy arrangement, we cannot get back our lands”. (Bhaumik, 2005). When the survey in the Matiajuri camp was carried out, some of the inmates of the camp reported that “out of 131 families of the camp, 13 families have been rehabilitated in their own village Jakati without any resistance from the Bodos and they got all their lands back. They further added that they are also waiting for the rehabilitation package. Once they are given the relief grants they will also move to their own villages.”

The life of the IDPs in the camps in the western part of Assam has been very difficult. Most of them do not get adequate food, nutrition and proper medical care. Children of these camps are deprived of formal education and health care services. Though some receive food aid, but it often arrives sporadically and is insufficient in quantity and nutrition.
Table 4.8.
Persons killed during May 1996 to October 2001 under Gossaigaon Subdivision (Causes of death was due to ethnic violence and extremist attack)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of community</th>
<th>Total No of deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santals</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rava</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihari</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SDO (Civil), Gossaigaon.

About 251 people were killed in the Bodo-Santal clashes of 1996 and 1998. The causes of death were either ethnic violence or extremist attack (SDO, Civil, Gossaigaon Sub-division). Of these 84 belonged to Santals, 59 belonged to Bodos, 55 belonged to Oraons, Muslims 34, Rabha 3, Bengali 3, Bihari 2 and others 11. Of these majority of people being killed belonged to Adivasi community followed by the Bodos. This report is prepared on the basis of available record in the SDO (Civil) office.

The conflict, which erupted between the Bodos and non-Bodos in the BAC area, is not related with ethnic cleansing. The reason is that the successive governments in the state had formulated certain policies and measures to protect the tribal lands but in reality it failed to protect the tribal areas from the encroachment of non-tribals. The conflict between the Bodos and non-Bodos is not a recent one. Had the authority concerned been at all
interested in the protection of the tribal areas in the past, the conflict, which erupted, could have been averted. The riots between the Bodos and non-Bodos took place even in the past. It will be misleading to say that the riots which broke out in 1993, 1994 and 1996 is a part of the policy of the Bodos to make the BAC areas tribal majority. Some scholars are of the opinion that the ethnic cleansing by the Bodo is not an isolated incidence in Assam. Settler communities have often borne the brunt of insurgent activities by indigenous communities who look at them as usurpers in their lands. Violence against Nepalis broke out not only in Assam but also in other hilly states of Northeast. In Assam violence against Nepali began with the Assam movement when Nepali and other settler communities like the Muslims and Hindus of East Bengal origin were considered as foreigners and asked to leave the state. Thereafter, during the time of Bodo movement for self-determination (1987-2003), many Nepali families were displaced mainly from the Kokrajhar and Chirang district. There were about 581 Nepali IDPs in the Patgaon relief camp in Kokrajhar district (Nath 2005).

The western part of Assam witnessed protracted conflicts and displacement of thousands of people in the last few decades. When the survey was conducted in the camps during the year 2005 it was found that 34,122 and 26,975 people in Gossaigaon and Kokrajhar sub-division respectively were staying in the relief camps. These IDPs were all but forgotten. The displacement of population in the Kokrajhar district was due to the conflict between the Bodos and the Santals. Many findings try to
insinuate that the conflict erupted due to an ethnic community claiming exclusive rights over the space that it defines its homeland, on the ground that it is the original inhabitants of the land. By the same token they have held that outsiders have no right to settle there. The conflict, which erupted between the Bodos and the Santals have nothing to do with the idea of making the Bodoland areas tribal majority. When the Bodo demand for a separate state intensified, the state levied Bodo majority as a pre-requisite for granting the community an autonomous council area- a much watered down version of the separate state the Bodo had begun the movement by demanding- and the boundaries of the promised "homeland" were left undemarcated till then in the Bodoland autonomous council memorandum of settlement of 1993 (Goswami, 2007). In the mean time violence broke out in the western part of Assam and continued from 1993 -1998. The former president of ABSU and the sitting MP Mr. S.K.Bwismutiary went on record saying, “This is all our land and non -Bodos have come and settled here from time to time. So changed demography can not be used against our aspiration for autonomy”(BBC, 1995). The Bodos have been fighting for their rights since the seventies. The allegation leveled by scholars that ethnic cleansing by Bodos is unfortunate does not hold good because the ethnic clash which broke out in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Barpeta would have erupted or spilled in other districts of proposed Bodoland areas where other communities including Santals constitute a large proportion of population and where Bodos are proportionately less in
number not in a district where Bodo population constitutes about 70 percent of the district population. Secondly they would have targeted the rival ruling community who are believed to be the suppressor, oppressor and exploiter of the Bodos and other tribals. Third, they would not have restricted their activities to a few communities. They would have tried to target other smaller non-tribal migrant communities as well. Fourth, they would have tried to cleanse other communities that were strongly opposed to the creation of Bodoland Territorial Council. Fifth, ethnic conflict applies when a larger group tries to vanquish the smaller group, but if the Census of India is followed, the Bodo population is only 5.5 percent of the state population in 1991 and figure of Santals about 30 lakhs that is 16 percent of state population in 1970s as put forward by various scholars. Bodo is much smaller group than Santal thus the question of ethnic cleansing does not arise. Sixth, if the Bodos went for ethnic cleansing against the Santals then it would not have been confined in Kokrajhar and Chirang district only. The Santals stayed together with the Bodos as good neighbour in other district of Udalguri, Sonitpur etc.

The northern bank of the Brahmaputra where Bodos were majority, mostly falls under tribal belt and blocks created immediately after the independence of the country. This tribal belt and blocks was created to safeguard the tribals from various ways of exploitation from other advanced communities (under the provision of Sixth Schedule and Article 19(5) of the Indian constitution). One of the most important provisions of the same
is that in such demarcated belt and blocks, non-tribal cannot have immovable property. But today in most of this belt and block, non-tribals have occupied plenty of land and have legal documents of the same for which today tribals are becoming minority in the tribal belts and blocks itself as evidenced from official data (Anon, 1984).

However very few scholars raises the issue why and how tribals are becoming a minority in the tribal belts and blocks. How could non-tribals have landed property and become majority in the tribal belts and blocks? In the absence of any strong legal authority to look after such a serious matter, it remained an unheard tragic story or hidden truth especially to the people outside the region and remains a hard fact of life for the tribals and for the Bodos. Then is it not the government itself indirectly responsible for such ethnic clashes?

One argument is that superficially and from a theoretical point of view it may be said that migrants are not well accepted by the host community that is why the Bodo- Santal conflict erupted. This idea however does not hold good at all in this context. Though Santals arrived in Assam in the 1880s and entered into Bodo dominated areas in the late 19 century only, Bodos and Santals became highly assimilated; intertwined and dependent on each other. Some villages had Santal Bodo mixed population. There was very close social and economic interaction. There were villages like Shymaguri, Majadabri, Srirampur, Silghagri etc, which had both Santals and Bodos. In some of the Bodo families, Santali language was used
to communicate each other even among the Bodos. Bodos of these villages were very conversant in Santali and therefore most of the times they preferred to use Santali in lieu of Bodo. Both the communities had close friends. Even intermarriage between these two communities was taking place. They depended on each on various matters.

There were no instances of conflict and hostilities and no sort of communal violence between the two communities prior to 1996. After the conflict erupted in 1996, some aged people belonging to both the communities were seen embracing each other, when they used to meet. Under such coherent existence for more than a century, how the ethnic clash erupted is a serious matter and needs to be deeply investigated and one should not simply conclude that one group was motivated by an ethnic cleansing perspective.

The ethnic conflict as believed by the people displaced Muslims of Bengali descent in Oct 1993. These migrants of mostly peasant stock had taken over land throughout Assam initially causing displacement of ethnic Assamese and the tribal peasantry. In the 1980's the Assamese agitators targeted them and a decade later they became the target of the tribals. The conflict did not end there only but it continued and a major conflict erupted in May 1996 between the Santals and the Bodos.

After the long struggle by the Bodos, two historic accords have been signed with the government such as BAC and BTC. It is true that the accords signed have brought some developmental opportunities in the
region but it should not remain confined in the hands of a few only. Now whatever developmental package has been offered to the region should be utilized with proper planning so that the fruit of benefit reaches everyone in the society and the face of the society changes so as to allow genuine development to take place. It is alleged by many that accords are meant for governance of the disturbed areas. Many of the accords signed in the past failed to achieve any desired result, as the issues are not properly handled at the time of negotiation with the government. The BAC accord also failed because the authorities did not try to understand the reality of the problem.

Bodos in the Brahmaputra valley have been demanding for separate geographical entity since the seventies but the Bodo leaders had to compromise on many occasions to the offer made by the central government. The distant Delhi should try to understand the problems of the masses not from above but from below. After the creation of BTC too, the Bodos have not become politically independent, as it has to depend a lot on the state government for its development. Thus the Bodos have a long way to go before achieving their political rights. In such situation, development of the region will remain a far cry in the years ahead.

4.2. Post 2003 Intra-faction conflict among the Bodos:

After the long agitation by the Bodos for the creation of a separate state on the northern bank of the mighty Brahmaputra, a memorandum of settlement (MoS) was signed on 10th February 2003 involving the state government, central government and the Bodo leaders. The MoS led to the
formation of the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) with its headquarter at Kokrajhar. For the first time the Sixth Schedule meant for the hilly areas of northeastern states of India was granted to the Bodos in the plains of Assam with slight modification. With the creation of BTAD the Bodos have been given the opportunity to rule themselves and look after the development of the Bodoland areas. After the accord, an interim body was formed with Mr. Hagrama Mohilary as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the interim council along with 12 other members. Thereafter, the Bodo leaders decided to float a new political party in the name and style Bodoland Peoples Progressive Front (BPPF). But problems persisted among the rank and file of the Bodo leaders as to who would be the president of the newly floated political party. The tug of war continued among the leaders and ultimately led to the division of new political party headed by Rabiram Narzary emerging; while the other faction was led by Hagrama Mohilary.

Later on, the two parties contested in the BTAD election, which led to bitter fight between the two political parties. Amidst allegations of rigging, the Returning Officer (RO) had to declare re-polling in two constituencies of the Kokrajhar district, BTAD i.e. Banargaon and Dotma. When the re-polling in the two constituencies was held, more conflict was witnessed as both the parties put their strength behind the two constituencies. Ultimately all the seats of the council were won by the Mohilary-led BPPF. Thus after the BTC election in 2005, a new government was formed with H. Mohilary as the Chief Executive Member
of the Council. Surprisingly, there was not a single member from Rabiram-led BPPF party to sit in the opposition. So, the Council started functioning without any opposition in the 46 member assembly. The conflict, which was started between Hagrama- Rabiram factions continued in the post BTAD election period.

Since the division of newly floated political party, there have been fratricidal clashes among the Bodos, which led to the killing of many innocent people. The Bodo national organizations like the ABSU tried to reunite the leaders of the newly floated political party BPPF but failed to do so as the leaders stuck to their stand. After the formation of the BTAD government, the leaders of both the groups tried to register their party with the election commission of India and ultimately Hagrama led BPPF could manage to register their party with the Election Commission with slight change in the nomenclature. However, the Rabiram led political party continued with the same nomenclature as they failed to get the party registered.

In the meantime, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) came into a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India (GOI) in 2005 to solve their long-standing demands through meaningful political dialogue with the (GOI). After the declaration of ceasefire with Government of India, the NDFB decided to shun violence with the then Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). There had been fratricidal clashes between the NDFB and the BLT since 1996, in which many cadres belonging to both
the organizations had to die. But the signing of ceasefire agreement with the Government of India and the formation of BTAD brought a ray hope among the Bodos. Accordingly both the organizations had several rounds of meeting to stop the clashes. The General Secretary of the NDFB, Mr. Gobinda Basumatary stated in one of the meetings of the organization that they should forgive and forget the past and work towards the greater interest of the society at large. The relationship continued for sometime but again it deteriorated after the assembly election in 2006.

In the year 2006, assembly elections were held in 124 LAC segments of Assam in which the Hagrama led BPPF and the Rabiram led BPPF party also fielded their candidates. There were clashes between the two political parties in many parts of Kokrajhar and Chirang district. The NDFB did not extend support to any of the political parties in the said election but the ABSU supported the Rabiram led political party, which could not manage to win even a single seat. The NDFB did not support any of the political party in the greater interest of peace in the Bodo society. But the relationship between the NDFB and Hagrama led political party started worsening in the subsequent period.

The relationship between Hagrama led BPF and the NDFB worsened as the BPF after coming to power did not take any initiative to expedite the peace process of the NDFB with the Government of India. That is why the NDFB through various news media reported that they have supported the candidates opposed to Hagrama in the recently concluded parliamentary
election in the 5 No. Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency thinking that if the
candidate they supported won, the candidate would put pressure on the
centre to expedite the peace process. This announcement on the eve of
election by the outfit merely aggravated the ill feeling of Hagrama led
BPF and the NDFB. Clashes between the BPPF and the BPF occurred at
many places in which many innocent people were injured.

Allegation and counter allegation by both sides continued. Although
the election on 23rd April 2009 passed off peacefully apart from some
sporadic incidents here and there, allegations of rigging by the BPF were
rife. After the election some houses belonging to the supporters of Hagrama
led BPF were burnt down in the Panbari area of Kokrajhar district, BTAD.

On the next morning when Hagrama led BPF leaders, supporters and
workers were on their way to Panbari area to take stock of the damage done
to their supporters, came under heavy fire from the militants suspected to be
the cadres of the NDFB (Ranjan Daimari faction) in which two persons
were killed, one was the pilot of the escort team and the other was the PSO
of the Executive Member Mono Kr. Brahma.

As a part of retaliation some members of the Rabiram led BPPF were
mercilessly attacked by youth BPF near Haltugaon under Kokrajhar district
on the same day in which 12 supporters of the BPPF were critically injured
and admitted in the Kokrajhar civil hospital including women (Pratidin,
2009). Thereafter, a supporter of Rabiram led BPPF was attacked and
brutally killed on the same day in the heart of Gossaigaon town on 24th
April 2009. Attack and counter attack continued in many places of Kokrajhar district even after the election was over. Again on 29th April 09, the President of Gossaigaon district BPPF Sri Birkushan Narzary Vice-Principal of Tulsiblight H. S. School was shot and later succumbed to his injuries (Pratidin, 2009).

Thereafter, many supporters belonging to Hagrama led political party fled from their villages taking shelter in the temporary relief camp at Gossaigaon and Kachugaon. The inmates of the camp reported that they were threatened by the supporters of Rabiram led BPPF and the cadres of NDFB. There are at present 644 displaced persons living in the temporary relief camps at Gosaigaon and Kachugaon under Gossaigaon subdivision in the Kokrajhar district. These people are forced to seek shelter due to political conflict between Hagrama led BPF and Rabiram led BPPF (Pratidin, 2009). Peace in the area has proved elusive and initiatives from literary organizations such as the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) to bring back normalcy in the trouble torn areas of the Kokrajhar district have been made.

The 5 No, Kokrajhar HPC had three candidates such as Mr. Sansuma Khungur Bwismutiary, Mr. Urkhau Gwra Brahma and Mr. Sabdaram Rabha. Rabiram led political party fielded Mr. U.G. Brahma as their candidate whereas the BPF led by H. Mohilary fielded Mr. S.K. Bwismutiary as their candidate followed by Mr. S.R.Rabha from Assam Gana Parishad. So, the constituency witnessed a three-cornered contest. Mr.
Rabha is believed to be supported by non-tribal voters of the constituency. There is a feeling in the minds of the people that a conflict between the Bodos and the Santal may erupt again after the result of the election as the Adivasis supported the AGP backed candidate. Such feeling in the minds of different communities forced the people of different localities to form peace committees to diffuse tension in the entire district.

In many places of the district, the villagers have shifted their movable properties including livestock to safe places. Villagers were also seen shifting from their villages to other safe areas at night. This sort of feeling has compelled the villagers to pass sleepless nights, some of them even ready to move with bag and baggage. Because of this feeling in the minds of the people, the villagers have not sown the seeds of rice in the fields though the fields are ready for sowing. The villagers also reported that there is a feeling of insecurity among the villagers thinking that their villages might come under attack at any time.

4.4 Findings:

From the foregoing analysis, the following findings may be listed:-

1. Displacement due to ethnic conflict causes more damage to the life and properties of the individuals, as the people are not informed well in advance about the probability of occurrence of conflict. On the contrary development induced displacement causes less harm as the people to be affected are well informed in advance.
2. The Santal-Bodo conflict of 1996 and 1998 displaced more than 3 lakhs of people from their original habitats but the figure would have been higher as the government kept records of the displaced people housed in the camp only. Data for those who got displaced for a week or a month could not be maintained.

3. When the conflict first erupted in 1996, displaced people returned to their villages with nominal grant received from the government. The government did not take into consideration the criteria to be followed for rehabilitation and perhaps that was why the conflict between the two communities again erupted in 1998 displacing more people.

4. The ration provided by the government was insufficient, which included rice, dal and salt in the beginning but later on it only supplied rice that too only for 10 days in a month. Some of the camp inmates received the ration up to 1997, others up to 1998 and thereafter it was stopped forcing the people either to return to their villages or move to other areas in search of livelihood.

5. Some of the conflict-induced displaced persons were found to be living in the relief camps for more than a decade now. As per the information provided by the camp inmates that they were supplied with 10 days ration in a month, which included rice, salt and dal. An adult and a minor displaced person received 600 grams and 400 grams of rice per day respectively for 10 days in a month. That means an adult could manage to get 6 kgs. of rice and a minor got 4
kgs. of rice in a month, which was not at all sufficient for the affected people.

6. When compared community-wise, it was found that the Adivasis have been the major victims of the ethnic violence.

7. The rehabilitation process initiated by the government could not cover the affected families who happened to be encroachers on the forestlands. About 1057 displaced families of Sapkata relief camp and 378 families of Kachugaon relief camp under Gossaigaon subdivision have been identified as encroachers on forestlands. They could not be rehabilitated till date.

8. About 113 Bodo families of Shyamaguri, Majadabri and Srirampur could not be rehabilitated due to the location of their villages in the sensitive areas. They remained displaced since the 1996 conflict. The sub-divisional administration miserably failed to rehabilitate these people although they were the original patta holders of their lands. Their lands are being illegally occupied by the Santals of the colony and were not being returned. Instead of dealing with the matter, the government has shirked its responsibility after distributing the nominal relief grant.

9. Many scholars often put the blame of the conflict on the Bodos. They are of the view that the Santal-Bodo conflict was a part of the policy of the Bodos to make the areas Bodo majority. The hidden truth has not been ascertained as to why and how the conflict erupted and an
important underlying grouse as to how non-tribals occupied land in the tribal belts and blocks has not been explored nor adequately addressed. Under such a scenario, the idea put forward by scholars— that Bodos were seeking to maintain demographic ascendency by resorting to ethnic cleansing does not seem to hold good.

10. After the creation of BTC in 2003, Bodos had formed a political party called BPPF, which got divided because of the leadership problem. When the parliamentary election-2009 got underway in May 2009, many clashes among the Bodos took place in the entire Kokrajhar district. Today supporters of both the parties have got displaced due to political conflict and are currently staying in the temporary relief camps at Gossaigaon and Kochugaon under Kokrajhar district.
References:


