



CONFLICT INDUCED DISPLACEMENT OF ASSAM (INDIA): THE IMPACT

Dr. Manjil Basumatary

Gossaigaon College, Assam, India

ABSTRACT

The state of Assam in general and the western part of Assam particularly populated by various ethnic and other communities have been experiencing ethnic conflict since last few decades. The conflict which erupted between the Bodos and the Adivashis during the nineties and again between the Bodos and the emigrant Muslims in the beginning of 21st century displaced more than 300,000 and 400,000 people respectively from their habitats, forcing them to stay in the temporary relief camps in the most dehumanized conditions. These groups of people who were displaced due to ethnic conflict were not given the status of refugee, as they had not crossed any international border. Therefore they were deprived from receiving the assistance and protection that the refugees receive world over. As per the guideline of the United Nations, to be recognized as refugee, one has to cross the international border and live in the relief camps.

The significance of the paper is that the conflict between the communities has been going on unabated around the world and often authorities in question are not in a position to come out with clear cut policies to solve such issues. Of late the subject has found a place in the academic circles and is being discussed, although whether this will translate to more attention and concrete action is another matter altogether. In this write up, an attempt has been made to highlight the causes of recurrence of Conflict, impact of displacement on the socio-educational and to critically examine the rehabilitation package given to the displaced persons.

Key words: Conflict, Displacement, Ethnic, Bodos, Adivashis, emigrant,

Introduction

The State of Assam in India and the western part in particular is populated with ethnic and other communities such as Bodos, Assomiyas, Bengalis, Rajbongshis, Santals, Rabhas, Garos, Muslims among others. They have been experiencing ethnic conflict for a long period of time (Goswami 2001). The conflict between the communities in the western part of Assam is and always has been a major concern and focus in terms of longstanding instability in the region. The conflict which took place between the Bodos and the Adivashis in the 1990s led to the displacement of more than 300,000 people from their original habitats in the western part of the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD), Assam and consequently forcing them to stay in the temporary relief camps for more than a decade. Another major conflict broke out between the Bodos and the immigrant Muslims in the year 2012 in which more than 400,000 people got displaced from their habitats. The displaced people stayed in the temporary relief camps, government institutions and makeshift arrangements. There were about 279 relief camps in Kokrajhar, Chirang and Dhubri district of Assam respectively with more than 400,000 inmates (The Sentinel, 2012). Although, the inmates of these relief camps have returned to their villages, many of them are still found to be taking shelter in camps near the villages of their habitats. The government has initiated the rehabilitation process by providing Gratuitous Relief to the affected families, however, some of them still face acute shortage of food, drinking water, sanitation and medicine supply issues; to mention a few of their difficulties among many. They are also encountering deep psychological problems and have a deep sense of insecurity even while staying in the camp sites near their villages. This has manifested into a deeper sense of insecurity and resultant unwillingness to return back to their places of original residence. The affected people of 1996 conflict which broke out between the Bodos and the Santals have still not been entirely rehabilitated and are found to be living in areas populated with and in a way dominated by their own communities.

Such recurrence of conflict in the region has germinated a feeling of hatred among the communities living in this part of the country and has resulted into the formation of Boro and Oboro (Non-Boro) organizations. The situation is so volatile even today that conflict may erupt at any time given the slightest of provocation.

Though many conflicts have occurred in the past and dissensions have led to the formation of various organizations, be it militant or democratic in the name of protecting individual communities; it has become inevitable today for all the communities to sit together and sort out the differences and work for bringing about permanent peace in the region through reconciliation. This paper highlights the identified causes of such ethnic conflict, consequent displacement and its impact on the socio-educational fabric. It also critically examines the rehabilitation package given to the displaced persons.

Pertinent to note is that the displaced people as a result of the conflicts in the region during the 1990s and 2012 could not be granted the status of refugees. The guideline set out by the United Nations Organization for getting the status of refugee underlines the requirement that to get the status of refugee one has to cross the internationally recognized border. The displaced people of the conflicts have not fulfilled the requirement as they are within the territory of the Indian State. However, in the present context they have been designated as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Thus, the displaced people of the conflicts remain deprived of the benefits received by the refugees globally.

Genesis of Conflict induced displacement

The longstanding conflict in the Bodoland areas has left many displaced and homeless which is a major distressing factor. There is no doubt that the influx of population from neighbouring countries and districts has been a major factor in this perennial conflict in the BTAD areas. Apart from this, there are emerging causes that are fuelling and aggravating the present situation.

The influx of immigrants into the region is not of recent origin. It commenced centuries ago and continues even today. When Kokrajhar was a part of undivided Goalpara district, the immigrants came to Goalpara district from Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra and Rongpur district of Bangladesh and settled on char lands. This had begun as early as 1901-11 (Barooah, 1979). The ingress continued through the porous border even after independence of India.

The conflict which is experienced today in the tribal areas between the immigrant Muslims and the Tribal communities is also not a recent, as has been mentioned. There have been many such conflicts in the past. The earlier conflicts had occurred due to lack of understanding of the land laws by immigrants in the belts and blocks meant for certain protected classes of people. This brought about the conflict with the locals from time to time. It is also a well known fact that the creation of tribal belts and blocks has a direct relationship

with the large scale immigration of people from eastern Bengal especially from the Mymensingh area (Bordoloi, 1999).

The Congress ministry in Assam headed by Late Gopinath Bordoloi did realize the dismal situation of the tribals and undertook policy initiatives and measures to create of tribal belts and blocks for tribals and backward classes with amendment of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act 1886 by adding chapter X in 1947. This had a direct relationship with the large scale immigration. After the recent conflict between the Bodos and the Muslims in the western part of Assam, it has been further unraveled that the land belonging to the protected classes of people have been encroached upon by a large population which is not ineligible to claim permanent rights to reside in those belts and blocks. The State government had inadequate checks and balance to prevent the illegal transfer of land in those belts and blocks. The district authorities have been instructed to send quarterly report with respect to illegal encroachment and transfer of land to the higher authorities but the letters have gone into oblivion.

The western part of Assam had earlier experienced conflict between the Adivasis and the immigrant Muslims during the 1980s just after the creation of Santal Colony Tribal block in the year 1977. The Santal Colony Tribal block has as many as 43 villages with 57,930 bighas of land in the western part of Assam created by the Assam government, vide notification No. RSD.9/77/11 dated 24.08.77, to protect the lands of the Santals and the tribals from the land-hungry immigrants. The conflict during 1980 forced the immigrants to vacate the colony and settle outside the border of the colony. The Santal colony tribal block was encroached upon by ineligible people, after the Santal-Bodo conflict of 1996. Though many Bodos lived in the colony prior to 1996 conflict but not a single Bodo family is found to be seen today after the conflict. There are about 113 Bodo families with original patta lands, who were displaced from the Santal Colony Tribal Block during the Santal-Bodo conflict and they have still not been rehabilitated till date.

The emigrant families who were displaced from the north of Bongaigaon more than 20 years ago and about 100 families of the 2012 conflict are still found to be living under unsafe and uncertain conditions along the national highway near Rakhaldubi and Bhodeaguri respectively. The families who are found living in the temporary relief camps, be it Adivasis or immigrant Muslims, have all been identified by the government officials as encroachers on forest lands. The government provided assistance to these families from time to time but they could not be rehabilitated. The families who had “patta” lands and got displaced from their

habitats have been fully rehabilitated in their respective villages by the government in a phased manner except the 113 Bodo families of the Santal colony tribal block. A few displaced Adivashi families identified as encroachers resettled inside the forest areas and the authorities evicted them recently which also propelled lot of protests from organizations. Even today, encroachment and settlement on forest lands is continuing and this has large potential of creating another conflict in the days to come.

Ethnic clashes and immigration of population from across the border and other parts of India are the most important contributors of displacement of population in the area. The Santal-Bodo conflict in the Kokrajhar district of Assam displaced more than 300,000 population belonging to the Adivasis, Bodos, Rabhas etc. forcing them to live in the relief camps for more than a decade. Whenever ethnic conflict occurs, people are ill-informed and their bid to escape from the area with whatever they can carry on person creates further distress as they know that what they leave behind will get destroyed.

Historically, the district of Goalpara was the main gateway for the influx of population from Bangladesh in to Assam. (Barooah, 1979). The presence of such numbers of immigrants whose language, manners and customs differ widely from those of the indigenous people, has affected the economic, political and social structure of the area. Their hunger to grab land was so great that they even encroached the land belonging to tribal communities. Initially there was no problem of land as such but when the availability of land became scarce due to increase in population land-grabbing brought them in direct conflict with the tribal people and other indigenous people of Assam (Barooah, 1979).

The communities of Bodos and Santals lived together as good neighbours for more than a century but the conflict which erupted between the two communities has brought a feeling of hatred. One of the root causes of the conflict is the control over forest resources. In addition to this, the issue of control and access over land and forests has resulted in unprecedented hostilities between the dominant and non-dominant ethnic groups of the area. In an already unsettled environment further differences have crept in between the various agitating groups thereby aggravating the situation even further (Goswami, et al. 2005). The Bodos enjoyed superiority as they are categorized as scheduled tribe population. Whenever there was tender for logs, only Bodos and others who were categorized as Scheduled Tribe (ST) were allowed to take part in tender. Although the Santals are the indigenous population of India and categorized as STs in their original states, do not seem to have either been granted or recognized as having the status of ST in Assam till date. They were deprived from

applying for such tenders that were meant for the ST population. So, dissatisfaction and discontentment started breeding among the Santals.

Of late, another problem being faced by the region is the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by the communities currently designated as Other Backward Class (OBC). The bandh call given by the ST status demand committee affected the entire region adversely as the Central government has failed to convey any concrete decision on the issue. The tribes have designated status of STs (14% of Assam's population) are vehemently opposing the move of the central government to grant ST status to these communities who are fighting for it. There is fear in the minds of the existing STs that once the six communities are accorded ST, they will be deprived from all the benefits being enjoyed by them currently. There is also an apprehension in the minds of the existing STs that once the six communities are granted ST status, they will be simply wiped out in elected bodies as well as from education and jobs. In the year 1996, a community called Rajbongshi was accorded ST status for six months and during that time most of the seats in the Engineering (17 out of 21 seats), Medical (33 out of 42 MBBS seats) B.Sc (35 out of 45 seats) and other services which are reserved for ST were taken up by the community. (The Indian Express, 2016).

Information gathered from various Bodo people of Gossaigaon sub-division further says that, the possible concealed reason may be banning entry into the forests in lower Assam by the National Democratic Front of Boroland) NDFB – an insurgent group of the Bodos. Santals who were closely associated with the forests for their survival got frustrated at such activities of the NDFB. On the other hand, the Santals started suspecting that NDFB allows Bodos to enter the forests but the Santals were being prevented from entering the forests. This led to internal hatred towards NDFB in particular and Bodos in general and started preparing for fighting against Bodos and it was capitalized by other anti-social elements.

An informant of the study area, Mr A.S.Koch, Head Master of Kashiabari school was of the opinion that there was a third force that was believed to be behind the conflict between the Bodos and the Santals. According to him, Bodos and other indigenous people of the area considered the immigrants as strangers and the immigrants were chased out by the local people once in the year 1950 as their number started increasing by leaps and bounds in the area. Creation of Santal Colony Tribal block in the western part of Assam in 1977 (Bordoloi, 1999) resulted in the Santals chased out the Muslims from the colony in the 1980s as they considered them as intruders. However, the third forces instigated the Santals to act against the Bodos to divert the attention of their intrusion into the restricted areas. The militants too

used to kill the people belonging to all the communities who went to the forest to cut trees. Killing of people by the militants were considered as a part of the design of Bodos to have full control on the forest. So, when the conflict erupted in 1996 and 1998 respectively, the two communities were busy fighting and the third forces were exploiting the situation. They went on intruding into the restricted reserved lands. Now many people belonging to the minority communities are found to be settled in the colony in western Assam which is created for the Santals and the tribals.

Another social worker of the area Mr Moken Narzary was of the opinion that the root cause of the Santal-Bodo conflict was mainly due to political reason. The 28 Gossaigaon LAC was always under the control of the Adivasis for a pretty long time. But the winning of Bodo candidates from the LAC in 1996 assembly election made the Santal feel uneasy, which led to the conflict between the two communities.

The recovery of three dead bodies belonging to Bodo girls near Satyapur under Gossaigaon sub-division in the Kokrajhar district on 10th May 1996 was only one of the instigating causes of the Santal-Bodo conflict. However who killed those three Bodo girls, why and how and where was not known. When the dead bodies were recovered and brought to Gossaigaon, thousands of Bodos gathered to see the dead bodies. It was assumed that the Santals killed them and there was no deliberation or second thought given to any other motive like personal enmity or conspiracy of some third party who knew about the germinating hatred of Santals towards Bodos. Proper investigation of the killing could have saved the carnage that followed. In the gathering some of the Bodo youths got furious and started beating Santals in Gossaigaon town itself. Later in ensuing days, some villages belonging to both the communities were reduced to ashes. The Bodo insurgent groups took this opportunity to show their patriotism towards Bodos and burnt down several Santal villages with impunity and show of power; and also killed many Santals and Oraons. In retaliation underprepared Santals retaliated with bows and arrows and burnt some houses of the Bodo villages and killed few Bodos.

Table (i) Internal displacement in western part of Assam (1990 onwards)

Region	Year	Causes	displaced persons	Population groups affected
Western Assam	1991-93	Bodoland Movement	60,000	Bengalis
	1994 (July)	Massacre at Kokrajhar, Barpeta and Bongaigaon	1000(60 villages)	Na Assamia Muslim peasants
	1995 (October)	Massacre at Relief camp at Bansbari in Barpeta	70,000	Na Assamia, Muslims, Hindu Bengalis
	1996 (May)	Santal- Bodo conflict	250,000	Ethnic Santal, Bodo, Rabha
	1998	Reoccurrence of Santal-Bodo conflict	82,000	Santals, Bodos, Rabhas
	2008 (October)	Bodo-Muslim conflict	97,090 (Udalguri district only)	Bodos, Muslims, Garos, Aassamiyas, Nepalis, Biharis, Rabhas
	2012	Bodos –Muslim Conflict	400,000	Bodos and Muslims

Sources: (i) Joshua Thomas, C. (2002), (ii) USCR (1999), (iii) Hussain, M (2000)

(iv) Deputy Commissioner, Kokrajhar and Deputy Commissioner, Udalguri, 2008.

(v) (The Sentinel, 2012).

Rehabilitation Issues:

The present level of assistance for the protection of the IDPs appears to be insufficient. The critical issue for IDPs is unlike that of refugees and as yet there no clear-cut international mandate for protection and assisting IDPs. Declaration of Hague on the future of refugee and migration policy articulates (Anon, 2002) that in many situations, IDPs find themselves living perilously among the already poor and deprived local populations. The impact of such type of displacement not only affects the psychology of the people but also the socio-educational and economic condition of the people.

The displaced people have been living in temporary relief camps for more than 15 years and some of them who could not go back, are still found to be living in the small huts erected near the campsite. After the conflict that erupted in 1996, many displaced people returned to their native villages in 1997. However, after staying for sometime in the village,

major conflicts between the two communities such as Santal and the Bodos again erupted in 1998, which led to the displacement of many people from their original habitats. The affected families of 1993 riot belonging to Muslim community are currently living in the temporary relief camps along the National Highway near Rakhaldubi under Bongaigaon district. There are altogether 3658 families or about 18000 people currently living in the said relief camp (Deputy Commissioner, Bongaigaon).

After the recent conflict between the Bodos and the Muslims, the government of Assam and the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) started rehabilitating the displaced persons in the places from where they had been ejected. But there were some obstacles as both the parties involved in the process of rehabilitation could not come to unanimous decision in regards to the guideline of the rehabilitation of the displaced people. Both the parties had several rounds of discussion and came out with the decision that the displaced people having land pattas would be rehabilitated in the first phase. The process of rehabilitation started as per the decision of the Group of Ministers (GoM) and the BTC authorities but it did not last long as yet again conflict erupted between the two communities which led to the killing of 15 persons within a week (Sentinel, 2012) and the administration was forced to impose indefinite curfew in the entire Kokrajhar district as a measure to control the situation from further deteriorating.

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 contentious issues such as:

- a) 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 might have been many unknown displaced people and they would not be assisted to return home.
- b) Secondly, there were also many IDPs who did not wish to be resettled. Reasons were many, such as trauma from violent incidents. Some had fears of security related to their areas of origin, some had lost their will to survive independently and had become dependent on camp life, while others were still unwilling to return to their areas of origin as they knew that there was a lack of infrastructure and other basic services.

c) 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 who tried to resettle towards urban areas. Plans for community rehabilitation programmes have not yet been developed partly due to in donor funding both from the government and donors. Initially the displaced persons were shifted from the relief camp to the place near the original village so that the poor and affected people could look after their lands and undertake agriculture in their lands. From the shifted camps the poor villagers moved to their original settlements but there were still a feeling of insecurity in the minds of the people.

Some of the conflict-induced displaced persons lived in the relief camps for more than a decade. 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 600grams 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. While a displaced Kashmiri Pandit received Rs.750/- per month, an adult Bru received Rs.2.67 paise per day i.e. Rs. 80/- per month (ACHR, 2006). It is clear that the government of India must do more to protect the fundamental rights to life, security and dignity of the IDPs. Not only is the current assistance and protection inadequate, government policy towards IDPs is inequitable with Kashmiri Pandits receiving more assistance than the IDPs in the Northeast. Additionally through the reduction of food rations and medical assistance, the government ignobly pressures IDPs to return to areas in which they feel unsafe.

In case of the IDPs situation in Kokrajhar district, the state government provided a meager amount of Rs. 10,000/- only as rehabilitation grants to those who were uprooted from revenue villages. The damages of the affected families were divided into two categories such as fully damaged and partially damaged. The families who lost everything including household assets during the time of conflict were placed under fully damaged category and they were given Rs. 10,000/- only as rehabilitation grant. On the other hand who had partially lost their properties were considered under the partial category and they received compensation @ Rs.5, 000/- only. In the-phase wise rehabilitation measures, the affected people of the recognized forest villages or encroachers on forestlands were not given the rehabilitation grants. The government rehabilitation policy has serious deficiencies. For instance, it nowhere takes on the issue of livelihoods of the affected people after their return to villages from where they were uprooted. During the time of conflict, not only the houses and other assets were destroyed but also the livestock, which happen to be very important for the poor people to till their lands. In the absence of livestock and without a concrete livelihood scheme, it became very difficult to start a new life for the poor people after the devastation.

After the receiving of rehabilitation grants, the villagers went back to their villages but the amount sanctioned by the government, as the rehabilitation package was not sufficient to purchase livestock and other basic requirements to start a new life. The livestock is very important for the poor affected villagers to plough their lands and the meager amount sanctioned by the government as the rehabilitation grant is not sufficient to purchase bullocks and other basic requirements. Therefore most of the inmates decided not to go back to their villages. Most often it was reported that the money sanctioned by the government was utilized in repaying the debts. So many families remained displaced after having received the rehabilitation grants.

Table 2. 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.

Items	Quantity	Cost
Rice	1311.24 quintals	Rs.11, 53,891/-
Carrying Charges		Rs. 24,295/-
Total		Rs. 11, 78,186/-

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

Table 3. Statements showing the ethnic break up of communities affected during the year 1998.

Name of Community	No. of families	Total population
Adivasi	21,290	1,33,357
Bodo	12,837	95,332
Rabha	264	2,233
Total affected	34,391	2,30,922

Source: SDO (Civil), Gossaigaon.

The Muslim displaced in 1993 had officially been declared as encroachers on forestlands. Their settlements had 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 related to status of displaces does not apply only with the Muslim displaces 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 have been identified as encroachers on forest land (Anon, 2006). The families, who were declared as encroachers, have been still living in the temporary relief camps since May 1996. They could not be rehabilitated like other displaced people till date.

Table 4. Statement showing the number of persons killed during the period from May 1996 to October 2001 under Gossaigaon Sub-division (Causes of death was due to ethnic violence and extremist attack)

Name of community	Total No of deaths
Santhals	84
Bodo	59
Oraon	55
Muslims	34
Rava	3

Bengali	3
Bihari	2
Others	11
Total	251

Source: SDO (Civil), Gossaigaon.

Findings

From the foregoing analysis, the following findings can 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 induced displacement according to a plan and development strategy causes less damage as the people and State machinery are prepared to take preventive as well as corrective actions 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 the record of the displaced people housed in the camp only. Data of those who got displaced elsewhere during the week or month of violence could not be maintained.
3. When the first conflict erupted in 1996, displaced people returned to their villages with nominal grant received from the government. The government did not take into consideration the possibility or contingent situations that could follow during the process of rehabilitation of the communities and therefore conflict between the two communities erupted again in 1998 further 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, some 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 600grams 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.

6. When compared the community wise break up data, 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 sub-division 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 the villages in the sensitive areas. They remained displaced since the eruption of first conflict in 1996 till date. The sub-divisional administration miserably failed to rehabilitate these people although they are the original patta holders of their lands. They cannot cultivate their lands by themselves and are forced to give it to the Santals to cultivate as sharecroppers and the return depends on the willingness of the cultivators.
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 Bodo areas Bodo majority. The hidden truth has not been ascertained as to why and how the conflict erupted. It is not the original inhabitants who create the problem but the intruders in others areas. Whenever conflict occurs, the people who have come from outside have alternative option to move to their places of origin for safety but the locals have no other alternative but to defend their land. Just after the independence of the country, tribal belts and blocks were created to protect the tribal areas from encroachments by non-tribals. One of the important points is that in the demarcated tribal belt and block non-tribals cannot have immovable property. But today in most of these belts and blocks, non-tribals have occupied plenty of land and have legal documents for which tribals are becoming minority in the tribal belts and blocks itself. Under such scenario, the idea put forwarded by scholars- that Bodos are maintaining demographic balance by resorting to ethnic cleansing to make the Bodo areas tribal majority does not hold good.

Conclusion

The western part of Assam, home to various communities, has been experiencing conflict for the last few decades. Due to reoccurrence of conflict, lakhs of people have been displaced from their habitats over a period of time, which needs immediate and positive responses from the governments for ending the conflict permanently. It has been seen that the recent conflict which erupted in the Kokrajhar district of the BTAD is not the first time in the region. There is no doubt that the influx of population from neighbouring countries and districts has been a major factor in this perennial conflict in the BTAD areas. The pressure on land in the bordering district of Kokrajhar and the republic of Bangladesh is very high, which might have been compelling the people to come and encroach on the belts and blocks created for the protection of down trodden people of Assam. Conflict erupts frequently on longstanding issues which have led to conflict in the Bodoland areas and rendered many homeless and displaced. The rehabilitation programme would do well to look beyond the immediate humanitarian assistance and focus on the issues of preventing further recurrence of similar conflict. To exterminate hostilities from the minds of people of various communities trying to find a resolve easy access of humanitarian workers in the resettled areas and effective government implementation of reconciliatory and protective measures will be paramount.

References:

1. Anon (2006). 'Office of the SDO (Civil)'. Gossaigaon, December
2. Barooah, D.P. (1979). "Gazetteer of India, Assam State, Goalpara District Gazetteer". Guwahati, Government of Assam.
3. Bordoloi, B.N. (1999). "Report on the Survey of Alienation of tribal Land in Assam". Guwahati, AIRTSc.
4. Goswami, S. (2001). "Ethnic conflict in Assam". The Indian journal of Political Science, Vol 6, No. 1, March.
5. Goswami, Uddipana (2006), 'Enabling IDP livelihoods in Western Assam: Nobody's Responsibility'. in Refugee Survey Quarterly 25:2.
6. Mc Goldrick Claudia (2003), 'Sierra Leone: Resettlement does not always end displacement'. Forced Migration Review, 17, May 2003, Refugee studies center in association with Norwegian Refugee Council/ Global IDP Project pp.31-34.
7. Sentinel, 27 July 2012

8. Sentinel, 7 August 2012.
9. Sentinel, 30 September 2013
10. The Indian Express, 24 October 2016 “Simply put: Tribal status becomes lauder in Assam”.