

CHAPTER – III

BACKGROUND OF CONFLICT PROFILE AND POPULATION DISPLACEMENT IN BTC, ASSAM

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter will highlight background study of the conflict profile of BTC area since the Bodoland movement. It also highlights the demographic profile, literacy and education scenario and the resultant conflict and population displacement in BTC area. The Political Movement for separate state of Bodoland curving out from Assam started way back in 1987 under the leadership of All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and its allied organizations. Since then the area has been well known for its protracted conflict and population displacement.

The movement for separate identity of the Bodos can be traced back from the early part of the 20th Century in the form of socio-cultural and religious reform movement. It was during that period the urge to preserve self-identity was articulated among the Bodos on the pretext of social, cultural and religious reforms under the leadership of Kalicharan Mech popularly known as Kalicharan Brahma (Sonowal, 2013). This movement has transformed the social, cultural and religious outlook of the Bodos in many ways and also contributed in spread of education in the society. Besides his goal of social, cultural and religious reforms Brahma has also initiated towards literary development too.

The socio-cultural and religious movement and the spread of Western education forms a few educated youth among the Bodos which further augmented in more social, cultural, political and literary awareness among the Bodos. The demand for a separate electorate of the Bodo tribals before the Simon Commission in the year 1929 was led by those educated youths is a pointer to this. This demand reflects the political consciousness of the Bodos during that period which gradually took a definite form and

further developed to the stage of separate statehood demand for safeguarding the identity of the Bodos by political means (Yamao Z Brahma, 2001).

The educated elites of the Bodos became more and more identity conscious and felt the need of forming an organization to further accelerate their interests which resulted in the formation of different organizations. Few among them are All Assam Plains Tribal League (1933), Bodo Sahitya Sabha (1952), All Bodo Students Union (1967), Plains Tribal Council of Assam (1967), Boro Security Force (1986), Bodo People's Action Committee (1988) etc. The political awakening of the Bodos for self-identity and political self-rule got more accelerated with the formations of these organizations.

The formation of Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in 1967 was the turning point of the political demand of the Bodos and the tribal people in Assam. PTCA was a political party which raised the demand for a separate state namely 'Udayachal' comprising of all the tribal areas of the North bank of the river Brahmaputra, to protect their social, economic and political interests and to bring all round development of their society. However the demand for separate state of 'Udayachal' led by PTCA brings no significant results, which in turn has forced the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), to take up the issue of separate statehood demand and a series of movements has been taken by the ABSU thereafter.

While the movement of separate state for the Bodos led by ABSU is going on, a section of the Bodo youth turned militant and formed militant organizations namely Boro Security Force (BSF) to liberate the Bodos from the Indian Union. Their main aim was to liberate the Bodos with arm struggle with the Indian Union and to create a sovereign state of 'Boroland'. However, BSF failed to get mass support neither from the common people nor from any other organizations because of their extreme ideology (Choudhury, 2015). So the movement for the separate state of the Bodos continued with two pronged approaches: One with the idea of separate state within the constitutional framework of Indian by democratic means and another with secessionist tendencies to create sovereign state of Boroland with arm struggle curving out from Indian union.

Finally, after a series of talks held between the ABSU, State Government and the Government of India the Memorandum of Settlement (MOS) was signed on 20th February, 1993, known as Bodo Accord. With the signing of the Bodo Accord it was believed that the Bodo issue concerning social, economic cultural and political had been resolved. The accord paved the way for the formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) with no definite boundary and power & functions. However, with much aspirations and doubts the first phase of separate statehood demand came to an end.

It is known that the ABSU leaders has to satisfy with the creation of BAC instead of separate state, therefore, the Bodoland issue still remain alive. So barely three years after the accord was signed the Bodo leaders realized that Council has nothing to offer them concerning to social, economic, cultural and political matters since BAC accord was never materialized properly by the government both state as well as central. The signing of the Bodo Accord failed to cope up with the popular aspirations of the Bodo masses of all sections. So the ABSU in its 28th Annual Conference held at Langhin Tinali, Karbi Anglong from 3rd to 5th March, 1996, adopted a resolution denouncing the Bodo Accord and decided to resume the movement for separate state for the security and development of the Bodos in all aspects. Consequently, the Bodo leaders under the banner of ABSU thus instigated another phase of agitation for a separate state (Hazarika, 1994).

The 2nd phase of separate statehood movement by ABSU after the failure of BAC Accord has witnessed a different direction this time with the formation of militant group called Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF), popularly known as BLT in 1996. The BLT was a militant armed group who bowed to continue armed struggle until a separate state is curved out of Assam (Mochahari, 2013). As two groups of armed militants is evident one fighting for sovereign 'Boroland' curving out from Indian Union led by National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), formerly known as BSF and the later BLT fighting for a separate state curving out from Assam, which has led to fierce fratricidal killings between the two groups from time to time.

Ultimately with a series of discussion and negotiations with the BLT, Government of Assam and the Government of India (GOI), the second accord was signed in the year 2003 for the creation of BTC under the modified Sixth Schedule of

the Indian Constitution comprising of four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. However, even after the creation of BTC the demand for a separate state has never died down, since the council has also failed to address the genuine problem of the Bodos as they are demanding for a separate homeland. At present the All Bodo Students Union is leading the front of democratic separate statehood movement calling the GOI to create a separate state for the Bodos under Article 2 and 3 of the Indian Constitution which mention that two third majority in the Parliament can form a new state.

3.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL (BTC)

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) also popularly known as Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) was formed on the 10th of February, 2003 with Kokrajhar town as its headquarter of the Council. It has been created under the amended Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The creation of the council has ends the long bloody era of arms agitation by the BLT and paved the way for the era of aspirations of peace and all round development in the region. The Bodoland Territorial Council has been divided into four districts for its administrative convenience namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. The BTC has a unicameral legislature consisting of 46 Members as Members of Legislative Council. Out of 46 Members 6 (Six) Members are nominated by the Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities.

3.1.1 GEOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

BTC is the gateway to the entire North Eastern Region of India curving out from Assam is bounded by the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan in the North, the Mighty Brahmaputra River in the South, Paasnoi River in the East and Sankosh River in the

West bordering West Bengal. It is an Autonomous Administrative Unit created by curving some areas of eight districts of Assam, namely Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur within the state of Assam covering an area of around 8970 Sq. Km. which is about 11.24 per cent of the total area of the state.

The geographical boundary of BTC lies between 260 7' 12" N to 260 47' 50" N Latitude and 890 47' 40" E to 920 18' 30" E Longitude and is in the North Western part of Assam. Kokrajhar town which is the Administrative Head Quarter of the Council lies roughly between 260 25' N Longitude and 990 16' 38" E Latitude (Statistical Hand Book of BTC, 2010).

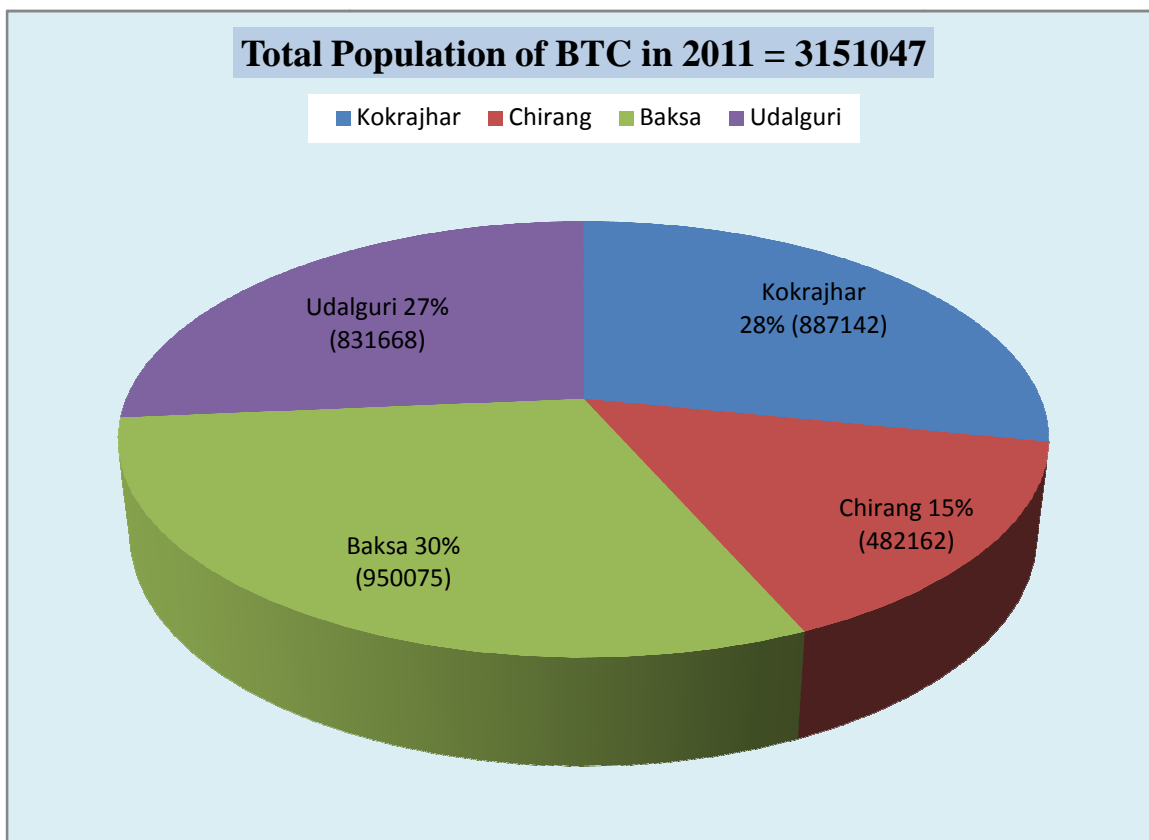
3.1.2 DEMOGRAPHY

The population of BTC is predominantly belonging to schedule tribe community. As per the 2001 census report the total population in BTC is 29.2 Lakhs out of which the ST population is around 52% of which only 3% of the total population live in urban areas. The average density of the population in BTC is 326 Sq. Km. compared to 340 per Sq. Km. of Assam. Amongst the Tribal population Bodos, Rabhas, and less number of Garos are living in the area out of which Bodos is around 90%. The other communities like Rajbangshis, Sarania which are also originated from Bodo group are inhabiting in large part of BTC. Besides Tea and Other Ex-Tea Tribes including Santhal, Oraon etc. are also found available. Other general communities like Bengali, Assamese, Nepali and few numbers of Hindi speaking people are also found available in the council area (www.bodoland.in, 2016).

According to the 2011 Census Report the total population of Assam is 31205576 of which 15939443 are Males and 15266133 are Females. On the other hand the total population of BTC as per 2011 Census Report is found 3151047 of which 1600712 are Males and 1550335 are Females. The total populations of district wise break up in BTC respectively are Kokrajhar 887142 (Males- 452905, Females- 434237), Chirang 482162

(Males- 244860, Females- 237302), Baksa 950075 (Males- 481330, Females- 468745) and Udalguri 831668 (Males- 421617, Females- 410051) (Census Report, 2011).

Figure 3.1: Comparative Size of Population of Districts in BTC, 2011



Source: Census of India 2011

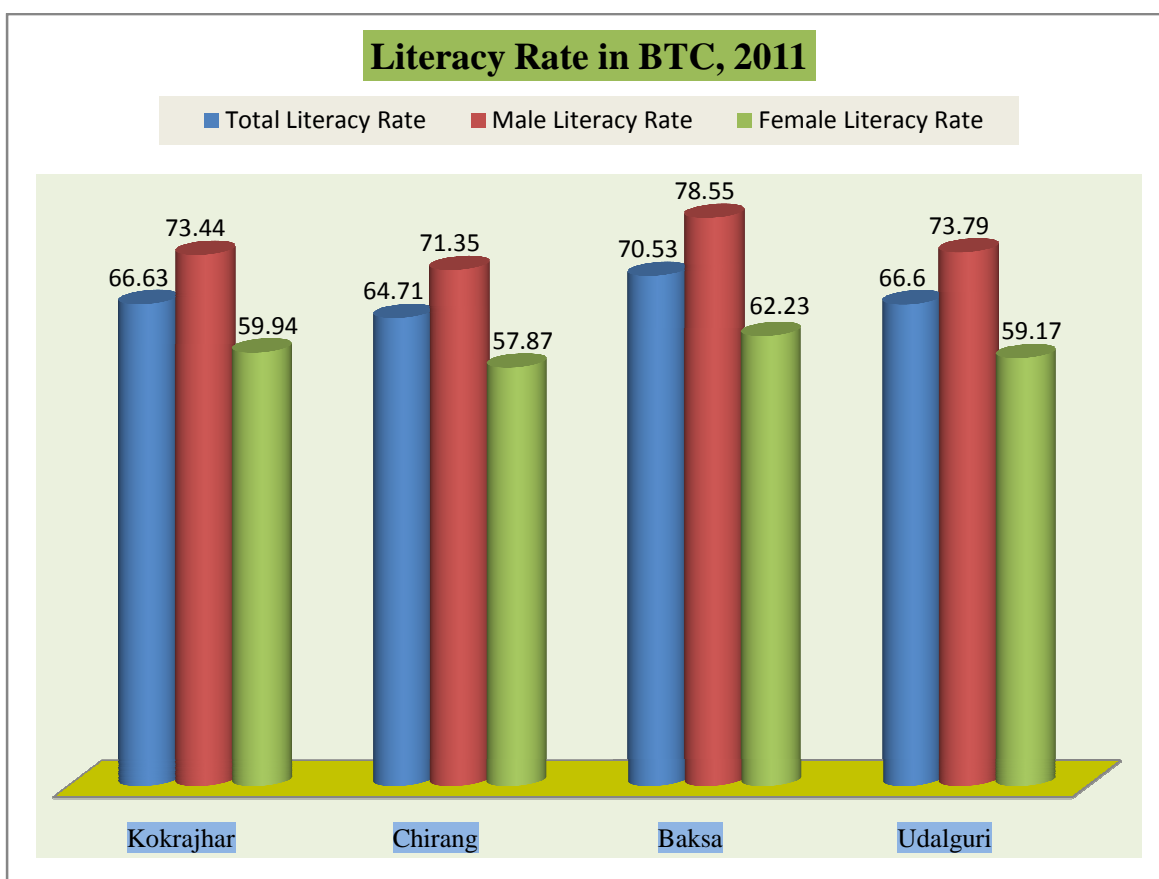
3.1.3 LITERACY AND EDUCATION SCENARIO

Education can be regarded as the vehicle of transformation in the society. However the BTC area is one of the most backward in the field of education and has the lowest percentage of literacy rate compared to the other parts of the state. The BTC authority has taken some keen interests in the development of education and its

infrastructure. In spite of this, there seems to be very slow pace of improvement and the council has to go extra miles to improve the sector.

The literacy rate in BTC as per the 2011 census report is 67.11 percent (Male- 74.28 %, Female- 59.80 %) while in Assam it is 73.18 percent on the other hand the National Average of Literacy rate in India is 74.04 percent. This shows that BTC is far behind in terms of literacy rate compared to Assam and India respectively. The literacy rate in the four districts of BTC, i.e. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri are also far below compared to the literacy rate of many other districts of Assam.

Figure 3.2: Literacy Rate of BTC



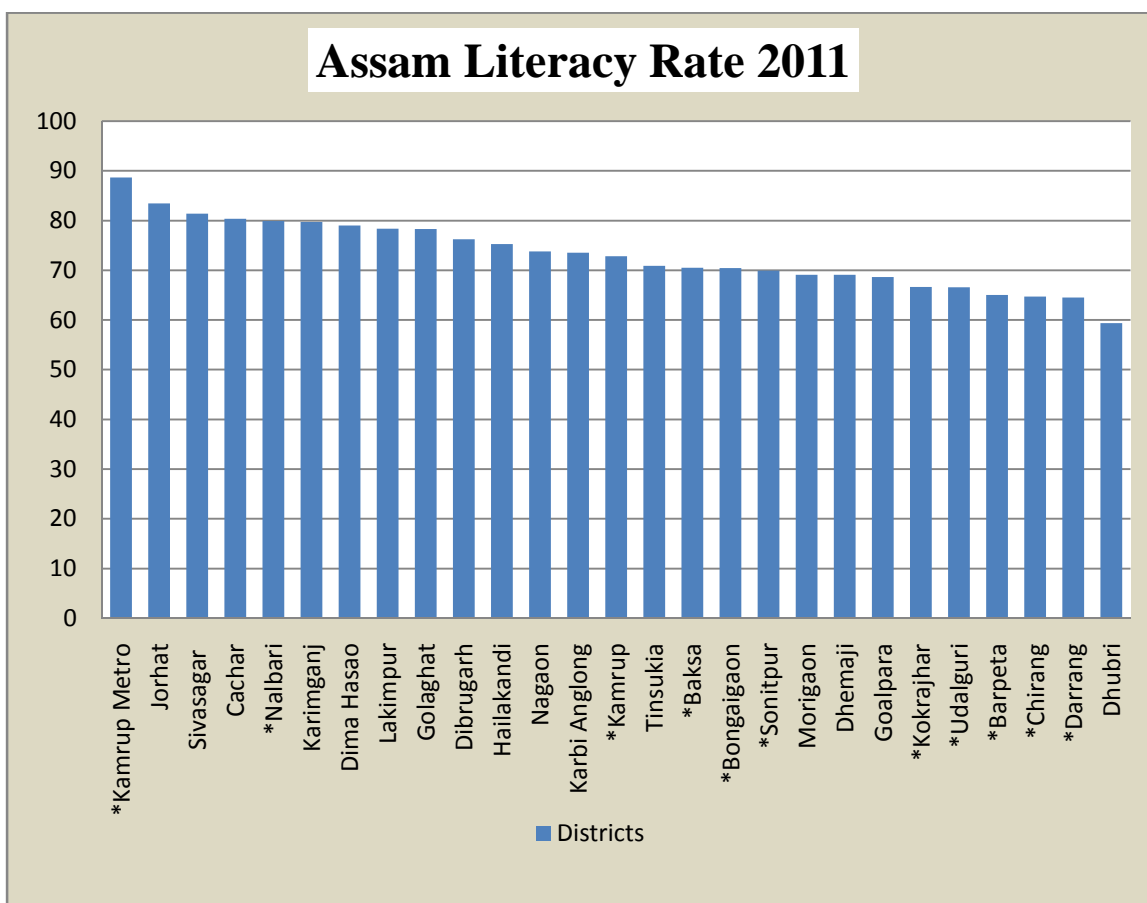
Source: Census of India 2011

Among the four districts of BTC, Baksa district top the list with 70.53 percentage of literacy rate and Chirang district stands at the bottom with 64.71 percentage of literacy rate while Kokrajhar and Udalguri stands in the second and the

third place respectively as the table indicates. Moreover, all the four districts shows huge gap between the male and female literacy rate.

In the overall ranking of the districts of Assam compared by literacy rate the ranking of four districts of BTC falls at – Baksa 16th Place, Kokrajhar 22nd Place, Udalguri 23rd Place and Chirang 25th Place which is lower compared to many districts of Assam as shown in Table No. 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Graph of District Wise Literacy Rate in Assam 2011



Source: Census of India 2011 (Provisional)

*Note: Due to creation of 4 new districts, the rates for 2001 have been affected in 12 districts.

3.2 POPULATION DISPLACEMENT DURING BODOLAND MOVEMENT (1987 - 2003)

The Bodoland Territorial Council has remained one of the most disturbed and politically very sensitive areas since the starting of the separate statehood movement by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) in the later part of the 1980s. The protracted conflict and the resultant violence have caused numerous deaths, loss of property and enormous population displacement in the region. Since the ABSU take up the issue of separate statehood movement number of movements and counter movements has started in the area resulting unending conflict situation.

Initially, as observed elsewhere, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was the first political organization that spearheaded the democratic movement for a separate state called 'Udayachal' for the plains tribal of Assam living in the North bank of the river Brahmaputra. However, over the time the PTCA become part of the mainstream politics and seems to have lost its grip over the new generation of the Bodos (Goswami, 2001). The political party could not bring any desired results and remained barren even after the lapse of seventeen years since its formations. Since then the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), took the fore front of leading the separate statehood movement of Bodoland with the popular slogan of "Divide Assam 50-50". The movement was initially by and large peaceful but later on turns violent with the formation of armed wing called Volunteers Force (VF). They were forced to take arms because of the terror unleash by the Government with the help of Assam Police and Central Paramilitary forces to suppress the movement.

Incident of fratricidal killings and burning of houses between the supporters of PTCA and the ABSU takes place during the initial stages of the movement in various parts of the BTC area which have displaced many Bodo families. The relief camp has to be erected by the government at Alangi Bazar near Patgaon in Kokrajhar district where mostly PTCA supporters are the inmates of the relief camp. Small number of displaced population belonging to PTCA supporters has also been kept at Athiabari Tinali near Serfanguri. It is now difficult to retrieve the exact number of displaced persons of the

two camps mentioned because of the lack of scholarly article and official data during that period.

Till 1993 there was hardly any inter-ethnic conflict during the first phase of the Bodoland movement which has caused large number of internal displacement. Of course targeted killing, looting, arson, bombing and intra-group clash continued during the movement. The first major inter-ethnic violence has been witnessed in the year 1993 involving the Bodos and the Non-Bodo belonging to Muslim minority group in the districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Barpeta. The conflict resulted in the death of 50 people (Deka, 2012), and has displaced a large number of people. The 1993 conflict has displaced about 3568 families consisting of 18000 persons (Monirul Hussain, 2007). In a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, submitted by the Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Saranarathi committee in 1996, it was claimed that 20,812 persons of 5043 families were living in 18 relief camps since 1993 (Barman, 2009).

Since then number of inter-ethnic violence has occurred in BTC with greater intensity of conflict, higher number of deaths and larger number of population displacement than ever before the history has witnessed in the past. In the month of May-June 1996, a conflict broke out between the Bodos and the Adivasis in Kokrajhar district. This conflict has resulted in huge number of population displacement. Almost 42,214 families consisting of about 2,62,682 persons were displaced by this conflict belonging to both the communities. These victims were sheltered in government sponsored 78 relief camps around Kokrajhar and adjoining areas. By the end of the 1997 many inmates of the relief camps were forced to return back to their villages with meager amount of money provided by the government. However, in 1998 again the conflict started between the two groups resulting in the displacement of 48,556 families consisting of 3,14,342 people (Hussain, opt. cit, 2007). Out of the total 48,556 families displaced in the district 15,602 families were from Kokrajhar subdivision and the rest 32,954 families were from Gossaigaon subdivision. This violence displaced 756 villages of Kokrajhar district of which 196 were revenue village, 25 were recognized forest village and 535 were encroached forest village.

Table 3.1: Distribution of Population in the relief camps of Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon Subdivisions due to outbreak of violence 1996-98.

Subdivisions	No of Relief Camps	No of Families	Populations		
			Adult	Minor	Total
Kokrajhar	15	7269	278499	1450	41999
Gossaigaon	23	16687	55216	29084	84268
Total	38	23983	82715	43548	126263

Source: Computed from Monirul Hussain & Pradip Phanjoubam's "A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, 2007."

Many of these conflict-induced IDPs are still living in relief camps for nearly two decades now without any government support. Since, the IDPs have been given compensation amount and are asked to leave the camps and return to their respective villages, they are no longer regarded as IDPs. The fact is that many of them remained in the camps in a permanent/semi-permanent situation as many of them are from encroached forest villages or are not conducive for them to return.

Table 3.2 shows the latest data on IDPs in Kokrajhar sub-division in different relief camps which shows decreased in numbers from 41,999 to 28,961 as on August 2006. Out of these numbers more than one third are children and two third are adults.

Table 3.2: Relief Camp wise number of Inmates in Kokrajhar Sub-Division Following the Ethnic Violence of 1996 and 1998.

Year of Riot	Name of Relief Camp	Community	No. of Family	Population		Total
				Adult	Minor	
1996	1. Joypur	Adivasi	263	1177	374	1551
	2. Bishmuri	„	145	460	129	589
	3. Deosri	„	281	1240	489	1729
Sub Total			689	2877	992	3869
1998	1. Vety. Complex, Bengtol	Adivasi	97	331	197	528
	2. Joypur (A)	„	1880	5985	3847	9832
	3. Bhumka-Maligaon	„	74	291	91	382
	4. Joypur (B)	„	754	3077	1163	4240
	5. Shantipur	„	246	1106	300	1406
	6. Deosri (B)	„	271	856	508	1364
	7. Bishmuri (B)	„	365	1260	485	1745
	8. Runikhata	„	967	3109	2486	1745
Sub -Total			4653	16,015	9077	25,092
Grand Total			5342	18,892	10069	28,961

Source: Computed from Monirul Hussain & Pradip Phanjoubam's "A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, 2007.

Table 3.3 shows the present status of Gossaigaon Sub-Division of Kokrajhar district. The sub-division has also seen decreased number of IDPs from 84,268 to 25,785 IDPs. Here also the number of IDPs children is more than one third of the total IDP population.

Table 3.3: Total IDPs in the Camps of Gossaigaon Sub-Division (As on 3/08/2006)

Total No of Relief Camps	Total Family	Total Adult IDPs	Total Minor IDPs	Total No. IDPs
14	4937	16,818	8,967	25,785

Thus combining the IDPs of both the sub-division will count for more than 54000 IDPs which is very high in numbers. It is to be remembered that many of them still have been living in the makeshift relief camps although no longer recognized by the authority for nearly two decades as of now. They have been living in various parts of the district without any proper care and protection involving a lot of human rights issues.

Table 3.4 shows the community wise breakup of the total IDPs of Gossaigaon camps.

Community	Total IDPs
Bodo	1,290
Adivasi	24,280
Rabha	215
Total	25,785

The community wise breakup shows that the Adivasi mostly belonging to Santhals community were the most sufferer with the total population of 24,280, while Bodos and Rabhas IDPs were 1290 and 215 respectively. However, large number of population were also displaced in the neighbouring district of Bongaigaon in the 1993

conflict with the total IDPs population around 19,544 mostly belonging to Muslim community.

Table 3.5: Showing the total IDPs in different camps of the District of Bongaigaon (As on 01/01/05).

Name of Relief Camp	Community	No of Families	Total Population	Name of Sub-Division
Garimri	Muslim	1832	9999	Bijni
Hapachora	„	1332	6265	„
Balajani	„	595	2980	Abhayapuri
Tapatri	„	60	300	„
Total		3819	19544	

Source: Computed from Monirul Hussain & Pradip Phanjoubam's "A Status Report on Displacement in Assam and Manipur, 2007.

The inmates of the camp have been living in the camps in a pathetic condition with no government sponsored relief material during the period. Nearly 8000 such Muslims IDP populations are forced to live in huts on both sides of the National Highway near Bijni town. Many others are forced to leave the camps due to the pressure from the local administration.

3.3 CONFLICT AND POPULATION DISPLACEMENT AFTER THE FORMATION OF BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL

Although, there was a stiff resistance by some Non-Bodo groups in the creation of BTC, finally as mentioned earlier in 2003 the Bodo Accord was signed which paved the way for the creation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) under the modified Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The BTC has been created keeping in mind to accomplish development in the area of economic, education, land rights, linguistic aspiration, socio-culture and ethnic identity of the Bodos and infrastructure development in the area. Since then there has been a popular belief of every citizen that the creation of BTC would bring the promise of lasting peace, security, development and end decades of violence, killings and economic backwardness in the region. Immediately, after the creation of the BTC, some development did start taking place especially in health, roads and education sectors in the region.

However, the creation of an autonomous territorial unit for the Bodos did not bring any major changes in the lives of the common Bodo masses, where majority of them were landless (Misra, 2014). The two Accords signed one at 1993 and another at 2003 has admittedly failed to meet the political aspirations of the movement's leadership (The Hindu, 2012). The BTC being in existence for over 15 years as of now had seen little development in the area and the Bodos feel quite dejected. The BTC enjoys hardly any financial power and has to fully depend on the Central and the State government funds. Further, the loopholes in the legal provisions yet allow the non-tribal people to acquire land rights contrary to the existing laws of the country that promise to safeguard the tribal people's land right (Burman, 2010). Patricia Mukhim in her article 'When Dreams Turn Sour' published on the Assam Tribune on 12 November, 2009 as quoted by Monjib Mochahary also argued that the policy of satisfying the militant demands through the establishment of autonomous councils has failed to redress public grievances and fulfill popular aspirations of the Bodo people (Mochahary, op. cit., p. 4). It did not take much longer time for the section of the Bodo leadership to realize that,

the autonomy given to them in the form of Sixth Schedule were not enough to reach the goal of realizing their ethnic assertion. Thus, the failure to accommodate the growing socio-economic and political concern of the Bodos even after the creation of BTC has once again reignited the Bodoland Movement.

Further, the creation of a particular ethnic homeland without sufficient ensuring the constitutional rights of the other communities living in the region was the beginning of the conflict lines which leads to the repeated clashes between the Bodos and other communities. The main ethnic groups in the BTC region which includes Bodos, Adivasis and Muslims virtually lives on edges and even a small clash between individual belonging to different ethnic groups have the potential to turn into huge communal riots (Asian Centre for Human Rights, 2012). All the ethnic groups in the BTC consider themselves as minorities and expressed their aspirations through insurgencies. The Guns, both legal and illegal dominates the lives in the BTC region as State Police and the politicians are complicit with the armed groups. Almost all the major ethnic groups have active insurgent groups in the region. Among them are NDFB (three factions), Adivasi Cobra Force, Kamtapuri Liberation Organization (KLO), Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam, All Adivasi National Liberation Army, Adivasi Cobra Military of Assam, Birsa Commando Force, Santhal Liberation Tigers and Adivasi People's Army (ibid., 2014, p. 8). Ethnic relations between competing groups have been fragile with clashes over space and identity. There have been several armed groups seeking various forms of autonomy or independence in Assam alone of which most of them are in ceasefire or in negotiations to settle their grievances (Hazarika S. , 2014).

On the one hand sections of the Bodo leadership were not satisfied with the present autonomous setup which leads to resumption of its separate statehood movement on the other hand the non-Bodo communities living in the region find themselves insecure and uncertainty over their future and became more organized than ever before forming organizations and associations demanding protection and political rights and opposing any further division of Assam. A series of movements and counter-movements by the Bodo and non-Bodo organizations finally prepared the ground for the present conflagrations which has given rise to a massive human rights and humanitarian

crisis in the region (Misra, op. cit., p. 246). Thus, the relationship between the Bodos and the Non-Bodos even after the creation of BTC seems to be very fragile.

The herculean task ahead of the BTC authority is the rehabilitation process of the large number of IDPs living in the relief camps in the region. The state government with the help of the local administration did start rehabilitation programmes, although, in many places the situation is not conducive for the IDPs to go back to their native places as claimed by both the Bodos and the non-Bodo groups. With the process those IDPs who have been living in the relief camps for decades have returned to their original home, but many were unable to return, because they are termed as Encroachers. The Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples (FDCIP) report says that even after the rehabilitation process about 23,000 families could not return to their respective homes as they are termed as Encroachers, who were unable to resettle in their original habitat (Murmu, 2009).

On the other hand since the compensation for returning home is very meager around 10000.00 for leaving the IDP camp but most IDP inmates have refused to accept the petty amount and have stayed on, as the compensation offered was considered to be insufficient to buy a land, house or even sustain them for a considerable amount of time (Dutta, 2014). The Government of Assam came up with the Four Phase of Action Plan for Rehabilitation of 38,364 families. Families who had land and could go back after getting the relief grant were placed in Phase One and Phase Two. Families with security threats were in Phase Three and families who had no land to go back were placed in Phase Four (ibid, p. 26). However, due to the lack of concrete and time bound rehabilitation programme of the 1996, 1998 and post 1998 IDPs by the government large chunk of IDPs in the region were still living in the camps without any government support. A survey report published by FDCIP in 2009 has found that at least 200000 people were living in 25 IDP camps in Kokrajhar District of Assam as of May 2006 without any adequate livelihood (Murmu, op. cit., p. 15). Therefore, condition of IDPs even after the creation of BTC seems to be very pathetic.

As mentioned elsewhere, that the creation of BTC will bring all round development and long lasting peace and security in the region but the popular expectation seems to be short lived. The uneven distribution of power as claimed by the

non-Bodo groups in the BTC Council Assembly has generated tensions between the Bodos and the non-Bodo groups, post BTC creation. The BTC has 46 members in the Legislative Council, where 30 seats are reserved for the Tribals, 5 seats are reserved for the General category, 5 seats are open and 6 members are nominated by the Government. Therefore, the power tussle between the Bodos and the non-Bodos is not going to die down very soon. The non-Bodo organizations are also blaming the Bodo leaderships of encouraging a policy of intimidation and extortion against the non-Bodo section of the populations. So the build up to the present violence began with a string of protests programme taken up by the non-Bodo organizations against what they have been long describing as the discriminatory policies of BTC authority against the other communities living in the BTC region (Misra, p. 248).

Misra also further observed that “as long as Bodo militancy was at its height, efforts by non-Bodo communities to organize themselves did not meet with much success. But, once militancy started ebbing with even the dreaded National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) faction led by Ranjan Daimary going in for a ceasefire and willing to open talks with the Government of India (GOI), the non-Bodo communities drew courage to organize themselves under the umbrella organizations called Non-Bodo Protection Forum (NBPF) which includes representative from the All Bodoland Minority Students Union (ABMSU), All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AKRSU), Bengali Students Federations (BSF), All Assam Gorkha Students Union (AAGSU), and the All Assam Tea Tribes Students Union (AATTSU). Amongst these components, the ABMSU which was a wing of All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) and which represented the Muslim settlers was an influential presence”.

The non-Bodos always felt that they were led down by the disproportionate representation in the BTC, blaming the Central and the State Government for not doing enough to change the discriminatory policy against non-Bodos living in the BTC (Times of India, 2012). Many of the non-Bodo organizations demands to scrap and repeal the creation of BTC which has further increased the hostility between the Bodos and the non-Bodo groups in the region. In addition to that continued and unchecked illegal migration from the neighbouring countries mainly from Bangladesh has put the Bodo leadership a major challenges to their aspirations for separate homeland. High

decadal birthrate among those migrant communities has also resulted fear among the Bodos of being further outnumbered demographically. The failure on the part of the government and absence of any strict law to curb the infiltration and preventing further alienation of Tribal land, the failure to protect whatever is left of the BTC region's reserve forests and delaying the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) are few causes leading to the present humanitarian crisis in the BTC region (Misra, op. cit., p. 247).

Thus the antagonisms between the immigrant Muslims settlers and the tribal communities have increased in Assam over the years with the immigrants settling in areas previously dominated by tribal communities. This now makes the two sides fight for the same political and geographical space. The administration's failure to protect tribal belt and blocks resulted in vast tracts of land previously belonging to the tribal people being illegally transferred to non-tribals and immigrant settlers, leading to the displacement of tribal people to forest as well as non-forest areas (Talukdar, 2008).

On the 3rd of October, 2008, violence broke out between the Bodos and the Muslims in the two districts of Darrang and Udalguri of Assam. Lasted for almost three to four consecutive days a total of 54 persons were killed in the conflict which includes 25 persons death due to police firing (Pathak, 2017). This conflict has displaced populations around 2,12,000 peoples affecting 54 villages directly and around 150 villages fled their homes due to fear of being attacked (Phukan, 2013). Later on the conflict has also spread to other districts of BTC such as Baksa and Chirang. There were 31 deaths in Udalguri alone where the clashes broke out first; 19 Muslim settlers, 9 Bodos and 3 others. There were 21 deaths in Darrang, where the violence soon spread; 17 Muslim settlers 1 Bodo and 3 others. In Chirang district also a seven month old pregnant immigrant Muslim women was shot dead by some unidentified gunmen. Again an adult and a child of the same community were also killed in the Baksa district (Talukdar, op. cit., 2008).

The state government blamed the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) for the conflict of which the organization strongly denied any involvement in the clashes. Information and Publicity Secretary of the NDFB, S. Sanjarang made a statement saying that the reports of the outfit being involved in the clashes as baseless

(telegraphindia.com, 2008). On the other hand former Chief Minister of Assam Sri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta blame the Tarun Gogoi-led Congress government for failing to protect the lives and property of the people (ibid, 2008). Mr. Mahanta while visiting the relief camps also held the state government responsible for the outbreak of the violence (Talukdar, Assam Violence Leads to Exodus of People, 2008). Around 58 new relief camps had to be created as a result of the recent clash, 26 relief camps in Darrang and 32 relief camps in Udalguri (The Telegraph, 2008). The rehabilitation programme already slow now appears to be difficult as more and more population has been displaced by the clash between the two groups.

Barely four years after the 2008 clash between the Bodos and the immigrant Muslims another episode of conflict in BTC region occurred in July 2012. The districts of BTC consisting of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri and the neighbouring Dhubri district of Assam which have claimed about 90 lives as on 31 August 2012 and has displaced population around 400000 peoples. This internal displacement has been regarded as the largest one since India's partition and the affected areas have been visited by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, then Union Home Minister P Chidambaram, current Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde, Congress President Sonia Gandhi, and leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) L.K Advani as well as leaders from different parties and organizations from all over the country (ACHR, op. cit., p. 1).

The tension in 2012 began when two members Md. Nurul Haque and Md. Mujibar Rahman of the All Bodo Minority Students Union (ABMSU), were shot dead by unidentified motorcycle borne miscreants on 6th July 2012. It was widely believed that the Ex. BLT members were behind the killing of the ABMSU members. However, Home Minister, Sushil Kumar Shinde, while clarifying before the House of Parliament in Rajya Sabha stated, “ *On July 6, Kamtapuri Liberation Organization terrorists fired indiscriminately at Muslimpara Gaon under Gossaigaon Police Station killing two persons belonging to Muslim community and injuring three persons. One KLO terrorist was arrested in connection with the case registered in this regard. Though this was communicated to the Muslim people of the area, it was not believed by them and they strongly suspected the hands of Bodo miscreants in the incidents*”. (ibid. p. 4). It was

indeed clear to the authority that the Muslim community in the area were not willing to believe that the KLO cadres were involved in the killings of the two Muslim youth, therefore the state government could have taken immediate and adequate security measures in order to prevent further outbreak of violence.

The already fragile situation took the ugly turn after the killing of four Bodo youths on 20th July 2012, presumably as retaliatory attacks, identified as Jatin Goyary (24), Jwngsar Boro (27), Dhruvajit Goyary (28) and Pradip Boro (32) by a mob of Muslims community who had assembled to discuss about Tarabi Namaj at Joypur near Kokrajhar town. The worst thing is that these four Bodo youths has been snatched away from the police van of the police patrol team led by the OC of Kokrajhar Police Station and DSP, Shri Arjun Pandit and lynched to death (ibid. p. 5). The police personnel refused to help the four youths after they were surrounded by the local mob instead handed over them to the frenzy mob for delivering justice (Bhatnagar, 2012). What followed after the killing of four Bodo youths was the worst humanitarian crisis that the Assam has ever witnessed in decades. During the crisis that has blown into a full-fledged conflict in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts of BTC and adjoining Dhubri and Bongaigaon districts, Assam has witnessed a tragedy of almost 5,00,000 people belonging to Bodo and Muslim communities being forced to take shelter in 273 temporary relief camps, being uprooted, scared and traumatized. An estimated 97 people lost their lives and around 500 villages were burnt down to ashes, the magnitude of which is overwhelming in terms of human tragedy that occurred within a span of a month of conflict (Hussain, 2012). The problems in the relief camps are something that one can hardly imagine. Faced with acute shortage of food, water, sanitation and supply of medicine the IDPs were packed in the government schools and buildings in a sub-human conditions engulfed with deep sense of insecurity and psychological problems.

The 2012 conflict in Assam has a far reaching impact in other cities too especially, the state of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Thousands of people from North East throng the railway counters to get tickets to return back to their native place as a result of the rumours of impending attack. Many special trains have to be arranged by the Karnataka government to ferry the people from North East. It all started with the rumour about an Assamese student being attacked by an irate mob in Bangalore on 13th

of August 2012, which has triggered a mass exodus of North-eastern people. Even assurance from the government of Karnataka that the news of the alleged attack was a rumour fails to stop the exodus of the people of North East from the state (India Today, 2012).

Moreover, as stated earlier most of the insurgent groups in the North Eastern Region were either in a state of ceasefire or in talks with the Government of India including both the factions of NDFB (P) and NDFB (R). However, a splinter group led by I.K. Songbijit popularly known as NDFB (S) remains underground and regarded as one of the most dreaded and active militant organization in the region. On the night of 23rd December, 2014, the heavily armed militant belonging to NDFB (S) faction entered several Adivasi villages in Kokrajhar, Chirang and Sonitpur districts of Assam and fired indiscriminately killing as many as 80 Adivasis and injuring number of people. According to the official report prepared by Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) there were over 3,00,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Assam, which was the highest in the world during 2014. Those displaced during the incident were living in 85 relief camps in four districts of Assam - Sonitpur, Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang district (The Hindu, 2015).

The killing of Adivasi community has led to wide spread condemnation from different section of people including different political parties, civil societies not only in India but internationally also. The Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) denounced the killing as “crimes against humanity as defined under Rome Statute of International Criminal Court”. It also called for the registration for FIRs and thorough investigation of the incident. The Amnesty International in a statement also condemned the killings and urged the state to step up security for the civilians and bring the perpetrators to justice (Indian Express, 2014). Home Minister Rajnath Singh has also condemned the killing of innocent people and made it clear that there will be no talks with terrorists and “zero – tolerance policy towards acts of terror” and asked the security forces to intensify the counter insurgency operations (The Hindu, 2016).

3.4 CONCLUSION

The conflict in Assam in general and BTC area in particular is a protracted one and cannot expect to end soon as many of the ethnic groups are fighting for autonomy with the Indian state ranging from separate state to secessionism. When such movement takes place it is irony that the common and marginalized people always became the victims of conflict from both sides, i.e. from police atrocities and easy target for extremist groups. Most of the ethnic movements in Assam including BTC have turned into communal violence resulting tens of thousands of population displacement, loss of property and loss of innocent life.

The genesis of the identity movement in Assam is not merely the outcome of the failure of the federal polity, but also the inability of the Indian state to provide political and constitutional solution raised by the identity movements. The fight for political, social together with territorial space has contributed towards the sharpening of conflict between communities. In the absence of an effective policy of the state and intervention from the civil societies, conflict and violence have become endemic and all pervasive in Assam. The exclusivist ethno-nationalist identity movements were the main source of massive international displacement in Assam. As the national government as well as the State of Assam does not have any proper policy to deal with the conflict induced internal displacement the problem of IDPs living in Assam will continue to exist in near future.

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