

Human Rights Violation in Conflict Zones: A case study of Bodoland.

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Abstract:

Assam is a conflict prone zone. The state has witnessed several kinds of ethnic and communal violence over the decades. The Bodoland also witnessed several forms of violence since 1993. The magnitude of the violence is very wretched and brutal. As a result of this violence there was violation of human rights including the rights of women and children. However, a terror activity like extortion, bombing, kidnapping, by insurgent groups has become a normal phenomenon in Bodoland. From 1993 to 2012 there are six brutal violence occurred in Bodoland which makes Bodoland a living hell in the earth. In the recent Bodoland violence more than 150 peoples have lost their life; 5 lakhs people have been displaced and made homeless by the miscreant. Besides, a huge amount of property like houses, schools, religious establishments has been destroyed. However, it is noteworthy to mention that the role of government during the violence was not satisfactory. The state has failed to address the problem of the Bodoland. It has also failed to protect life, liberty and property of the citizens and failed to promote and protect human rights as well. Therefore, in this critical juncture it's imperative to address the issues relating to human rights violation.

The present study seeks to address the following issues.

1. *What are the nature, structural causes and consequences of the violence in Bodoland?*
2. *How far ethnic violence create humanitarian crisis?*
3. *What is the role of the governments for the protection and promotion of human rights and conflict resolution?*

Keywords: *Human rights, conflict zones and structural cause of violence.*

I. Introduction:

The society of Assam is multicultural. Various ethnic communities have been migrated to Assam from time to time. As a result of migration the society and polity of Assam become multicultural and multiethnic. However, immediately after India achieved independence politics of space and autonomy have been emerged in Assam which has their roots in the colonial period. It has witnessed various autonomy and separatist movement in the post colonial period. For example the Rabhas and Hajongs are demanding for greater autonomy under 6th

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schedule, the Koch Rajbansi's are demanding for a separate state in the name of Kamatapur, the ULFAs are demanding for an independent Assam out of the Indian Union and the Bodos are demanding for a separate state within Indian Union in the name of Bodoland. Nevertheless, all these autonomy movements in order to draw the attention of the public, media, civil society organizations and mainly the governments both the central and state have been adopting several means like protest rallies, demonstration, hartals, bands etc. however, the consequences of these demonstrations, rallies, and bands become very brutal, violent and inhuman. The supporters and leaders of the movement sometimes failed to conduct a democratic movement. They in order to draw the attention of the competent authority used to resort undemocratic means which ultimately becomes a source of human rights violation where people have to lost their life, liberty, and property. Likewise the Bodoland movement is also an identity movement which is trying to create an exclusive homeland for the Bodos. They want to preserve their own identity and culture. So, keeping this intension in mind various Bodo organizations like NDFB, BLT etc are raising their demands from time to time. They also in order to achieve their ends are resorting to both democratic and undemocratic means. It would be worthwhile to mention here that the Bodos are minority in Bodoland. Their population is much lower than the non Bodos. But they are holding a majority power. Therefore, various authorities as well as intellectuals are raising the undemocratic power holding by the Bodos. However, the Bodos in order to become majority have been resorting to violent conflicts with the non Bodos from time to time. Besides, various Bodo insurgent outfits are using arms and ammunitions, illegal weapons and other explosive modern means to threaten the non Bodos so that they are bound to compel Bodoland. Not only those, the militant outfits are associated with illegal and anti law activities like extortion, kidnapping, murder etc. This fact is even confessed by BTC chief Hangrama Mohilary himself in various public meetings over the past few years. The Inspector general of police, BTAD in charge, G.P Singh said that extortions are the major problem in BTAD (The Assam Tribune, dated Guwahati, and 15th July). As a result of this gross violation of human rights are going on in Bodoland. It will be effective to mention here that there are various reasons for the demand of autonomy like discrimination, domination, mal governance, exploitation by different authorities and to protect and preserve the unique identities of the different ethnic communities. But in our discussion neither we will not focus on the causes for the demand of autonomy nor we will try to justify the causes, rather we will try to explore how the autonomy movements become a source of human rights violation.

In this paper we will strongly argue that firstly, due to autonomy movements and ethnic conflicts human rights become vulnerable. And life of the human beings is always remaining under threat, under tension and under pressure. There is no human security in the Bodoland. Secondly, we argue that the consequences of ethnic conflicts and undemocratic autonomy movement are very brutal and violent. It destroys a huge amount of both public and private properties like houses, shops, schools, religious establishments, agricultural fields, and other domestic animals. It also compels people to migrate into a safe zone and creates humanitarian crisis viz. Scarcity of houses, food, medical facilities and other basic amenities. It has also failed to protect life, liberty and property of the fellow citizens and failed to promote and protect human rights as well. So in this paper we will try to substantiate our arguments by data. This paper is totally based on secondary data collecting from govt. reports, news paper, magazines, journals, websites, books etc. Hence, we are very conscious about our methodological limitation.

Bodo Movement and Human Rights Violation:

As we mentioned in the very outset that Assam is a land of Migrants. Different layers of migrants from different directions both within and outside of the country made Assam heterogeneous. It would be effective to mention here that among the migrants the tribal's are the earliest community migrated to this land. Therefore they regard themselves as the aboriginal of Assam. The Bodo is a larger community consists of sub identities viz. Kacharis, Mishings, Rabhas, Tiwas, Hajongs, and Dimasas etc. they are mongoloid origin belong to Tibeto-Burma stock. In Assam they are concentrating mainly in the Brahmaputra valley. Among the Plain tribes they are the prominent groups. (Das, p.4). However, the struggle for the right to self determination for the protection and promotion of their culture and identity among the Bodos is not recent origin. It has its genesis in British Rule. But it's become active in the post independence period. Due to relative deprivation by the mainstream Assamese community and successive state and central government generates the thinking of separate Bodo homeland (Rahman: 2013). So from time to time they are trying to articulate their demand under different banner. In 1960s-70s the Bodo movements were under the banner of three major organizations viz. the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, (BSA), All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and Plain tribes Council of Assam demanded a union territory called 'Udayachal in order to preserve their culture and language. It's important to mention here that before the signing of the so-called Assam Accord in 1985 the Bodo movement was not so active but the signing of the Assam Accord gives a reference point for the Bodos and ABSUS and it was during the tenure of the AGP government the Bodo movement went over to the firebrand youth of Bodo society. A section of Bodo formed the Bodo Security Forces, BSF (later it becomes NDFB) and ex ABSU member in order to catch the attention of the authority resorted to violence and finally in 1993 a memorandum of settlement was signed by the ABSU, Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) and the Indian Government represented by Rajesh Pilot, then minister of state for home affairs and Assam government represented by Sri Hiteshwar saikia, then CM of Assam comprising 2570 villages. But because of its ragtag hocism the Bodo Accord failed to take off. (Mahanta 2013a : 51-52).

After 1993 the Bodo movement entered into a full-fledged violent movement. The extremist section of Bodo movement have started killing of innocent people by bombing, kidnapping and extortion. They started killing even children and women and civilians like the Doctors. They in order to draw the attention of the authority even killed government officials, bureaucrats, started to torch houses of both private and public. So life's in Bodoland during those days become very uncertain. Killing, kidnapping, bombing and extortion become day to day activities. The central government in order to understand the gravity of the situation signed a memorandum of settlement in 2003 and formed BTC by comprising four districts called BTAD. Even after signing the so-called Memorandum of settlement in 2003 violence in Bodoland has not been stopped yet. Various non Bodo communities have been raising their voice against the memorandum as undemocratic and a pro minority. This settlement undermines the majority section of population for the sack of minority i.e. the Bodo. As a result conflicts have occurred from time to time due to different causes which made innocent people homeless and sometimes have to loss their life.

Violence in Bodoland (since 1993) at a glance:

Bodo-Muslim clash 1993: In 1993, one northern district of Assam i.e. Kokrajhar, the heartland of Bodos witnessed a conflict violent between Bodos and Muslims. In these conflict as many as 3568 families comprising eighteen thousand people were rendered homeless in Kokrajhar district (Dutta 2009: 226-7). Nevertheless, a huge amount of properties were destroyed, houses were torched by miscreants.

Barpeta massacre, 1994: In July 1994, the northern parts of the Barpeta district in lower Assam witnessed a series of massacres of the Muslim peasants of East Bengal origin, and now largely Assamised by Bodo militants. It is estimated that about 1,000 people, mostly women and children, were killed, thousand injured and about 60 villages burnt down to ashes (Hussain 1995: 1154). Although it is estimated that more than 1000 people were killed but the actual figure is yet to be ascertained. The most worrying fact is that in spite of a having a demand for judicial inquiry the govt. had not set up any judicial inquiry the monstrous massacre. Nevertheless, many of the families even had not received proper reliefs. Therefore, the state came under severe criticism by many intellectuals, journalist, social workers etc both within and outside of the state. The dubious role of the state not only hearted the Muslim minority but also helped to create anxiety among the religious minority.

Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Violence, 1996: In May 1996, another brutal violence witnessed by Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon district of Assam. It's between the Santhals and Bodos where more than 200 people were killed and over two lakh peoples were displaced. Nevertheless, 42,214 families comprising 2,02,684 persons were forced to shelter in 61 relief camps (Dutta op.cit : 226). Besides, huge amounts of property were burnt down. In this violence the Santhals were the worst sufferer. However, it is also witnessed that the victims were not given proper relief and rehabilitation by the state. Even most of the victims are yet to be returned to their homeland.

In 1996, about 42,214 families comprising 2, 02,684 persons were forced to shelter in 61 camps. Again in **1998**, thousand of Santhal families displaced **Dutta op.cit. : 226-7**).

In May 1996, Bodos mounted large-scale attacks on ethnic Santhals that displaced more than 250,000 persons, mostly Santhals. Santhals too organized themselves, got armed and fought back, causing the displacement of several thousand Bodos. During 1997, most of the displaced Santhals and all of the displaced Bodos returned to their homes. However, the Assam state government prevented some 40,000 Santhals from doing so, saying that the land they had lived on was "forest land" protected by law (Bodos living in the same forest areas were, however, able to return home (www.iussp2009.princeton.edu/papers/90211, viewed on 4th august, 2013)

Santhal- Bodo conflict 1998: Again in **May 1998**, a brutal violence occurred between the Santhals and Bodos. In this violence also more than 50 peoples were killed and thousands of Santhals were killed in Kokrajhar (Dutta op.cit: 227). Even the relief camps of the victims were also attacked by militants.

In May 1998, further Bodo attacks displaced another 25,000 Santhals, many for the second time. The displaced population again grew to between 65,000 to 80,000, living in 33 camps. Bodo-Santhal clashes in September left 30 dead and resulted in the displacement of another 2,000 people (www.iussp2009.princeton.edu/papers/90211, viewed on 4th august, 2013)

Udalguri Violence, 2008: In 2008 another violent conflict emerged in two northern districts of Darrang and Udalguri where 70 peoples have lost their precious lives and more than 200,000 were displaced. Though the conflicts cannot be described as Bodo-Muslim conflict as several other indigenous people were also involved but the Muslims were the worst sufferer. However, the magnitudes of the violence were very brutal, apart from killing innocent people and a huge amount of property have been vandalized and made many people homeless.

In 2008, clashes in the two northern districts of Darrang and Udalguri claimed nearly 70 lives and displaced over two lakhs people. However, the clashed cannot be described as Bodo-Muslim conflict as several other indigenous tribes like the Garos, Rabhas, and other Assamese speaking people, etc, were also involved (Mahanta op.cit:49)

Bodoland violence 2012: Among all the violence occurred in the history of Bodoland the magnitude and impact of the violence of 2012 is very large and deep. Because in the Bodoland violence of 2012 itself more than 450000 people were displaced which is much higher than the earlier violence? The displaced people were kept in various relief camps in different parts of the state where there were even no basis facilities like healthcare, pure drinking water, adequate shelter, cloths etc. Moreover, more than 150 peoples comprising vulnerable section were killed where the majority of victims belong to Muslim community. The violence was not confined to the Bodoland only. It impacts went to Dhubri and Chirang districts also its impact even went out of the state which results mass exodus from south India. As a result of this violence a heinous violence had occurred in Bombay also. Moreover, as a result of the violence a huge amount of property have been destroyed, houses have been torched, furniture's and other useful materials were looted by miscreants, shops were gutted down and a number of houses were totally made devastated by using sophisticated vehicles like JCB.

Table 1: Total camps and displaced people in Bodoland Conflict 2012:

District/Subdivision	Total no. of camps	Displaced people as on 29 th august 2012	comments
Kokrajhar	46 (32-Bodo, 13-minority community, 01-other community)	19,732(Bodo)24,453(minority), 105 (Others)	
Kokrajhar subdivision	12 (all Bodo camps)	5764	
Gosaigaon subdivision	27 (14-Bodo, 12-minority, 01-other community)	12,009(Bodo), 24,085(minority) 105 (others)	
Porbotjhora subdivision	7 (6-Bodo, 1-minority)	1959(Bodo), 368 (minority)	
Total displaced people in		Total : 44290	

Kokrajhar district			
Chirang district	23 camps (6-Bodo, 17-minority)	4486(Bodo), 32,232(minority)	Total displaced people in Chirang district-1,04,064 on 2 august 2012, Total 92 camps on 30 July 2012
Total displaced on 29 th august 2012		36,718	
Dhubri district	132 camps; all belonging to the minority people		Total displaced persons- 1,75,829(all minority) on 1 august 2012
Total displaced in Dhubri district on 29 august 2012		1,46,091 (minority)	
Bongaigaon district	12 camps (all inhabited by minority)	Total-8,313	
Total in all districts	213 camps(38-Bodo, 174-minority, 01 other community)	Displaced people on 29 August 2012=2,35,412	Total displaced people at the peak of the conflict 4,85,921

(Source: Mahanta 2013a:52)

Humanitarian crisis: No Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response

According to a study made by Asian centre for human rights it is found that in most of the relief camps there is lack of food, baby food, Utensils, shelter and housing, water facility, health care etc. they also found that in most of the relief camps in Kokrajhar, Chirang and Dhubri there was delay in providing minimum ration such as rice, Dal, mustard oil etc they strongly claimed that the government failed to provide the basic amenities to the victims living in the relief camps.

Since 21 July 2012 when the riots between the Bodo tribal's and Muslims in Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) and Dhubri district of Assam spread, over 400,000 persons were displaced and they took shelter in over 300 relief camps. Government schools and other buildings have been converted into relief camps thereby affecting school children and general public. With no basic facilities such as adequate food, medicines, doctors, drinking water, clothes, sanitation

and hygiene and more people flocking the already overcrowded relief camps, the humanitarian crisis is palpable. (ACHR, 2012)

Bodoland and Human Security: From the above analysis it can clearly be witnessed that in Assam particularly in BTAD there is no human security at all. Anything can happen anytime in Bodoland. This is happening due to undemocratic political arrangement and representation of the non-Bodos. In BTAD the non-Bodos which includes Asamiya Hindus of virtually all caste, Koch Rajbanshis (OBC), Asamiya Muslims, Rabhas (ST), Muslims from East Bengal, Assamised but Bengali Hindus and oppressed tea plantation workers from Jharkhand (Hussain op.cit: 1155). The demand for a separate state for the Bodos, question of representation of the non-Bodos which constitute majority in Bodoland and inclusion of Non-Bodo villages in BTC has become the main cause of conflict. Because in BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council, 2003) out of 46 seats 30 seats are reserved for STs and only 5 seats for non-tribal community and 5 open for all and the rest 6 are the representatives of Governor. So this is totally an undemocratic representation. However, the Bodo militant groups very tactfully started ethnic cleansing by targeting one by one community. They apprehend that if they started their fight against all communities in Bodoland they may be defeated by the non-Bodos. Moreover, it has been witnessed that the cadres of all the militant outfits are engaged in extortion and kidnapping. Therefore, human securities especially the securities of non-Bodos are under threat. Whenever we read the newspaper, watch TV there is always news of extortion and kidnapping in Bodoland.

II. Conclusion:

India Since independence has been witnessing various autonomous as well as separatist movements by various organizations. The Bodos also started their movement for a separate state since decades. However, their demands for Bodoland have been creating a lot of problems. They in order to fulfill their aspiration have been resorting to various brutal violence and heinous activities. As a result human rights have been violating day by day. People especially non-Bodos are living under threat. Due to violent conflict various issues have been affecting the people at the grass root level viz. conflict induced displacement, loss of education, human rights violation, trauma rape victims, arms proliferation, extortion etc. (Mahanta 2013b: 329). However, their life and property is not secure. There is no value of humanity in Bodoland. The magnitude of the violence is vicious and high, from 1993 to 2012 nearly 1 million people (952,684 people, collected from different sources) had displaced, 1500 people lost their valuable lives, crores of property, both public and private had destroyed due to violence. This is the present day situation of Bodoland. So in such a situation could we imagine a dignified life in conflict zones like Bodoland? It would be effective to mention here that the role of the state is very dubious. The govt. does not want to solve the problem of Bodoland. So, this kind of violence not only violates human rights but also breakdown democratic plural society. Besides the state has also failed to address the multicultural, multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic composite culture of the region; rather, it has continued with a policy of ethnic insularity and ethnic homeland as had been followed by the colonial rulers. (Mahanta op.cit: 57). Moreover, the state also failed to protect the life and liberty of the multi-ethnic people living in the region. Hence, in order to protect the life and liberty and to strengthen the democratic fabric there is an urgent need to make a fair and just political arrangement in BTC and the Bodo militants should give up the demand for exclusive homeland and should live under the larger Assamese society. In this regard the role of the state is very

important because the government is the legitimate authority to protect the rights of its fellow citizens. The govt. must address various key issues prevailing in Bodoland, such as, issues of governance, corruption, identity, protection of human rights etc. The govt. should seize the illegal arms from the militants without delay. Moreover; the state should take appropriate measures so that the conflicts can be resolved amicably. Furthermore, the state in collaboration with civil society groups and citizens should take appropriate measures to protect and promote the rights of the people and to protect and promote the distinct culture and identity of not only Bodos but also the non Bodos inhabiting in the BTAD.

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