

OPPRESSION OF DISPLACED WOMEN: A GLOBAL CHALLENGE
(A Case Study on Conflict and Calamity induced Muslim Women of Dhubri and Kokrajhar)

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Abstract:

According to the figure released by the Geneva based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 28.8 million people were found displaced around the world by the end of 2012. Three countries enrolled highest number of displaced population, namely Columbia, Iraq and Sudan. India's North East is the most contributing region on IDP in the country. In Assam the Kokrajhar district contributes a large amount of IDPs due to ethnic violence occurred in last two decades. Dhubri district of Assam on the other hand is the most erosion prone river bank area of Brahmaputra and due to erosion and recurring flood thousand of people dislocated in the post independent era with no rehabilitation causing a great number of IDP in the state. Women are approximately half of the IDP population who are most vulnerable. Muslim women are worst sufferer due to dislocation, poor socio-economic condition and male hegemony which need an immediate intervention to protect their rights and it is a global challenge at all for a sustainable development.

(Key words: IDP, Women's right and peace process in conflict zone)

Introduction:

Displacements of women caused by different war, violence, calamities have been a specific challenge for global society. During the period of dislocation women are more vulnerable than men as women's basic needs and fundamental rights are ceased to exist. Subsequently their plights are also often neglected. It needs more attention of the social scientist to the issues relating to women's right in the conflict zones to create awareness and to improve their situation for a healthy global society.

Review of literature:

A number of studies relating to women rights in the areas of conflicts and displaced zones have been undertaken by the academicians and human right organisations such as International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), The United Nation Development fund for Women. These studies have shown how the plight of women occurred by war and conflicts had been ignored. V.T.Patil and P.R.Trivedi focussed on Migration, Refugees and Security in 21st century stating that as we enter in the 21st century we must ensure that humanitarian organisations have the ability to respond quickly and effectively to complex emergencies and other situations in which people are forced to flee for their lives. But we must also recognise that such a capacity is of limited value unless it is accompanied by vigorous advocacy and longer term action on behalf of victimised and dispossessed population. Naveen Mishra's volume 'Population in South Asia, Migration as a survival strategy' is a serious attempt to provide a comprehensive study of the inter relationship between migration and population in South Asian context. Another important publication of ICSSR seminar 'Human movement and settlement: Crisis and dimension of displacement in Eastern and North Eastern region of India' comprised of four sections

as Migration, Displacement and Development, Refugees, Internally Displaced Person and Immigration are found to be useful for further study in the subject.

Objectives:

The objectives of the study is to-

- ⇒ study the nature and extend of displaced women
- ⇒ study the abysmal condition of the IDP relief camps
- ⇒ suggest policy adoption to over come existing situation

Methodology:

The present study involves empirical method of study. Data has been collected from primary and secondary sources. Field works, interviews with displaced women in char areas have been conducted. Books and journals have been consulted for effective analysis of data and recent development on the topic.

Discussion:

Internal displacement of people and its genesis:

There is no universal definition of Internally Displaced Person (IDP). The working definition of IDP in 1992 defines IDP to be ‘Persons who have been forced to flee from their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers, as a result of armed conflict, internal strife or natural or man made disasters, and who are within their territory.(The working definition of Internally Displaced Person, 1992). Here the refugees who cross an international border and IDP are distinct in its status. In recent years worldwide IDPs are being increased in comparison to the number of refugees. The refugee issues always receive the attention of academicians, news agencies and international agencies. In comparison to that IDPs are not able to draw much attention of these agencies. The concerned states are also not recognising their IDP status and hence the IDP becomes unfortunate in receiving national and international attention and assistance. For the IDPs , right of life, property, security, food, education and employment are under threat. The national relief and rehabilitation policy 2007 included people from development induced displaced people only and hence the calamity and conflict induced IDP need to provide justice on the basis of the principle of UN guideline.

Causes of Internal Displacement of People:

As noted by Monirul Hassan status report on a National Seminar organised by Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group in Kohima there are three main causes for internal displacement of people-

1. Conflict induced IDP
2. Development induced IDP
3. Calamity induced (flood, Erosion) IDP.

Internal displacement of people in NE India:

North East India has witnessed protracted conflicts of several arm group, separatist group insurgency, ethnicity and it claims thousands of people dislocated in last few decades. Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya contributing a large IDP due to ethnic conflict and arm group rebel. In an estimate it is revealed that total number of ethnicity induced IDP is close to three lakhs in the North East India alone. It accounts for almost half of Indias conflict induced IDP.(Bhoumik:2005).

Internal Displacement of People in Kokrajhar and Dhubri District:

The internal displaced people of in the district of Kokrajhar and Dhubri can broadly be divided into two categories-

(a) **Ethnic violence induced displacement:** The BTAD violence has been associated with the ideas of autonomy, liberation and ethnic cleansing which have been taken as granted measures for achieving the goal. The ethnic violence in between Bodo-Muslim, Bodo-Santhal, Bodo-Bengali, Bodo-Rajbongshi have witnessed several thousands of lives and lakhs of displacement of population. In 1993 violence nearly 3568 families consisting of 18000 people displaced in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon district. In 1996 Bodo Santhal conflict displaced nearly 262682 persons.(Bhoumik, 2005). In 2012 alone Assam witnessed the tragedy of nearly 5 lakhs displaced people both from Bodo and Muslim communities and were forced to take shelter in temporary refugee capms.(Bonojit Hussain,2012) The recent Bodo Santhal conflict (2014) also left another several thousand Santhal IDPs in makeshift in nook and corner of the state. Whatever the causes are, these large numbers of IDP have been suffering from humanitarian crisis in the relief camps. Although some of them resettled in their homes but most of the capable families have shifted nearby districts for permanent settlement. The Muslim IDP of Kokrajhar district rushed to different places of Dhubri district which is also caused an abnormal high growth rate of Muslims in the district in 2011 census.

(b) Calamity induced displacement:

The perennial flood and erosion induced displacement of people in the district of Dhubri is highest in the state. The district of Dhubri and Goalpara experienced very high rate of erosion and flood every year. The silent emergency of erosion does not make news but it has reportedly claimed several thousand of square kilometre of land, destroying more than 2500 villages and displacing over several million people in Assam. According to a recent study by Archana Sarkar of the National Institute of Hydrology and P.D.Garg and Nayan Sarma of IIT, Roorkee 1053 sq KM was lost to erosion between 1990 and 2008. Nearly seventy percent of South Salmara subdivision of Dhubri district is now to the extended bed of river Brahmaputra. Most of the displaced person either living in the river banks, Bandhs or shifted to lower part of Meghalaya adjoining to the district. The people living in the river isles use to move to the nearby town and cities for livelihood. Some of them are finding their livelihood in the slum of cities, pulling rickshaws and working in construction sites. Of course the host societies never recognise them to be the citizen of the country and here the security and identity crisis haunt them permanently.

Effect on women:

In patriarchal societies men are expected to be strong and women are valued in term of their chastity and obedience. They live little independent status, as they are viewed by the communities only in connection with their fathers and husbands. (Chenoy.Anuradha M: Impact of arm conflict on women in South Asia,2007). In conflict zones women are often targeted by hostile group to dishonour the community. Death or missing of male partner makes women widow and half widow whose societal value reduces due to different societal norms. In most cases women are unarmed and unprotected in conflict zones. Trafficking and sexual slavery is another problem of displaced women. The most of the IDP male used to go outside for earning livelihood and women are to compromise with their dignity and privacy in the relief camps. Women living in the temporary camps or in the river banks are facing severe health hazards. Mental health hazards obviously a neglected area despite of evidence of trauma caused

by violence, fear and displacement. Nutrition is a major problem of Char dwellers. Pregnant women in relief camps usually gives birth a premature baby. Dhubri district records highest level of home delivery in the state which signifies the health status of the char and displaced people of the district.

Effect on Muslim women:

The Muslim IDP women bear the testimony of double oppression in the conflict zones as well as calamity hit zones in both the district. The Muslim society which put high importance to the chastity of women, admitting that women raped or abused, not considered worthy of marriage. Such married women are often rejected by her husband. Muslims are mostly criticised in the country for religious fundamentalism, fanaticism. Due to economic reason the illiterate Muslim of the district believes that more manpower means more earning. It leads uncontrolled birth rate amongst Muslims and the extra burden is to be bore by the Muslim women in the dislocated situation also. Very often polygamy is also responsible for women deprivation in Muslim community. To bear the extra expenses of the family the Muslim women used to work in different factories, brickfields and also in construction sites without having proper remuneration and facilities. The corrupt male hegemony and age old suppression of women is very common in displaced Muslim women. Most of girl child labours, beggars are found in Muslim community in the district.

Findings:

From the above discussion it is crystal clear that women IDP in both the district bears the common suppression in case of livelihood and other human rights. In case of Calamity induced Muslim women the sufferings seems to be doubled. The main focus points can be traced as follows which needs immediate intervention of proper authority-

- ⇒ security
- ⇒ Sexual abuse
- ⇒ Health hazards
- ⇒ Education
- ⇒ Dignity
- ⇒ Social mobility
- ⇒ Freedom.

Policy to be implemented:

1. Central government should develop a national IDP legislation and policy in accordance with guiding principles of internal displacement.
2. The government should declare Kokrajhar as conflict zone with large number of IDP and also the district of Dhubri as disaster prone district and formulate policy to protect and rehabilitate IDP particularly the women and the children.
3. Ensure that women displacement by violence or calamity receives adequate protection, assistance and compensation.
4. Ensure co-existence of non tribal community in BTAD area.
5. The state government should systematically asses the situation of Adibashis, Bodos, Muslims and other communities in BTAD and taking into confidence to all community representatives a dialogue be initiated for sustainable development of all communities.
6. The Muslim IDPs who have been living in the BTAD area for two or three generations be granted land documents enacting laws in this connection.

7. The Bodo and Non Bodo politicians are to be checked to politicise the ethnicity, rather developmental initiatives be encouraged and exercised.
8. Women empowerment within and intra community be ensured by providing education, health services, ownership of land and properties.
9. NGOs and monitoring agencies be provided strengthening capacities on the protections of IDPs.
10. Provide training and work assistance programme to women.

Conclusion:

Ethnic violence in the North East region in most cases is a by-product of land alienation owing to demographic change as the people are fighting for natural resources in the same geographical space. It is obvious that peace can be restore in the region by land restoration, poverty alleviation, education and development especially in rural areas. The erosion is causing threat to the whole of the district riverine areas. It should be protected taking a long and sustainable policy. Above all, politics for development is to be cultivated by which every citizen ensures as resource.

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