

WOMEN IN SPACES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT :

TEXT AND CONTEXT

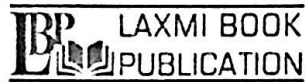


Dr. Monalisha Roychaudhury

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Dedicated To

My Father Late

Ranadhir Roychaudhury

FOREWORD

This book is the culmination of the author's research on the area leading to her PhD degree. Taking under her purview women in the context of conflict and violence in BTAD she undertakes an extensive and detailed research taking into cognizance the diverse definitions of violence and conflict as used in political terminology and discourse of nation, state, ethnicity and identity. Since the area of study is violence and conflict in Assam from 2008 to 2015 therefore the use of the terms derives their signification from the nature of conflict during this period. Assam has been home to number of ethnic and communal clashes resulting from the demands of autonomy by various ethnic groups. In these clashes a number of men, women and children have been rendered homeless, turned into refugees, lost labour, land and property, lost education and above all lost security of life. As such Assam has become a fertile ground for conflict and peace studies. Although there have been studies on causes of violence there have been very few studies on women's experiences in these situations. Studies generally read in terms of perpetrators and victims and quite often women get subsumed within the category of victims. However, considering the fact that women's experiences are different from man, even experiences of women in spaces of conflict and violence are bound to be different. Filling this gap, especially in the context of ethnic violence in BTAD, the book through case studies offers some concrete insights into the lived conditions of women in conflict situations, the trauma they go through and their little resistances. This book will contribute in many ways in reading conflict in the region from a humane perspective.

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PREFACE

As reported from time to time, violence and conflict distorts normal life of the people living in the conflict zone and women are the most affected members during such trying period. They suffer from physical discomfort, injury, psychological conflict and also lose their private space. The incidents of violence create multifaceted impact that affects the aspirations of development and welfare of a society. Women of all ages in the conflict ridden areas have to suffer from multidimensional problems and have to move through uncertain situations and unexpected spaces. There are innumerable instances throughout history how women had to lose identity, property, dignity, family members etc. and face sustained troubles.

The persistent happenings of ethnic violence in the BTAD area of Assam have become a serious concern for all civilians, thinkers, policy makers and researchers. Women of many communities had to lose their spaces and were placed in a grim situation not only during the period of conflict but also in the post conflict period. It was only in the Eleventh Five Year Plan that women were given equal status and were recognized as a vehicle for social and economic growth. However, it is necessary to search the ground realities when social disorder takes place especially during times of ethnic conflict.

The above circumstances demand an in-depth discourse into the issue of “Women in Spaces of Ethnic Violence and Conflict” in general and in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts of Assam in particular. The study proposes to assess the issue of women in spaces of ethnic conflict in BTAD that emerged from ethnicity and identity issues.

Ethnic violence leads to forced migration, loss of income which brings in considerable misery in the lives of women who mainly takes the responsibility of running the household. Women are raped, terrorized and their rights are violated whenever there is ethnic violence. Even in the relief camps where they take shelter women are faced with different kinds of problems which

are often overlooked. So the main objective of the study is to examine the women in spaces of conflict ridden areas, to examine the status of women who are directly or indirectly victims of conflict, to look at the position of women orphaned or widowed as a result of ethnic violence and examine the condition of women in the refugee camps and to understand why and how conflicts affect the lives of women.

For achieving the objectives, secondary information was gathered from various published sources such as books, journals, newspapers periodicals and reports. Historical perspective of the issue too relied on various published sources of information. Since the study is on women's issues a feminist approach to the interpretations becomes inevitable.

To fulfil the need of primary information, a multi stage purposive random sampling technique was adopted. Initially the four districts of BTAD namely Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang and Baksa were selected purposively because they fall under the jurisdiction of BTAD which have witnessed ethnic violence for last two decades. Two types of sample units were chosen – (i) the household head women and women of affected villages and (ii) women camp inmates. A sample size was **285 units** with **213 units** under the first category and **72 units** under the second type. The study comprised of collection of field data through two pre-tested structured questionnaires. Using qualitative and quantitative analysis the findings of the study are achieved. The period taken is from **2008 to 2015**.

Most of the nations in the world simmer with violence, be it political or ethnic. Assumptions are made that men are the perpetrators and women are the victims. But in situation of violent conflicts their experiences cannot be built upon a single discourse. Diversity of geographical location, culture, religion and society makes the experiences of the victims vary. A universal interpretation cannot be considered especially so when there is a contextualized analysis.

Assam has seen a number of ethnic and communal clashes resulting from the demands of autonomy by various

ethnic groups. In these clashes a number of men, women and children have been rendered homeless, turned into refugees, lost labour, land and property, lost education and above all lost security of life. Although there have been studies on causes of violence there have been very few studies on women's experiences in these situations.

Although there is a growing body of feminist discourse establishing that war and peace are gendered activities and consequently women's experiences, responses and needs are different, it is often overlooked by national and international policy makers (Manchanda 2015). Hence a study of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict and inclusion of BTAD is justified. Besides, no study so far has been conducted on the issue particularly in the BTAD area. Therefore the study is significant not only to bring to light the ground realities of women inmates in the relief camps and affected villages but also to prescribe the policy initiatives.

The present study included all the aspects of the issue of women in spaces of ethnic conflict and violence in BTAD. It also tries to probe into in details the evolution process of various ethnic organizations for establishing a separate identity of the Bodos. An interpretation of what gave rise to the ethnic conflicts in Bodoland is being attempted through analysis from the historical perspective. From the analysis it can be concluded that the Bodos who are known as the 'sons of the soil' were eventually marginalized by the Aryans who came to Assam much later.

The Bodo Movement was the result of an age old aspiration of the Bodo community to establish their own language and culture. Participation and contribution of women in the Bodoland Movement has also been included in the study.

The thrust area relating to the issue tries to focus on women's image in various media in general and in particular to conflict ridden areas in BTAD. It also attempts to discourse about the role of media in representation of women and how their problems are projected, highlighted and under-reported

particularly during conflict and post-conflict period. The truth is that the plight of women is only partially reflected in the news coverage on conflict and violence. The in-depth discourse into the media scenario and their roles indicate that there is least concern on the issues of women in spaces of ethnic conflict and violence. The analyses clearly reveal the lackadaisical attitude of media towards the sufferings of the camp inmates particularly women in the BTAD area. Only a few news items and articles published in print media are found to highlight the women and girl child issues during conflict and on camp living conditions. It implies that acute gender insensitiveness exists in respect to the role of media persons. The findings establish the fact that media is patriarchal in structure and the problems of women are often silenced.

The study elaborates and contextualises women's experiences in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict in BTAD and identifies the nature of ethnic violence, its complexity, its long term evils and simmering effects on the society. Further it explores various traits of dismal situation of women during conflict and post conflict period. Field survey reveals that there is a disturbing noise in the silence of the women and they prefer to stay back than go back to their villages as they feel safer in the camps. Another observation that became very prominent during the study was that the villagers belonging to different communities, who co existed in peace and harmony for many years, helping and cooperating with each other had become strangers to one another soon after the ethnic conflict began. In a situation like this the women become the worst sufferers as by nature they are caretakers, caregivers and lover of peace. The pain that violence affected women goes through and the problems that they face are often not heard especially in the conflict zones. Women in the camps are more concerned about their children, husband and with time for their camp mates. The impact of conflict on women of different communities has also emerged from the study.

The concluding remarks and suggestions are made for focussing on the possible solutions to the perennial problem.

From the study it can be seen that women are the worst sufferers in a conflict situation and because of the patriarchal structured society their sufferings are often overlooked. They have to find their own ways to solve their crisis for which confidence and empowerment is very important. Special schemes for women empowerment must be introduced and participation by external partners who will stand by these affected women needs to be encouraged. Post conflict situation can be taken as an entry point towards empowering women. This will certainly help in bringing the affected people out of psychological, social and economic crisis.

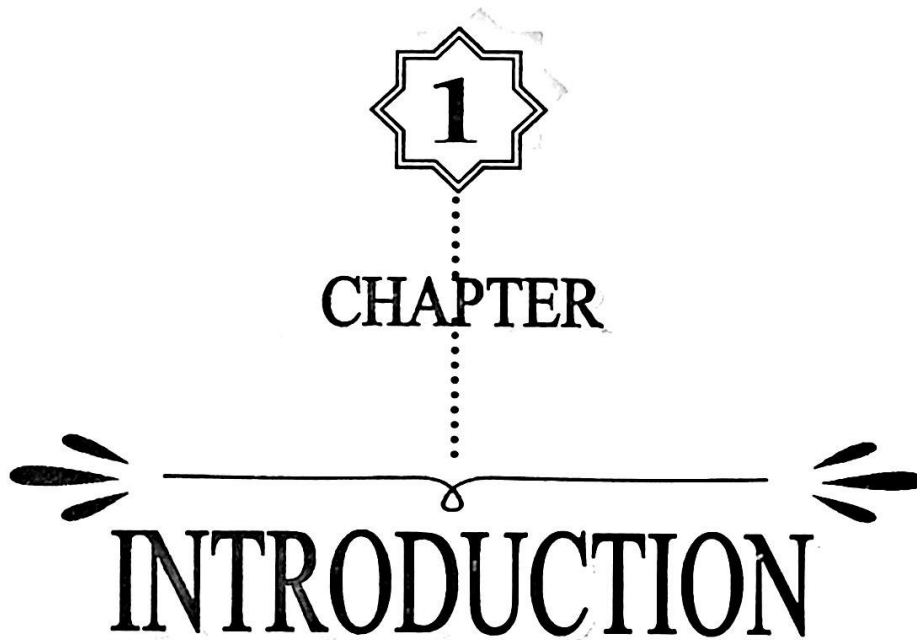
Monalisha Roychaudhury

ABBREVIATION

AASU	All Assam Students Union
AATWWF	All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation
ABSU	All Bodo Students Union
ABWWF	All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation
AFSPA	Arms Force Special Power Act
AHRC	Assam Human Rights Commission
BAC	Bodoland Autonomous Council
BLT	Bodo Liberation Tiger Force
BPAC	Bodo People's Action Committee
BrSF	Bodo Security Force
BSMC	Bodoland Statehood Movement Council
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Area Districts
BTC	Bodoland Territorial Council
BWJF	Bodo Women Justice Forum
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
MoS	Memorandum of Settlement
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
UNWGIP	United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Population
VF	Volunteer Force

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1
CHAPTER
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction:

Women are the most affected members of the society especially in the violence ridden areas as reported from time to time. Apart from physical discomfort at times, they also suffer from physical injury as well as psychological conflict and loss of private space. Through ages, violence and conflict in the society has distorted the normal life of the victims and perpetrators in particular and the society as a whole. The incidents of violence create multifaceted impact that affects the aspirations of development and welfare of the society. Most prominently, the women of all ages in the conflict ridden areas have to suffer from multidimensional problems. Such sufferings bring not only extreme agony but also create further problems that affect the organic form of the society over time. Incidents of violence and conflict have many causes and among them the recent happenings of ethnic clashes throughout the world prove that most conflicts occur for protecting land right and identity. Feeling of ethnicity leads to sustained violence in the areas which has major ethnic groups who feel that their identity is in a crisis. Due to violence and conflict, women have to move through uncertain situations and unexpected spaces. There are innumerable instances and evidences throughout history how women had to lose identity, property, dignity, family members

etc. and had to face sustained troubles. This reflects the grim situation that most women are placed in.

Naturally, women are more vulnerable to any disaster compared to their counterpart caused by violence or natural calamities. Therefore the intensity of hatred, sufferings and troubles fall mostly upon women. The State of World Population Report, 2015 reveals that the women's status in 78 countries (natural calamity-ridden) throughout the world is very pathetic. The report shows that 507 women in these countries have lost their lives daily on an average for natural calamities as well as violence. Further it reveals that three women out of five have to die due to natural calamities and ethnic violence.¹

It has been observed that owing to external or internal conflict a humanitarian crisis occurs which is impossible to handle by one or two organizations. In such cases it has a very negative effect on women and children. Death and homelessness is usually the direct effect of such conflict. The consequences that follow such catastrophic event are mostly seen to fall on women and children. Often families are forced to flee from their homes during ethnic conflicts or armed violence and these results in loss of human rights and human dignity. Though relief services and help are provided to the affected communities yet it is never enough. There is always a threat to health, security and safety and to the community. Armed conflicts and other man-made or natural disasters often lead to humanitarian crisis.

Usually in the armed conflict situations like in ethnic or communal clashes the ground becomes a place of three parties. One force is the ordinary citizens including women, the second force is the government which has its own armed forces and the third is the activist or terrorist who creates all types of conflict. In such situation it is seen that it is usually the citizens including women who are affected and suffer from immense loss. There is a general belief among the majority of social scientists that sustained deprivation of basic amenities of life of certain groups of aboriginals, socio-economic backwardness due to paucity of basic sources of human development gave rise to ethnicity among the various tribes of the North East Region of India.

The persistent happenings of ethnic violence in and around the North East Region of India, especially in the BTAD area of the state of Assam have become a serious concern for all civilians, thinkers, policy makers and researchers over the period. From the beginning of the Bodo Movement (May 2, 1987), the signing of the Bodo Accord (February 20, 1993) and formation of BTC (December 7, 2003), several incidents of violence took place and created numerous problems especially for the women. During the violence Bodo, Muslim and Adivasi women were being humiliated. Resultantly, the women of all ages had to lose their spaces not only during the period of conflict but also in the post conflict period. They were the worst sufferers and their physical and mental condition further deteriorated to the nadir. The conflicts placed the women of the affected society in an unexplainable grim situation. Women constitute almost half of the population and have always been an indispensable part of the society. However, it was for the first time the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12) gave equal status to women and recognized them as a vehicle for social and economic growth. But it is necessary to search the ground realities when social disorder takes place especially by ethnic conflict.

The above circumstances demand an in-depth discourse into the issue of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict in general and Bodoland Territorial Area Districts of Assam in particular. Therefore, the present study proposes to assess the issue of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict that emerged from ethnicity particularly in the violence ridden BTAD area.

1.2 Conceptualization of Ethnicity:

Ethnicity refers to an overt expression of feeling of differentiation. This is a consciously expressed feeling. From the available data it has been observed that discussions on ethnicity end up to a discussion on ethnic group boundaries and identities (Zehol 57-58). While conceptualizing ethnicity there is a need to bring into clarity related words such as 'ethnic identity' and 'ethnic group'. In her book *The Archaeology of Ethnicity*:

Constructing Identities in the Past and Present (1997) Sian Jones explains the three terms accordingly:

Ethnic identity: that aspect of a person's self-conceptualization which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent.

Ethnic group: any group of people who set themselves apart and/or are set apart by others with whom they interact or co-exist on the basis of their perceptions of cultural differentiation and/or common descent.

Ethnicity: all those social and psychological phenomena associated with a culturally constructed group identity as defined above. The concept of ethnicity focuses on the ways in which social and cultural processes intersect with one another in the identification of, and interaction between, ethnic groups.

(Jones xiii)

She further stated that 'ethnicity' cannot be defined in a single definition because of different traditions among the variety of ethnic groups, socio structural dimensions of a society of mixed population, the research on a particular group or the region where the research on ethnicity is conducted. The complexity of the term, she argues, "is further complicated by the fact that few people explicitly define what they mean by the terms ethnicity and ethnic group" (Jones 56).

Isajiw (1974:111) found out that out of sixty five studies on ethnicity in the field of sociology and anthropology only thirteen had some kind of definition on the term. There are no clear and definite definitions of ethnicity in the available literature. However, two central issues have been identified that cut across different conceptualizations of ethnicity.

- An age old anthropological debate on the etic (relating to cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who does not participate in culture being studied) and emic (relating to cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who participate in culture being studied) perspectives has brought back the definitions of ethnicity in form of

difference between objective and subjective definitions. The 'objectivists' take on the etic perspective. Based on the researcher's understanding of socio cultural differences they define the ethnic groups. The 'subjectivists' define ethnic groups from the emic perspective which is based on the subjective self-classification of the people who are being studied. This difference poses a question on the nature of ethnicity itself.

- Another factor concerning the definition of ethnicity is a tension between specificity and generality. Some definitions are too broad to study or analyse a particular case and some definitions are too narrow for comparative study. A comparative definition of ethnicity is not possible because there is no definite and developed theory on ethnicity. For instance, to assume that because ethnic identity is manipulated for economic gain in some instances, ethnic groups should be defined as interest groups (Jones 57-58).

Marcus Banks in his book *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* provides many definitions on ethnicity. He says that "a number of disciplines have contributed to our understanding of ethnicity- anthropology, sociology and social geography are the major ones, but there have also been contributions from social psychology, socio-biology, social work and educational theory, and even literary studies" (Banks 1). So the term ethnicity can be given different meanings depending on the context.

In *Grolier Encyclopaedia of Knowledge* the ethnic minorities have been defined as "a group of people who differ in language, race or colour or in national, religious, or cultural origins from the dominant group- usually the majority population of the country in which they live". The differing identity of an ethnic minority may be displayed in any number of ways, ranging from distinctive customs, lifestyles, speech patterns and essence, dress or food preferences to the particular attitudes, value systems and economic or political beliefs

espoused by the members of the group. Frequently, ethnic minorities are discriminated against the members of the dominant group. The position of the ethnic minorities may be a result of past wars of conquest or of immigration patterns that are centuries old. It is estimated that about one quarter of the world's population belong to some kind of ethnic minority.

In their article *Human Trafficking in Conflict Zones: The Role of Peace Keepers in the Formation of Networks* Anthony D. Smith and Cuesta mentioned that ethnic groups are historically given collectivities or psychological communities whose members share a persisting sense of common interest and identity that is based on some combination of shared historical experience and valued cultural traits - beliefs, culture and religion, language, ways of life, a common homeland. With passage of time such groups emerge, at times change or disappear altogether (Smith and Cuesta 28).

From the above discussion the term ethnic community or ethnic group can be conceptualized as that which possesses the following traits:

- There must be a name for the group which serves as an emblem for self identification.
- Another powerful feature of national and ethnic identity is language. It is seen that one of the major reason for ethnic clashes is demand for language rights and language policies.
- Religion is one of the ethnic markers in societies where religion spreads over various arenas of social life.
- The economic and political aspects in the life of ethnic groups give them a base to form a territory. Many ethnic groups aspire to have their own territorial state.
- Culture is a distinctive element of any ethnic group. Customs, norms of life, language, religious practice etc. distinguishes one ethnic group from another.

In other words ethnic group can be referred to that group of people who share the same ancestry, cultural heritage, language, homeland or national experiences. Moreover, other features that

define an ethnic group are their religion, rituals, dress, food and physical appearance.

1.3 Concepts of Ethnic Violence and Conflict:

The UN defines violence against women as 'Any act of gender based violence that result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or sufferings to women, including threats such as acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life' (1993 UN Declaration of Elimination of Violence Against Women, *The Assam Tribune*, July 27, 2012).

The concepts of 'violence' and 'conflict' are often used synonymously although they have different connotations. There can be no one perspective or meaning of violence as across disciplines and methodologies different understandings of violence will emerge. Elizabeth A. Stanko in the introduction to *Meanings of Violence* discusses different forms of violence in different contexts and discusses how violence is an area that has engaged enormous debate among scholars.² 'Violence' as a term as such is ambiguous and its usage is in many ways moulded by different people as well as by different social scientists to describe a whole range of events, feelings and harm. In an essay exploring ethnic and nationalist violence, Brubaker and Laitin discusses the problem of defining violence: "The problem [of defining violence] is not that there is no agreement on *how* things are to be explained; it is that there is no agreement on *what* is to be explained, or *whether* there is a single set of phenomena to be explained"(quoted in Stanko 3). What violence means is and will always be fluid, not fixed; it is mutable. Therefore violence cannot be understood through available definitions of violence or as found in the criminal statutes. Therefore by taking an approach that does not assume a standard definition of violence or conceptualized as fixed one can extend the understandings of violence by taking into account the diverse sites of violence and the nature of violence. According to Stanton 'it is only through

fluidity of definition that we can think creatively about disrupting violence as a social phenomenon” (Stanko 3).

In the Introduction to her book Stanko also discusses the various complexities involved with the notion of violence. As has been pointed out here, the popular view regarding the term includes two aspects, viz. the evil perpetrator and the other, the innocent victim. But nothing is as simple as it seems to be. Stanko argues about the diverse forms of violence like “Domestic violence, racist violence, homophobic violence, abuse of the elderly, sexualized violence, leisure violence and violence towards and maltreatment of children” (Stanko 4) and problematises further by stating that the idea of violence also involves the diminishing of the rights of the people affected by violence. Again according to her, the victims of various forms of violence also suffer from discriminatory attitude and unequal treatment in society. Cairns while discussing about violence states that:

we must distinguish interpersonal violence from intergroup or political violence, the latter defined as 'violence perpetrated by one set or group or people on another set or group of people who were often strangers to each other before the violence occurred.' (Cairns 10)³

John Archer and Jo Jones in “Headlines from History: Violence in the Press, 1850-1914”⁴ observes the portrayal and representation of the violence by the print technology and argues how the reporting of these events got theatrically affected by the coming of the print media during the mid 1850's. According to them even the mere representation of such events raises serious questions and has severe moral and social underpinnings regarding the role of the press in the contemporary times. In regard to the depiction of the images of war, Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndmann in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* mentions how:

A common image in ethnicnationalist conflicts, as well as in national liberation movements in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, is the woman refugee gazing out

hopelessly or witnessing the death of her child. Along with the woman victim, another prevalent war image is that of a woman with a rifle over her shoulder and a baby on her back, or, in similar fashion, images of nationalist Croatian or Serbian mothers and daughters protesting on the street to prevent relief trucks from reaching zones belonging to the "enemy." These prevailing war images of women have been largely spread by state institutions, media, and military organizations and have come to constitute iconic representations and/or symbols of women at/in war. As such, they tend to serve strategic, nationalist, or state purposes and tell us little about the diversity of women's experience during war, their role on the front lines, or their care in refugee camps. (Giles & Hyndman 4)

According to them the images of war in relation to women serve the purpose of the 'state apparatus' and the governments to showcase the multiple experiences of women engaged in the wars. They further maintain that, the concept of the distinction between the public and the private space no longer holds any significance where the private stands for the female(civilian) space and the public meant the male (military) space. In reality the private or the civilian spaces became the easy targets of violence and conflict motives. The civilians are the most who suffer most of the casualties.

As cited in *Education and Conflict*, Coser defines conflict as two or more people involved in struggle over values, power, limited resources, competition for status, etc. Again, according to Roche, conflict means "the playing out in violent form of political relations".⁵ Davies in his analysis of the concept of conflicts lists various theories for an effective study and understanding of conflict.

1. **Attribution theory:** There is a general tendency of people to attribute positive qualities, causes and consequences to their own self and assigning negative qualities to the others. The assigning and attribution of

negative characteristics to the other may result in blaming the others.

2. **Equity Theory:** This theory studies how people believe that they are deprived of their fair amount of share and distributive justice of which they consider valuable.
3. **Psychodynamic Theory:** People live with their problems and try to tackle with them from one of many unconscious states like anxiety, fear, ego, guilt, etc. Displacement takes place when the parties in concern unable to locate or direct the source of their problem, directs it to a more easily available source.

Not only these, Davies also mentions some other conflict theories which are as follows: Field Theory, Interactionist Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Phase Theory, etc.

Sanghamitra Choudhury in her book *Women and Conflict in India* mentions that based on the common article of 1949 Geneva Conventions and Article 1 of the Additional Protocol II, the International Committee of the Red Cross defines internal conflicts as 'protected armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising on the territory of a state [party to the Geneva Convention]'. The armed confrontation must reach a maximum level of intensity and the parties involved in the conflict must show a minimum of organization.

Schröder and Schmidt in their work *Violent Imaginaries and Violent Practices* mentions how George Simmel looks at violence as a 'synchronic event'. He says that it a type of social relation at intragroup and intergroup levels that serves specific ends between individual and collectivities. This set a ground for a new approach on violence.

Violence can be categorized under three main approaches.

- a. The operational approach where the focus is on ethnic antagonism caused by rift owing to material possession and other political conflicts.

- b. The cognitive approach focuses on emics of the cultural construction of war in a given society
- c. The experiential approach looks at violence as something related to individual subjectivity not necessarily confined to situations of intergroup conflict. This kind of violence structures people's everyday lives, even in the absence of an actual state of war.

David Riches in his chapter '*The phenomenon of violence*' says that violence is an act of physical hurt which is thought to be legitimate by the performer and some witnesses. Violence can transform social environment and can send forth an ideological message before the masses as violence is highly visible.

Though a lot of violence has occurred throughout the world yet issues on women and their problems do not get focused. Women are a marginalised group globally; they experience marginalization in a very different way. They face socio-economic insecurities, health problems and the welfare and future of their children are at stake.

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* ethnic conflict is a form of conflict in which the objectives of at least one party are defined in ethnic terms, and the conflict, its antecedents, and possible solutions are perceived along ethnic lines. The conflict is usually not about ethnic differences themselves but over political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial matters. From the root term ethnicity the ethnic violence and conflict can be conceptualised. Gursel G. Ismayilov (2008) in his study of "Ethnic Conflicts and their Causes" focuses on the concept of ethnic conflict and he conceptualizes it as fight among specified group to establish their identity. There is a general consensus that the violence is the result of ethnic hatred and ethnic conflict which causes loss of human rights, enormous loss of lives, property, security and poses threat to democracy.

Internal conflicts within the state are usually found to be caused by identity crisis which often leads to ethnic conflicts. Apart from conflicts arising out of identity crisis, some other types of internal conflicts also take place. These conflicts could

occur due to ideological differences, racial differences, environmental issues or disappointment with governance. According to Brown these kind of internal conflicts are sometimes termed as "ethnic conflict" and is used to describe a wide range of internal conflicts.⁶

According to Gursel G. Ismayilov (2008), ethnic conflicts can be defined as conflicts between ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic state, which have been going on some time, which may appear to be unsolvable to the parties caught up in them. Michael E. Brown says that an ethnic conflict is a dispute about important political, economic, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities (Ismayilov). Ethnic conflicts mostly result in loss of life, denial of basic human rights and immense material destruction. Some ethnic conflicts escalate into interethnic or internal war.

It is seen that in most of the cases groups seeking more autonomy are often defeated. The central authorities impose their own conception of order in a successful manner. Sometimes secessionist groups are successful and establish their own states. We can thus conclude that there are three types of outcomes in ethnic conflicts. The conflicting groups might agree to live together, agree to live separately, or fight to control the situation.

The main reason for identity conflicts is because of ethnic, tribal, religious, linguistic differences. These conflicts often take place with a hope that the central government initiates a process to give power, property etc. to local groups. Conflicts between ethnic groups in a multi ethnic state, which seems to have no solution and has been continuing for a long time, can be defined as ethnic conflict. According to Michael E. Brown, an ethnic conflict is a dispute about important political, economic, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities (Brown 5).

There is innumerable loss of life and property, deprivation from basic human rights in the ethnic conflicts yet these conflicts keep on erupting frequently. Usually the desire for forming a separate state, protection and recognition of minority

interest or demand for greater autonomy with the state give rise to ethnic conflicts.

Violence too has multiple meanings. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines violence in six categories:

1.	Physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging, or abusing....
2.	An act or instance of violent action or behaviour.
3.	Intensity or severity, as in natural phenomena; untamed force....
4.	The abusive or unjust exercise of power.
5.	Abuse or injury to meaning, content, or intent....
6.	Vehemence of feeling or expression; fervour (Giles 4-5).

These multiple meaning makes it difficult to put the word 'violence' under one definition. The definitions vary from conscious to unconscious, physical to psychological. People get a better understanding of violence once they witness it.

Violence and Conflict has been conceptualized for better understanding of the issue of women's spaces in violence ridden BTAD area.

1.4 Spaces of Women:

Space is created for an individual in a society after continuous co-existence. Because of patriarchal structure of the society the space for women is hardly given its due. Stein in her book *Empowerment and Women's Health: Theory, Method and Practice* mentions that "theoretically women's *space* has been defined in terms of women's access to (and control over) material resources (including food, income, land) and other forms of wealth and to social resources (knowledge, power, prestige) within the family, in the community and in society at large. It has also been defined as 'the ranking, in terms of prestige, power or esteem, according to the position of women in comparison with, relative to, the ranking given to the position of men". (Stein 45)

However, the domination of male authority and emotional bonding created by parental care results in subordination of women. The social structure gives men the power to dominate and exploit women. When women are placed in a conflict situation

she loses all her space. Most of the time, they have to leave home where the women had created a space of their own with great difficulty. In the relief camps the situation is even worse. Not only are they targeted by the perpetrators but also by men of their own community. There is lack of security in all spheres. The women mostly become victims of voyeurism and they often find themselves in helpless situations. Looking around they find no private space for themselves especially in the conflict ridden zones.

Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1994) said that inhabited space transcends geometrical space. The ordinary space is not viewed in an ordinary way. The outlook surely changes. Spaces can be psychologically created or removed. From this it can be inferred that in conflict ridden areas the spaces of women are not always the physical space provided for them. The question is if they are able to create a psychological space for themselves in such violence torn regions.

Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift in the introduction of their edited book *Thinking Space* mentioned that in literary theory, space is often a kind of textual operator which is used to shift registers. In anthropology, it is a means of questioning how in an increasingly cosmopolitan world communities are constituted. In media theory the modes of structuring primarily visual media space tends to signify an aesthetic shift away from narrative. In geography and sociology, space is a means of questioning actuality or reality. Space can be used to move closer to fact. It can be said that in all disciplines, space is a representational plan or design. (Crang & Thrift 1)

When a conflict takes place there is no doubt that women lose their physical space. Their displacement and refuge in relief camps during conflicts make them lose their geographical space. Apart from this they too lose their psychological and social space. The spaces in areas of conflict are completely a male domain and women hardly fit into that space, be it psychological or social. This is evident even in the conflict affected areas of BTAD.

Mostly the spaces of women are determined by the 'rule of

male' in respect to their public and private life. In contrast to the physical area, the present study seeks to conceptualize women's space with respect to human relations in a civilized society including all aspects of human rights – political, social, psychological etc. Further, the concept tries related to spaces of ethnic violence and conflict. Patricia McFadden (2017), a feminist worker visualizes women's spaces and stated – “When women become articulate about who they are sexually and cast off the old patriarchal myths about what a women can be and what she is not allowed to become, women become powerful and acquire the ability to say no to violence; no to unpaid labour; no to exploitation and discrimination in the name of cultural preservation”. In this perspective, the present study attempts to look at women's spaces apart from spatial spaces in public and private life and tries to contend the unique features of women to be mothers, wives, sisters and so on, especially in times of crisis that arises in situation of violence and conflict.

McFadden in her article *Why Women's Spaces are Critical to Feminist Autonomy* tried to point out how space is politicised and gendered in societies of all communities. Certain practices like breeding, feeding are assigned to women across cultures and those spaces are marked as 'female' which is a private space. Public spaces are marked as 'male' territory and as such women are excluded from spaces where “key decisions relating to power are deliberated and implemented” (Mcfadden)⁷. Women end up living and leading a life in their 'feminised space' which is considered to be least important. Even at times of crisis though women struggle to keep the heath burning and restructure their lives their contribution to create a 'real' family is ignored. In all the important institutions of the societies the term 'family' and 'household' are masculine. If women become the household head it is immediately feminised and often ignored by the masculine society.

A lot of work has been done on social, political, psychological aspects of women but a study on human relations and women's spaces during and after ethnic conflict has rarely been done. This concept is to be inducted in the conflict ridden

area of BTAD.

1.5 Women in Conflict Situation:

Women constitute nearly half of the world population and the achievements of women are almost as equal as men. Unfortunately their success, contribution in various field, their sacrifices always remain invisible. Women have always been tortured, subjugated, made victims of conflict and worse still are their status in violence ridden areas. Their protests and demands are often misinterpreted, misread and often sneered at. The masculine language describes women in various ways since ages. Whichever way she may be described she has always been projected as an individual who is forever in need of protection, vulnerable with no power of her own.

'What is a woman?' is a question asked by Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal work, *The Second Sex* and she herself answers it in the following way:

humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as a relative to him, she is not regarded as autonomous being. And she is simply what a man decrees, thus she called 'the sex' by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as sexual being. For him she is sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential...He is subject, he is Absolute.-she is the Other. (Beauvoir, 1)

A number of work has been done on the marginalized section of the society by historians, sociologists and educationists. But to my knowledge very little work has been done on the spaces of women who are indirectly or directly affected by violence or conflict – both physically and psychologically. Moreover it has been observed that women has very conveniently excluded from any kind of decision making. No special policy has been adopted by the government to meet the needs of women in the relief camps. There are no special supplies of personal needs for women. Though a lot has been discussed on justice for woman but

the socio-political reality is quite different. Unless and until the veil of silence is lifted and women's voices are heard, the realities explored, the possibility to understand the ground reality would be pretty difficult. Women's privacy especially in the relief camps need to be studied.

Though a lot of work has been done on the problems and violence on woman no concrete solution has been arrived at. A number of seminal works has been done based on which policies were proposed to be framed for the upliftment of the status of woman.

In her paper "Women and Social Violence" Elise Boudling points out that social violence on women are primarily based on social or institutional structure of the patriarchal order which is the root cause of all kinds of oppression and discrimination against women. This discrimination leads to behavioural violence. Because of the social structure and socialization the male child becomes the oppressor and the female child the victim when they turn into adults. This discrimination has perpetuated against women in political participation as citizens with equal rights, socio-economic fields and also at home. Though a lot of protests against such discriminations are staged women are still treated as property.

Considering the fact that violence is a primary instinct of all creatures for survival in a hostile environment and its ubiquitous nature, social scientists like Coser (1964), Gurr (1970), Hannah Arendt (1966), Casfield (1970), Mackenzie (1975) etc have considered some amount of violence as natural and functional and only when it becomes volatile the destructive aspects of violence are recognized. But the argument of this thesis is the truth of violence on women especially in conflict ridden areas can be given justice only when the victims come out with their personal tragedies. But the fear of isolation, shame and the patriarchal structured pressure prevents women to come out of with their true experiences in the rehabilitation camps.

As Indrani Dutta(2002) in her study on *Women in Armed Conflict* mentions that armed conflict situations arise at the instance of external aggression by a foreign country or internal strife, communal hatred, attacks on marginalised communities and minorities, religious fundamentalism, extremism, class and caste conflict and state repression. When the situation, during armed conflicts, gets beyond control and the police force of the state fails to contain the situation, the State Government requests the Central Government to send army. The state military becomes the protector and serves many functions. According to the convention, the military serves to protect the borders of the state and citizens within them from outside aggression. The military establishments serve another function. During internal conflicts that take place within the state the military protects the repressive state elites from rebellion from their own people. In other words the internal security of states is maintained at the expense of non-elite citizens.

Although conflict takes different forms in different parts of the globe or within one country, the predominant forms it has taken in some parts of India, is the confrontation of the state (protector) and the community (protected/defenders) or the representatives of the community, especially those fighting for the right to self determination. Another form of armed conflict is when communities or marginalized groups are pitted against each another, fighting to claim land rights and ethnic identities that are already under some kind of threat both of internal and external migration. Both the above forms of conflicts can be found in the North East region of India. Through the decades the conflict in the North East has been made extremely complex by both state and non-state actors as protectors and defenders, who are not open to any kind of conflict resolution(Dutta 70).

Whenever ethnic violence takes place all the people residing in that particular area are affected but it has been observed that the most affected are the women and the children. This leads to forced migration, loss of source of income which brings in lots of misery in the lives of women who mainly takes the responsibility of running the household. Women are raped,

terrorized and their rights are violated whenever there are ethnic violence in any part of the world. Women are faced with different kinds of problems in the relief camps where they take shelter during ethnic conflicts. According to Amnesty International, women living in the areas of ethnic conflicts face different kinds of problems like (i) Increased vulnerability of women under special legislation; (ii) Rape and sexual abuse by security forces; and (iii) Increased problems of access to redress.

Moreover, when women are forced to live in relief camps owing to displacement, they face other problems that hardly come to light. Sadly enough, the protectors and supposed defenders of women become the violators of women's rights.

In the context of ethnic violence and conflict in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) of Assam, the issue of women in spaces of conflict in the society brings forward the need for a new discourse. In the clashes a number of men, women and children have been rendered homeless, turned into refugees, lost labour, land and property, lost education and above all lost security of life. The immense impact of all these fall harshly upon women, especially in the post conflict periods.

In a meeting held in Kokrajhar on February 3, 1988, Pramila Rani Brahma, the then President of ABWWF "reprimanded as well as reproached in furious sentiment that the Assam Police forces unleashed by the AGP led Assam Government attacked, as if in war field, the Bodos, repressed them inhumanly, destroyed numerous properties, houses, looms having weaving threads and weaved clothes, mixed the rice with grinding glasses, poured poison in the wells and tube-wells, raped their sister like young girls and their mother like aged women, arrested the innocent Bodo villagers and had beaten them, kicked the and dragged them violently on the ground and such dangerous tortures were beyond imagination" (Mosahari 77).

A number of ethnic clashes took place in various phases in the Kokrajhar District during 1996-99, 2001-06 and 2012 displacing lakhs of families of Bodos, Muslims and the Adivasis who had to take shelter in hundreds of temporary relief camps.

However, the ethnic clash which took place in almost all the district of BTAD had increased the number of displacements i.e. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and numbers of temporary relief camps as well as a number of inmates. The women inmates in all the camps were to face all sorts of harsh reality that compelled most of them for uncertain dimension for survival. The feeling of alienation, fear psychosis, scarcity of basic requirements, and loss of privacy, land, property and relatives, health hazards, paucity of drinking water, food and shelter made them a source of severe of humiliation. Such inhumane situation of women undoubtedly should not be a norm for a country like India which has celebrated several decades of Independence and yet women are imprisoned in their own home and situation.

Ethnic clashes in BTAD area have resulted in numerous problems for the women, especially in the post ethnic clashes. The BTAD witnessed a number of ethnic violence since a couple of years for protecting their land rights and identity. The displaced persons in 2012 conflict between Bodos and Muslims in the BTAD area had to be sheltered in the temporary relief camps (279 camps) with about 4 lakhs inmates (*The Sentinel*,2012). Besides, in this conflict about 100 lives were lost. The human tragedy had not only taken place during the violence rather it accentuated in the sheltering temporary camps with immense tragedy of women of all ages. As one of the consequences the Bodo, Muslim and Adivasi women have significantly been humiliated in particular. The vulnerable women of the society in that area have drawn serious concern in respect to their spaces over time. A look into the intensity of humiliation of women at the ground level would pave the ways for reducing humiliation, miserable livelihood and for sustaining a dignified space for women in future.

Considering the above perspectives, the issue of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict is conceptualised in general and the present study seeks to induct it into the conflict rided BTAD area. The situation of women in the post conflict era has drawn serious concern of all sections of the civil society, policy makers and scholars. The spaces of women in the post ethnic clash necessitates an in-depth discourse not only for searching the

background, causes and impacts, its extension its dimension etc but also to sort out policy perspectives for enhancing women's rights in a perfect manner. Further such study would help for policy perspectives of women to reduce troubles and sufferings from such unprecedented situations. Therefore, the issue of "Women in Spaces of Ethnic Violence and Conflict" has been chosen to assess the condition of women in the ethnic conflict ridden areas in general and in BTAD in particular. The reference period of the study is between 2008 and 2015. During this period a number of violent incidents took place and women have been victims of immense turmoil for too long in the affected areas. However their issues were not addressed.

To achieve such broad objective the study chooses the following specific objectives.

1.6 Objectives:

- i. To examine the women in spaces of conflict ridden areas.
- ii. To examine the status of women who are directly or indirectly victims of conflict.
- iii. To look at the position of women orphaned or widowed as a result of ethnic violence.
- iv. To examine the condition of women in the refugee camps.
- v. To understand why and how conflicts affect the lives of women.

1.7 Data Base and Methodology:

As the objectives suggest, the present study is an evaluative and a descriptive one. Besides it has to go through historical perspectives. Therefore, it has to depend on both secondary and primary sources of information. For achieving the objectives, use of libraries, collection of secondary sources and a field survey was conducted. Since the study is on women's issues a feminist approach to the interpretations becomes inevitable. Secondary information was gathered from various published sources such as books, journals, newspapers periodicals and reports. Historical perspective of the issue relies on various published sources of information on regional, national and global

issues. On the basis of such published sources, the study frames the concept of women in spaces of ethnic conflict and violence.

To fulfil the need of primary information, a multi stage purposive random sampling technique was adopted. The four districts of BTAD namely Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang and Baksa were selected purposively. These districts were chosen because these are under the jurisdiction of BTAD which have witnessed ethnic violence for last two decades. 5 villages in Kokrajhar, 6 in Udalguri, and 5 in Baksa were selected randomly. This random selection of villages was justified because these villages were among the affected areas of ethnic violence. This phase also comprised of random selection of 3 relief camps in Chirang district. The random selection of villages and relief camps was on the basis of the highlighted villages in reports and news items published in various regional and national newspapers. After is a selection of sample units was made. Two types of sample units were chosen randomly. The first type is the household head women from affected villages and the second type is sample units from the women camp inmates. A sample size is of 285 units comprising of 213 (80 Bodo, 79 Muslim and 54 Adivasi) under first type and 72 units (Adivasi) under the second type. Later data was collected from the field through a pre-tested structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared in two sets as per the requirement of the study. Sample units were interviewed using the prepared questionnaire. The first set of questionnaire relates to the general information from the women at the entry to the camp and after their return to their respective villages, and the second set relates to specific aspects of camp living condition. During the field visits, interviews and discussions were conducted to collect the required data and research tools such as hand notes, note pads, diary, camera, etc were used. To collect primary data field visits were conducted in two phases during November, 2014 and December, 2015. Finally using qualitative and quantitative analysis the findings of the study are achieved. In respect to quantitative analysis simple statistical tools such as tables, rates and ratios were used.

The methodology used in the study is

- a. Observation method
- b. Community Conversation
- c. Focus Group Discussion

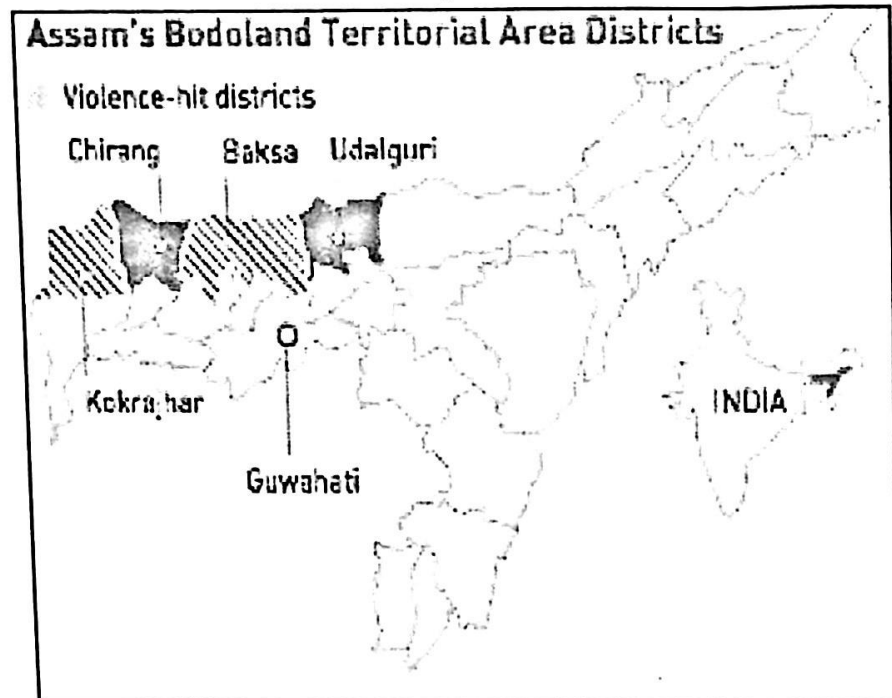
Information gathered through the above procedure are analysed to achieve the findings of the study that are highlighted in the consecutive chapters. The selection of sample from field level under the above procedure is highlighted in a tabular form as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Selection of samples from the study areas

Sl. No.	District Name	Village name	No. of sample		Total Sample
			In-camp	Post-conflict	
1	Kokrajhar	Bedlangmari	-	21	21
		Madalpara	-	16	16
		Pakriguri	-	15	15
		Pakriguri	-	15	15
		Hapachara	-	20	20
		Kachugaon	-	11	11
2	Udalguri	Rowta Bagan	-	15	15
		Phakidiya	-	12	12
		North Nagdolbari	-	15	15
		Hatigora	-	08	08
		Jhargaon 1	-	13	13
		Jhargaon 2	-	10	10
3	Chirang	Ravanghat	23	-	23
		Lawripara	14	-	14
		Juiloga	35	-	35
4	Baksa	Narayanguri	-	11	11
		Apoha	-	17	17
		Khagrabari	-	21	21
		Bennabari	-	08	08
Total			72	213	285

The study area is indicated through the Map of Assam including the areas where recent ethnic violence and conflict took place in BTAD.

Map 1



1.8 An Overview of Conflict and Women:

If pre-conflict and post-conflict is seen the position of women do not get better even if her contribution to peacemaking, planning refugee camps, reconstructing families and societies in conflict zone is commendable. In recent past Assam has become a fertile ground for conflict and peace studies. The state is plagued by intra-state conflict. The role of women specially in ethnic violence is either very passive or some women are seen sensitizing people in the affected area on the issues they feel that need to be focused. At the end of the conflict, many families lose their husbands, sons, daughters and properties worth lakhs of rupees. Hundreds of people are displaced from their homes, women are tortured and raped and households rendered destitute with no bread winners. According to Staub (1996) this kind of collective branding of localities and dehumanization of inhabitants make vulnerable groups susceptible to mass violence (Staub 117 -132). Though some women have mature understanding of the historical and political reason for this but most of them feel victimized and violence faced continue to haunt their minds as late as 2015.

The problem of trauma was also taken into consideration in the study. Trauma is associated widely with psychological context of victimization. In Greece the word trauma originally stood for wound referring to an injury inflicted on a body. Later in the 19th century the term came to be used for psychological wound or injury where Freud's writing on trauma especially enunciated that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or a simple illness of a wounded psyche; it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). This is quoted in Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experiences, Trauma, Narrative and History*.

Mukhim in her article "*Women in Conflict Situations*" describes how women are traumatized with no trauma centres anywhere near the camps. This has also been marked during the field study. Interestingly though so much violence is faced by women in this region where conflict has become a part of life yet no women are taken in the peace making process. Under-Secretary-General, Michelle Bachelet, the head of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment for Women (UN Women) says "Wherever there is conflict, women must be a part of the solution" (Mukhim, *The Assam Tribune*, March 29, 2013).

The tradition of Western science is built on positivism an epistemology of the fact. For both natural and social science, the world of experience is generally believed to be an objective world, governed by underlying regularities, even natural laws. Every epistemology, Genovasays, involves assumptions about the points of a triad: the knower, the known, and the process of knowing (Sprague 34).

Of course, it is curious that just when women and ethnic minorities have begun to demand a voice in creating knowledge, an epistemology emerges claiming there is no truth to be known. Standpoint theorists begin by rejecting positivism's pretensions of creating a view from nowhere in favour of the postulate that

each subject is specific, located in a particular time and place. Thus a knower has a particular perspective on the object. There is no single privileged standpoint. Because women exist in a wide diversity of social locations based on class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, etc., the subject of feminist knowledge is multiple and sometimes conflicting (Haraway 1988). Further, women cannot be the only generators of feminist knowledge; men in oppressed locations need to understand themselves and contribute to our understanding of their experience from a feminist perspective (Harding 1991). If knowledge is grounded in experience, then we need to recognize and take into account the understandings generated by people in their daily life. However, we also need to recognize the authority that comes from the experience of having studied something, having reflected on it, and paid attention to the reflections of others.

Haraway argues that we need to see the world not as an object over which we have control but as a "coding trickster" with which we try to have conversations using the methods, or "prosthetic devices," that help us see (Haraway 1988: 594). The oppressed have a different knowledge of the oppressor and they manage to stay with the oppressor.

We are in a social relationship with the rest of the community. In the social division of labour, we are cultural workers; our product is understandings. Because the community in which we live and work is organized in relations of social domination, the work we do—the questions we pursue, the strategies we use to gather and interpret evidence, and the forms and venues in which we communicate our findings—connects us in balanced ways with either the powerful or with the oppressed. If we continue to do it as it has been done before, we will connect with the powerful, not the oppressed, whether we choose to consciously or not.

Most of the nations in the world simmer with violence, be it political or ethnic. Assumptions are made that men are the perpetrators and women are the victims. But in situation of violent conflicts their experiences cannot be built upon a single

discourse. Diversity of geographical location, culture, religion and society makes the experiences of the victims vary. A universal interpretation cannot be considered especially so when there is a contextualized analysis.

1.9 Background and Rationale of the Study:

It has been observed that voices are raised in favour of women's rights, women empowerment, justice for women, enhancing the status of women, protecting women dignity and self respect but when there is mass violence of women's rights there are hardly any policy that offers women the protection and privilege they are entitled to. The post-conflict condition in general has attracted much attention in developing research and policy circles (Nagraj 2015) but no attention has been focussed on the needs of women in relief camps or otherwise during and after conflict.

Taking into cognizance the diverse definitions of violence and conflict the reference to these words in this study applies to its association in the present time with violence and conflict as used in political terminology and discourse of nation, state, ethnicity and identity. Since the area of study is violence and conflict in Assam from **2008 to 2015** therefore the use of the terms derives their signification from the nature of conflict during this period. Assam has been home to number of ethnic and communal clashes resulting from the demands of autonomy by various ethnic groups. In these clashes a number of men, women and children have been rendered homeless, turned into refugees, lost labour, land and property, lost education and above all lost security of life. Although there have been studies on causes of violence there have been very few studies on women's experiences in these situations. Studies generally read in terms of perpetrators and victims and quite often women get subsumed within the category of victims. However considering the fact that women's experiences are different from men, even experiences of

women in spaces of conflict and violence are bound to be different.

Though a lot of violence has occurred during this period yet issues on women and their problems do not get focused. Women are a marginalised group globally; they experience marginalization in a very different way. They face socio-economic insecurities, health problems and the welfare and future of their children are at stake.

Although there is a growing body of feminist discourse establishing that war and peace are gendered activities and consequently women's experiences, responses and needs are different, it is often overlooked by national and international policy makers (Manchanda 2015). Besides, women's issues mostly rely on domestic violence, sexual harassment, molestation etc in day to day happenings and these are mostly pronounced and discussed. But humanitarian discourses relating to women in conflict affected areas are left behind and they are mostly excluded from the post conflict reconstruction. The cries of women as relief camp inmates remain unheard and uncared for.

The diversified spaces of women in post conflict situation bears significant impact in the society. Therefore, the study of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict and inclusion of BTAD is justified. Besides, no study so far has been conducted on the issue particularly in the BTAD area. Hence the present study has a strong background and rationality. The study is supposed to be significant not only to unearth the ground realities of women inmates in the relief camps but also to prescribe the policy initiatives.

1.10 Some Ethnic Conflicts around the World:

Ethnic conflicts have been witnessed all over the world ever since man started settling down leaving behind their nomadic life. Most of these conflicts arise from the desire of the subordinate groups to improve their condition in the area that they are settled. In today's world the desire is to promote their status within the state rather than separating from the country they belong to. The ethnic groups try to protect the traditional

land and culture which always has a risk of being eroded by influence of the modern society.

Several ethnic groups have settled in different parts of the world after leading a nomadic life for long. Eventually with growth of population and invasion of other ethnic groups into their demarcated area the original inhabitants started feeling threatened mostly because of cultural and political domination. This threat led to the feeling of identity crisis among the people. To assert their power and presence these neglected groups of people started revolting leading to ethnic clashes.

Though the history of ethnic clashes dates back to time immemorial only some recent and prominent multi-national and regional clashes that erupted around the world have been mentioned below

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. and allied nations launched the invasion of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The pro-American Afghan government was supported by the US in their mission against the Taliban and al-Qaida terrorist groups. This **Afghan war** continues to this day.

In 1992 the Islamic Salvation Front won the election in Algeria. But the military did not accept the result and declared the election as void. After a long struggle the Islamic Salvation Army were bound to surrender. However, the other ethnic groups refused to bow down and are still carrying on their movement against the government. This led to the **Algerian Civil War**.

After the Second World War the ethnic groups in Myanmar raised their heads and started to demand for separate nation for themselves. This gave way to the **Burma (Myanmar) Civil War** which continues till date. Moreover, the Narco guerrillas control some areas of North Burma. They are notoriously known to harvest opium and earn huge amount of money. The government has somewhat failed to curb this practice.

In Nepal the people especially the people from the rural areas were dissatisfied with the monarchy. On February 13, 1996

there was a rural uprising with the motive to overthrow the king and bring an end to monarchy. In this process the **Nepal Civil War** took place. However, after the death of the king, the new king was overthrown and election took place in a democratic way. The Maoist contested in the election. They also took active part in the civic life of Nepal. This brought an end to the war.

The Northern Ireland Conflict began because of the disagreement between the majority Protestants and minority Catholics in Northern Ireland. This led to the conflicts that were fought in Ireland by the British. The Catholics who were the minorities wanted to be a part of the Irish Republic. The Protestant para-military group fought against the Catholics and over 2,500 people died in this clash. In 1998 a peace agreement was signed and this brought an end to the struggle.

In Sri Lanka a major conflict is going on between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority where a large number of people, both civilians and security forces, died. Records say that this war resulted in 70,000 deaths. This **Sri Lankan Civil War** that started in 1983 is yet to come to an end.

In Sudan the conflict is based on the ideological differences between race and religion. The government has Muslims as most of its members and their functioning is pro Muslim. The black Christians settled in the southern part of the country feel dominated and are raising their voice against the functioning of the government. Thus it can be said that the **Sudanese Civil War** that began in 1983 is the result of this disagreement.

In the island of Sulawesi both Christian and Muslim population lived in harmony. However, with time conflict took place between the two groups. Violence became intense, when in 2001 a large number of Muslim militants called Laskar Jihad arrived on that island.

In Yemen the rural tribesmen were unhappy with the Government and protested against its poor economic policy. This led to frequent conflicts between the government and the tribes.

Known as the **Yemini Tribal Uprising**, this conflict began in 1998.

A worldwide war against terrorism in fact began after the infamous terrorist attack on **September 11, 2001** in the USA. Al-Qaida, the terrorist organization led by Osama bin Laden, hijacked four commercial flights of United States. They then crashed them into the important buildings, the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre. This was the result of the conflict between America and the Middle East Muslim world.

The identity and cultural crisis among the Bhutanese led to inter ethnic clash with the Nepalese that escalated around 1990s. Many ethnic Nepalese fled from Bhutan and took shelter in Nepal. This also made the Bhutanese residing in Nepal insecure. By 1996 there were over 1, 00,000 Bhutanese refugees in camps of Nepal. The Bhutanese government wanted to remove the large number of Hindu population and preserve the culture and identity of Buddhist tradition.

During the **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict** the Soviet troops and army jointly forced the Armenians who weresettled across Shahumyan to leave their villages. The Armenians settled in Nagorno-Karabakh or neighbouring area. This major ethnic cleansing documented a large number of human rights violation. Inhuman abuses and attacks were initiated by the Soviet and Azerbaijani forces. About 17,000 Armenians were deported and there were many cases of torture, rape, harassment, destruction of life and property that were reported. Many protested over the atrocities on the poor Armenians but these human rights violation could not prevented.

After the Gulf War in 1991, Kuwait started a campaign against the Palestinians. Of the 4, 00,000 Palestinians living in Kuwait 2, 00,000 fled for security of their lives. However, they were not allowed to enter Kuwait again and the rest of the Palestinians living in the Gulf were put under great economic pressure. An environment of terror and violence forced them to leave and go to Jordan where they had citizenship.

Another major ethnic cleansing known as **Rwandan Genocide** took place in 1994. In this ethnic clash almost one lakh Tutsis were massacred by Hutus. The pain and struggle for survival knew no bounds.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) expelled the entire Muslim population from Northern Sri Lanka. They were given 48 hours time to leave their homes. The members of the LTTE looted their properties and even killed the Muslims who refused to obey their orders. This took place in October of 1990. The main motive behind this expulsion was to create a mono ethnic Tamil state in the northern part of Sri Lanka.

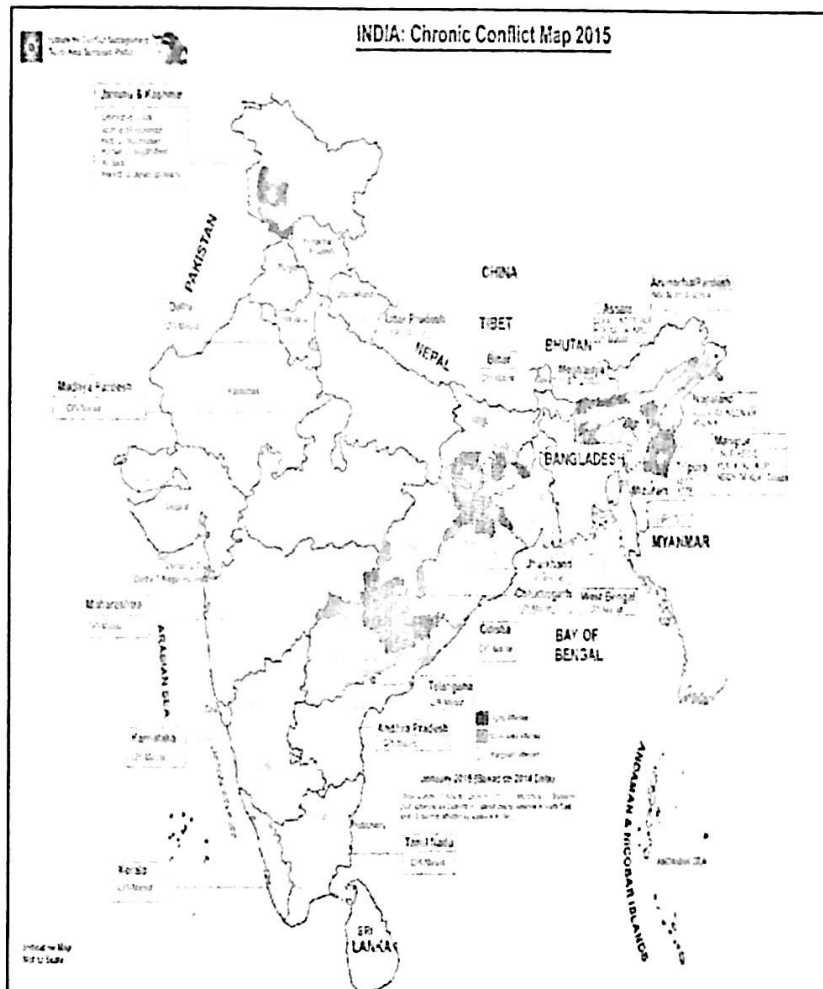
Another ethnic cleansing took place in Kyrgyzstan where many ethnic Uzbeks were killed in 2010. Thousands of Uzbek refugees took refuge in Uzbekistan. The International Media and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe condemned the killings.

Violence between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims took place in western Rakhine State in Myanmar in 2010. This incident displaced around 90000 people. The conflict is not yet resolved

1.11 Ethnic Violence in India:

India has been experiencing ethnic and communal violence since a couple of decades. The prominent places where such violence has been taking place are indicated through Map 2.

Map 2



Source:

<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/database/conflictmapindia.html>

From the above map we can say that most of the eastern part of India and Jammu and Kashmir is beleaguered by ethnic conflict and violence.

With a peasant uprising in the town of Naxalbari on May 25, 1967, the Naxalite came into being. They fight for the poor and helpless peasants and their activities are not limited to Naxalbari alone, it has spread out to the states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The naxalite guerrillas work among the peasants and fight the private paramilitary groups funded by wealthy landowners and also the government security forces. This Naxalite Guerrilla War has been going on till the present day.

A separatist insurgency group targeted the Hindu Kashmiri minority in Jammu and Kashmir. Since 1991 1200 people have been killed and over 400000 displaced. In 1989 Islamic terrorist entered the region and started a campaign to convert Kashmir into a Muslim State. The militants' wanted to establish an independent Kashmir. This resulted in ethnic cleansing where over 400000 Kashmiri Hindus have been forced to leave home or murdered. In 2009 a resolution was taken by the Oregon Legislative Assembly to recognize September 14 as Martyrs Day. This was decided to acknowledge the ethnic cleansing of the non Muslim minorities of Jammu and Kashmir by the militants on September 14, 2007. They also introduced a resolution to recognise the disputed territory as Indian Territory. Both the resolutions could not be passed and the conflict is still on.

Violence against the North Indians started in Maharashtra on February 3 2008. Similar incidents were reported in Nashik, Latur, Pune, Aurangabad, Mumbai and Jalna. To save themselves from violence nearly 25,000 and 15,000 North Indians fled from Pune and Nashik respectively.

In Assam the ethnic violence in BTAD area has been taking place since 1993 and more than 400000 people were displaced and many killed. This ethnic clash took place between the Bodos, the Adivasis and the Bengali speaking Muslims. The problem of encroachment by the immigrants and a sense of identity crisis among the Bodos led to the conflict.

1.12 Review of Literature:

There is a plethora of literatures relating to gender issue, second sex, violence of women's rights, etc but few are found relating to the spaces of women especially in the areas of ethnic violence and conflict. The available literature that relates directly or indirectly to the issue of spaces of women particularly in ethnic conflict ridden areas is being summed up below.

James R.Giles in his book *The Spaces of Violence (2006)*, discusses that violence is not confined to urban areas alone but expands to rural spaces too. To supplement the theoretical

approach to violence the understanding of space becomes necessary. He discusses Henri Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space* (1974), to delve into the nature of space. Lefebvre states that there are 'three essential forms of space: "first, the physical—nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly the *social*" (Giles 2006: p 10).

Giles also points out the vision of sacred violence that came out of Girard's study of culture where he stated that the rituals of purification are controlled by male priests. The modern capitalism too is phallogentric nature. Such male domination in all forms leaves little scope for women to assert their rights and a study on their condition in conflict and violence ridden area which becomes even worse needs the attention of researchers and social scientists.

Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman in their edited book *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (2004) tries to bring out a connection between militarized violence that occurs in pre-conflict, during and post-conflict period. Even in absence of violence the areas of conflict can be places of violence. A feminist analysis is done to understand the gendered politics. It cuts across existing views and emphasises on the situated nature and limits of knowledge claims (Haraway 1991). Another issue addressed in the book is how gender relations differ across multiple cultural, political and geographical contexts. One common gender identity that emerges is that women are considered the bearers of culture and tradition and men, the protectors of nation and property. Even in the ethnic-national movements it is observed that retaining the cultural identity and values are assigned to women.

The book also points out that there has hardly been any acknowledgment from the media on the importance of feminist struggles. Examples have been given of the Milosevic regime where women were active and contributed towards the struggle to defeat the dictatorship yet their work and their faces are almost missing. Another issue reflected taking the example of

Kenya's Northeast Province is that the refugee camps constructed during violence can also become conflict zones as there is a tendency to compete with the local population for resources and also external insecurity. The Somali refugees who go in search of fuel (mostly women and girls) are often at risk of being sexually abused. Moreover, the NGOs, local people, refugees, UN workers and the refugees have a rationale for being there in the camps. Aggressive gender politics is seen in the delivery of services and protection plans. The occurrences of rape and torture which is common in the conflict zones cannot be curbed even in the refugee camps.

In the introduction of her edited book, *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones from the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights* (2011) Elizabeth D. Heineman has tried to bring forth an age old issue that has haunted human civilization since long – the issue of sexual violence in conflict zone. The book aims at theorizing sexual violence based on empirical evidences. It deals with the devastating trauma suffered by women because of the sexual violence which is common in the conflict zones. Heineman wishes 'to provide the tools to integrate theories of sexual violence in conflict zones into larger understandings of "public violence," or large-scale state-sponsored or state-supported violence' (Heineman 2). Contributors to the book have looked into sexual violence from different perspectives narrating stories of the victims of the war zones in different parts of the world. For convenience and better understanding of the problem of women in conflict zone and the politics of sexual violence, Heineman has placed the essays under five categories - Sexual Violence in Peace and in Conflict, The Economy of Conflict-Based Sexual Violence, Telling of Sexual Violence, Law and Civilization and Towards an International Human Rights Framework.

Nirupama Subramanian in *Sri Lanka Voices from a War Zone* (2005) speaks of the price the Sri Lankan had to pay for the elusive peace in their war inflicted zone. She talks of how the lives of ordinary people like farmers, fishermen, housewives, businessmen and school children were disrupted and deranged because of the war. Their stories of trauma and inexplicable

sufferings are narrated to uncover the truth in the war zone which goes unreported.

Exploring the reasons of ethnic conflicts, Ismayilov (2008) found that the birth of many new states and oppression and dictatorial administration gave rise to ethnicity and ethnic violence. Outcome of a high level team framed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, found that due to certain feelings about occupation of some parts of BTAD by immigrants as one of the reasons for the conflict (*The Assam Tribune*, July 30, 2012). Dr.Pahi Saikia (*The Assam Tribune*, August 19, 2012) suggests the failure of the Government in documenting migration and protecting demographic status as reasons leading to conflict. The author focussed on the growing mixed population which was caused by inter group security dilemma that resulted in violence in BTAD.

Kikon (2015) visualized women's space in the post conflict situation and elaborated on their crisis of livelihood, sustainability and development. In reference to applicability of developmental project in Nagaland she observed the adverse impact on women after armed conflict and militarization which has been at work since 1997 during cease fire. She looked into sustainability and crisis of the people specifically the women simultaneously when they were working in a number of international and national funded NGOs for rehabilitating the displaced women and children.

Further the study found that development programmes undoubtedly ushered new generation of economic entrepreneurs but there has been an increase of cases of harassment against women, child trafficking, rape, domestic violence, illegal shops etc. stunted the growth and shrunk the space of women. Post conflict situation in any society compels some women to migrate in search of work especially to towns and cities. Most of them have to work as domestic workers, daily wage labourers etc. Some also fall into the trap of human trafficking and other kinds of human rights violation thus losing their space in their own domestic arena.

Kumari (2015) focuses on women's lives after migration. Her study found that migrated women feel happy with some earning but they are not aware of their fundamental right as woman. So in a situation like this a study needs to be done on spaces of women in the conflict ridden zone.

In regards to consequences of harsh living in relief camps Wolte (2004) finds that major victims of human trafficking are women and children who are forced in exploitative labour or prostitution. Confining to the study of the armed conflicts and the post conflict situation he author highlights trafficking as one of the major dimensions of women in the post conflict situations

Srikant (2015) made an insight into the ethnic militancy in Assam. It shows how the killings during the ethnic violence compelled the kith and kin of the affected people to take shelter in the camps. Although the study did not enter into the details to probe into women's condition, it did unearth a small percentage of the pathetic condition of women and children.

Although there have been studies on violence in Assam (Sanjib Baruah 1999, 2005, Samir Kumar Das 2008, M. Hussain 2000) there have been very few studies on women's experiences in these situations. Studies generally read in terms of perpetrators and victims and quite often women get subsumed within the category of victims. However considering the fact that women's experiences are different from man, even experiences of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict are bound to be different. To this extent the study would do a field survey in conflict zones in BTAD under study.

Goyari (2015) in her study wrote on the kind of losses the affected people face and her findings relate to loss of lives, property, communal harmony, loss of education, loss of trade and commerce, transportation and communication etc but there has been no focus on the miseries of women living in the relief camps and dimension of livelihood in post-conflict times. However, her study highlighted that about 5 lakhs of people were displaced and sheltered in 259 temporary relief camps.

Mosahari (2011) analysed the ground realities of Bodoland Movement and focused on the political crisis of the Bodos as the root cause of the struggle. The study searched the background of the movement and found that the basic problems were on literature, language, economy, land, education, socio cultural aspect, job opportunities, development etc. The ever deprivation of basic amenities and hatred as conceived by the Bodo leaders, even led them to raise the slogan "Divide Assam Fifty Fifty". This resulted in social conflict with their counterparts and violence began to take place in different areas of Assam. The study mentions violence created by the APTF (mass rape of Bodo girls on 25th and 27th January, 1988). Such heinous crimes took place on account of trying to control the voices of Bodo movement. Such incidents forced the Bodo agitators to start '*jangi*' movement. Consequently, a series of violence in different forms began to take place. It has been observed that the ultimate victims were usually the women.

Borgohain and Sinha (2014) focuses on the IDP households who are unable to go back to lead a normal life because of fear and a feeling of insecurity. This leads to the detrimental effects upon girls and women. There is usually shortage of medical aid and the pregnant women in the relief camps have to face untold miseries. Moreover, there is shortage of baby food which causes a lot of distress among the mothers.

Monisha Behal, North East Network in her article "Women suffer most: Armed Conflict and Women's Rights in North East India" has mentioned that feeding the family has always been the prime responsibility of women. It has been observed that men often move away from the rural area to earn better leaving the women behind. On advent of any conflict the women become insecure and vulnerable. This hampers the regular activities like going to the fields, working for longer hours etc which results in less income. To strengthen the situation these women has to ask men to protect them which makes women lose both autonomy and power.

In a report published in *The Assam Tribune* (September 5, 2001) on "Women losing battle for equality at work places" it was found that the approach towards the glass ceiling is not working, with women's representation falling in almost half the industries surveyed. The annual "Sex and Power" report found that women are losing the battle for gender equality in workplaces after years of progress. This study was carried out by the Equality and Human Rights Commission of Britain (3).

It is seen that most of the literature revolves around the general issues of women and the difficulties they face in a patriarchal structured society. Yet there are many literatures relating to discrimination and harassment of women in general but only a few literatures are available to the pertinent issue of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict. Further, scanty of literature specific to women and girl child in conflict ridden areas. Therefore, the issue of women in spaces of ethnic conflict is conceptualized to induct it in conflict ridden areas of BTAD.

¹ Stanko maintains that the meaning of violence is not just limited to the understanding of the perpetrator of violence and the victim, rather the meaning of the term violence carries multiple connotations and is also at times contradictory.

² Stanko maintains that the meaning of violence is not just limited to the understanding of the perpetrator of violence and the victim, rather the meaning of the term violence carries multiple connotations and is also at times contradictory.

³ The statement made by Cairns has been cited from Lynn Davies *Education and Conflict*.

⁴ John Archer and Jo Jones in "Headlines from History: Violence in the Press, 1850-1914" ed. Elizabeth A. Stanko *Meanings of violence* raises vital issues regarding the concept of violence by stating about the representation of violence in the print media.

⁵ Roche's statement has been cited from Lynn Davies *Education and Conflict*.

⁶ Source: <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/04/24/ethnicity-as-a-source-of-conflict-in-india/>

⁷ Source: http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=630:why-womens-spaces-are-critical-to-feminist-autonomy&catid=127:theme-mens-involvement-in-womens-empowerment dated 03/05/2017

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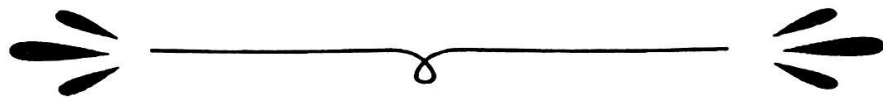
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CHAPTER

ROOTS OF
ETHNIC CONFLICT
IN BTAD



2.1 Introduction:

A sense of identity can be a source not merely of pride and joy, but also of strength and confidence. And yet identity can also kill- and kill with abandon. A strong - and exclusive – sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord. (Sen 1-2)

Conflict theory refers to the theoretical approach that views social phenomena as the result of conflict between individuals or groups. Conflict theory has developed at both micro and macro levels. The micro level studies the individual and from his or her behaviour seeks to draw inferences about collective behaviour. Psychologists, social psychologists, and sociobiologists locate the cause of conflict behaviour in human nature-either in the imperatives of survival that have programmed forms of aggression and defensive response, or in individual aggressive impulses triggered by personality dynamics.

Further, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and organization and communications theorists adopt macro approach to conflict. They hold that collective conflict behaviour is not an individual product of individual behaviour but behaviour socially induced either by a sense of collective grievance or by national leaders for purpose of defending the national territory or defeating another nation. This school defines conflict as a condition in which one identifiable group engages in conscious opposition to another identifiable group, in what the American sociologist Lewis Coser has called "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources" (175). Conflict may, according to some theorists, have a positive social function. It may be the only means by which an exploited group can assert its rights and it maybe an unavoidable characteristic of international politics in that the threat of violence is essential to creating stability and maintaining peace, wars being one means by which states adjust their competitive interests.

Because conflict theory investigates the process by which nations develop their national strategies and decide upon war, it has become germane to the study of international politics. Conflict theory must take account of the motivations and perceptions of individual leaders and decision makers-and to the extent that individual citizens are engaged in conflict by conscious appeals to their beliefs and patriotism, the micro level approach to conflict theory remains important.

Ethnic violence is often the result of identity crisis among the people who in spite of being a part of a state population since pre historic times feels that they are neglected or rather given step motherly treatment after a few centuries. A discussion about the root causes of ethnic violence and conflict, BTAD in particular, necessitates an analysis of historical perspective. It becomes pertinent to explore the evolutionary process of various Bodo organizations to establish their distinct identity to preserve their culture, tradition, language and land rights.

2.2 Origin of the Bodos:

If we search into the pre-historic period of Assam we have to go back to the period of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji in her work *Kirata Jana Kriti*(2014) mentions that the Negroid had first entered from different frontiers. Later some of them entered Assam and Andaman and Nicobar Islands through Arab and Iran coast. The Nagas of the North East India is said to have some similarities with the Negroids. But we have no evidence of their influence on Assamese culture and society.

The next ethnic group to enter Assam was Proto-Austroloid. The Kaibartas of Assam belong to this group. They are referred to as Kewatta in the ancient inscriptions of Ashoka. After them came the Austroloid who entered India through different regions about 1500 BC. They were hunters by nature and were known as Saba in *Ramanyana* and *Mahabharata*. This group has been divided into two parts: Austro-Asiatic and Austronesia. The Khasis of Assam belong to the Austro Asiatic division.

After them came the Dravidians who are known as the Nadials and Kaibartas in Assam. Gait says that the '*Nadial*' Group of Upper Assam belongs to this group. Gunabhiram Baruah mentioned that both '*Nadial*' and the Kaibarta belong to two different ethnic groups who share the same profession.

Then entered the Tibeto- Burman ethnic group and they were known as the Kiratas in ancient Assam. The Tibeto-Burman group was divided into three sub divisions - Tibeto Himalayan, Assam Burman or Lohitic and Uttar Asom Sakha (North Assam Branch). Tibeto-Himalayan has no link with Assam or its culture. However, both Assam Burma and Uttar Asom Sakha have influenced the cultural and social life of Assam. The Assam Burma group consists of Bodo, Kukisin, Kochin, Burme, Lulumosu and Sak or Lui. Every branch has its sub-branch. But since this study concerns the Bodos of Assam only that branch will be discussed.

The ethnic group that influenced Assamese culture the most was the Bodos. Sabeswar Rajguru in his book *Itihaasor Paat*

Meli divides the Bodos into the following groups - Bodo or Kachari , Tiwa, Dimasa, Garo, Koch, Rabha, Tripuri, Chutiya and Moran. Dr. Nagen Saikia divided the Mongoloids into four groups - *Proto Mongoloid, Dirgha Mastoki Mongoloid, Prokhosto Mostoki Mongoloid and Tibeto Mongoloid*. Juginitantra, a 10th century text mentions that Kairataja dharma was followed in Kamrup.

Bodos came to Assam during the pre-historic period and established themselves in the region. The first king of Assam was Mohiranga Danav who belonged to the Kirata dynasty. His original name was Mairanga. (Kanak Lal Baruah, 2008) The kings who succeeded him were Hatakasura, Sambharasura, Ratnasura, and Ghatakasura. All these kings belonged to Kirata dynasty but their names were aryanised. Dr. Saikia said that Kirata kings ruled Assam from 10th century BC to mid 5th century BC i.e. for almost 500 years. Narakasura became the king of Pragjyotish after defeating Ghatakasura. He was the first Aryan king who came from Mithila (Central India). His kingdom stretched from the Karatoya River to the Brahmaputra Valley. After his death in the hands of Sri Krishna, Narakasura was succeeded by his son Bhagadatta. As mentioned in Mahaharata, King Bhagadatta participated in Kurukshetra War. He helped the Kauravas with his host of soldiers. The soldiers who accompanied Bhagadatta were copper complexioned, straight upright hair and stout structure which indicates that they were of the Tibeto Burman group or in other words they were Kiratas.

In *Kalika Purana* it has been mentioned that when Naraka was ruling Pragjyotisha, King Bana ruled Sonitpur. King Bana took initiative to build the Shiva temple known as Mahabhairav temple. The King was a devotee of Shiva. He belonged to the pre-Aryan period. The romantic stories of Usha, King Bana's daughter and Anirudha, Krishna's grandson has been described in the poetical work of Kumar Harana. Sri Krishna and Rukmni, daughter of Bhisma, king of Kundila (Modern Sadiya). There are legends that tell us stories of Hidimba of Assam and Chitrangada of Manipur. All these legends of the pre-historic times have connection to Assam. It belongs to the period before the Aryans came to North East part of the country.

Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers mentioned in Mahabharata, was married to Hirimba, who belonged to Kirata group (Nath 37). This is proof enough that the Kiratas were the inhabitants of Assam even during the Mahabharata period. After Bhima deserted Hirimba, the society which she lived in was very disappointed and shunned her. Being abandoned by Bhima and her kith and kin, Hirimba along with her friends and supporters travelled to Assam and the North East Frontier. They later developed a modern town on the bank of river Dhansiri at the foot of the Naga Hills. They named the place as Di Ma which meant children of the big river. This group later came to be known as Dimasa (Nath 40).

History states that the earliest rulers of Pragjyotish belonged to the Danava dynasty. As mentioned earlier the first king was Mahiranga Danava. But authentic history of Assam is said to begin with the Varman dynasty which began with King Pushyavarman, who ruled in the second quarter of the 4th Century AD. The last and most illustrious king of this dynasty was Kumar Bhaskaravarman (594-650 AD). Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese scholar visited Kamrupa during his reign. The scholar wrote a valuable report on ancient Kamrupa. Apart from this report, there are Nidhanpur and Dubi copper-plate inscriptions and Banabhatta's Harshacharita that gives information about King Bhaskaravarman.

After the Varman Dynasty the rulers of the Salastambha dynasty became the rulers till the end of the 10th century. The prominent historian K. L. Barua writes, "It is therefore reasonable to suppose that when Bhaskaravarman died, Salastambha who was the governor of the Mech country organized a revolt and that he dethroned the immediate successor of Bhaskara Varman and proclaimed himself as king" (Baruah 2008: 67).

The Pala dynasty came to power after the rule of Salastambha dynasty. The people elected Brahmapala as their king and he occupied the throne of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa in about 900 AD (Barpujari 140). A powerful ruler of the kingdom of Kamrup was Prithu. The first Mahammedan invasion of Kamrup

took place during his reign under the leadership of Mahammad Ibn Bakhtiyar (1205-1206 AD). He was defeated but later in another Mohammedan confrontation, Prithu failed to prevent the invasion. He was overpowered in 1228 AD. The last king the Pala dynasty was Sandhya (1250-1270 AD). Perhaps around 1260 AD he shifted his capital from Kamrup to Kamatapur. The very little account of the Mahammedan expeditions proves that the river Karatoya was the western boundary. We have to study the chronicles of the Ahoms who entered the eastern corner of the Brahmaputra Valley in the early 13th century, to know about the eastern portion of the territory

According to the chronicles the Chutia kings ruled the region east of Subansiri and Disang rivers. A Kachari kingdom existed further west. Several Bodo tribes enjoyed independence in the south and south east part of the region. There existed a number of small chiefs known as the Bhuyans beyond the Chutias in the north and Kachari on the north bank. Though the Bhuyans were independent of each other but when they were threatened by a common enemy they joined forces (Gait 39).

The Kacharis extended their kingdom to Central Assam. To the west of the Kachari kingdom was the Kamata kingdom. King Durlabh Narayan was a powerful Kamata king. The Kamatas were followed by the Khayen line. King Nilambara, the last of the Khayen king was defeated by the king of Bengal, Hussain Shah in 1493. It was during this time some local Bhuyans become prominent.

Later the Koch king Bisvasingha (1515-1540 AD) came to power. His son, Naranarayana (1540-1584 AD), a powerful ruler extended his kingdom upto Brahmaputra valley on the east and North Bengal in the west. He also occupied the neighbouring kingdoms of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Tripura and Cachar. His brother, Chilarai was a constant companion and helped in administration and military power. After the death of Naranarayana the kingdom split into two parts. The eastern part came under the Ahoms and the western part was controlled by the Mohammedans.

The Ahoms came to Assam in the early 13th century. The advent of the Ahom rule changed the political, cultural and social history of Assam. They unified the scattered groups of people into a homogenous unit. The Ahoms came from Burma across the Patkai range and entered Assam under the leadership of Sukapha. Through their skilful moves they established themselves over a large area within a short time. They overpowered the Chutias, pushed the Kacharis to southern part of Brahmaputra and formed the great Ahom kingdom. In the 17th century their kingdom extended to the west of Manah River. There were forty four Ahom rulers who ruled over Assam. With the passage of time the Ahoms adopted the Assamese language and Hindu religion abandoning their own foreign language and religion. They can be said to be the torchbearers of unified Assam and forerunners of advancement of the state.

The Ahoms were attacked by the Mughals of Delhi several times but were defeated under the competent commandership of Lachit Barphukan. However, there was a long civil war known as Moamaria uprising leading to several internal struggles and finally the Burmese war put an end to the reign of the Ahoms. The British interfered in the affairs of the Ahom in 1824 and finally with the signing of the Yandaboo Treaty in 1826, between the British and the Burmese, Assam came into the hands of the British.

From the above study we can see that the Bodos were the inhabitants of Assam since the pre-historic times and how with the passage of time they were sidelined and subjugated by the other powerful ethnic groups. According to Rajmohan Nath the word Boro came from the word Bodo which means motherland. The Mongoloid people of North Himalaya and West China were known as Borofisa (son of the soil) which means son of motherland. Bodo as an ethnic name was accepted from the 19th century. This Bodo group was known as the Kacharis during the Ahom rule. The first branch of Bodos came to Assam from the confluence of the rivers, Dila-Ubra (big water) and Changibra (small water) which is now thought to be Gobi Desert. The rivers dried up in the course of time and formed a desert (Nath 38).In

the history of Ahom rule it is found that during the medieval period, the Ahoms developed a friendship with the Bodos. Assimilation with the Ahoms took place through friendship, marriage, trade etc.

While analysing ancient history of the Bodo-Kachari Mongoloid group it has been seen that they arrived in Assam during the pre-historic period. Therefore Dr.Nagen Saikia has said that they were the first layer of the Assamese community (Saikia 69). Of all the places in India, Assam is an area where the largest element of Indo-Mongoloid is found. They dominated primarily the political scene and to some extent influenced the culture. In this part of India the composite culture of the Ganges valley always dominated the culture including religion. Excepting members of a few of the higher castes of the West (mostly mixed Austric-Dravidian-Aryan), most of the people are of Indo Mongoloid origin with some Austric and Dravidian stratum. The Indo-Mongoloid inheritance therefore, is very dear to the people of Assam.

H.K.Barpujari in his book *Comprehensive History of Assam: Vol I, 1990* had stated that the Proto-Australoid, Proto-Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman and Alpine people inhabited proper Kamrupa. The Aryan culture which was not there in this part of the nation was carried into Assam either by the Alpines or the Brahamanas who had already come in contact with other races when they entered Assam. It is likely that these Brahamanas ultimately influenced the culture of ancient Assam (Barpujari 1990: 197). As in other parts of the country the Aryan settlers mixed with the local groups of Assam, accepted and assimilated with their language, culture etc. However, it cannot be denied that the Assam population was predominantly Mongoloid in character and composition .Migration from the west by the Aryans had a strong influence on the people of the plains of Assam. However, the ruling power had always been of Mongoloid origin. From the above study we have seen that the Chutias, the Kacharis, the Koches and the Ahoms ruled Asam at different points of time. An opinion prevails that the Aryan group is not referred to as an ethnic group but as a group of people who

spoke Aryan language (Saikia137). Bhuban Mohan Das in his book *The People of Assam* mentions that Assam and especially the Brahmaputra valley had two major races of mankind – the Mongoloid and the Caucasoid. The valley served as the linking road between India and Southeast Asia. He states that “various population groups of different ethnic affiliations used this route at different intervals of time since time in immemorial laying the racial and cultural foundation of the people of this region” (Das 2012: 11).

With the increase of Aryan population, the Indo-Aryan language came to be the dominant language of Assam. The written literature that enriched the heritage of the state was also in that language. According to Dimbeswar Neog, Assamese, along with Bengali, Oriya and Maithili, formed the easternmost group of modern Indian languages which are considered to have come through Magadhi and to belong originally to the Indic subdivision of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages (Neog 37). However, the languages of the non-Aryans living in Assam had great influence on the Assamese language. From around the 10th or 11th century the Assamese language acquired a distinctive form. Therefore, to preserve their identity an aspiration for separate ethnic identity began to germinate among the Bodo people living in Assam.

2.3 Growth of Ethnic Identity:

The aspiration for distinct identity of Bodos has grown out of crisis of language, culture and sovereignty.

2.3.1 Language and Culture:

With the increase of Aryan population, the Bodos started isolating themselves from the common masses and started settling in the periphery of the Aryan towns. The Aryans who came to India with an advanced civilization started having a strong influence on all spheres. Since the study is confined to BTAD area the following discussion will be on why the Bodos started demanding a separate state. From the preceding discussion it can be concluded that the Bodos had been the inhabitants of Assam since the pre-historic times. At one time

Bodo was the most powerful language and the names of places and rivers are proof enough to establish the fact. The names of the places, streams, rivers and rivulets that bear the prefix Di, Ti or Doi are of Bodo origin. These prefixes mean water. So the names Dikhow, Digaru, Dihing, Dimapur, Dibrugarh, Doimukh, Dimou etc can be identified as Bodo names. The Aryans who came much later, accepted these names.

During their migration the Bodos brought with them not only their traditional language but also their native religion. They believed in Bathou, Shiva and Shakti. The kings namely Bhagadatta, Banasura, Bhaskaravaran were worshippers of Shiva. The Bodos built many temples during this time. Later these temples were modernized or developed by the Aryans. The Bodos settled in different parts of north-east India. They had an advanced civilization. They used stones and bricks for construction ever since the prehistoric times. The ruins of Dimapur, Tezpur, Kamrup and ruins of Shiva temple found in different parts of north-east India bear witness to their advanced civilisation. It is believed that Bodos were the first agricultural nomads to have entered this part of the country. They also practised the system of irrigation. In fact the British and the American missionaries who worked among them in the 19th century describe them as the best cultivators (Sonowal 20).

Apart from these the Bodo women were expert weavers. They reared silkworms and produced Muga silk, Endi of high quality. These were woven in handlooms and were in demand not only in the region but also in China and Tibet.

2.3.2 Loss of Sovereignty:

Through various rise and fall of the Bodo kingdom, the Bodo people were displaced several times, thereby they resorted to frequent migration. As per the information, the Bodos were the first agricultural nomads to have entered in this part of the country. They found security in the possession of their land. The women were expert weavers whose handloom products were sent to China and Tibet. But with passage of time and domination of the Aryans, it resulted in loss of not only sovereignty but also

loss of economic avenues. Such factors led to dissatisfaction among the Bodo community; thereby they began to organize themselves for restoring their lost glory in a democratic way.

2.4 The Bodo Movement in Assam:

With the aryanization, the tribes of Assam started alienating themselves from the Aryan society and the Aryans also started feeling superior as they had entered Assam with advanced civilization. The condition became worse after independence. The Bodos became very upset when the Indian Constitution placed them under the 'Tribal' category and backward class. It had hurt their self respect because they were once the ruling dynasty of Assam. They felt subjugated in their own land. They had apprehended the hijacking silent aggression of the originally microscopic minority Assamese people who seem to have been resorting to exploit the Bodos and other Mongoloid groups of people politically, socially, economically, linguistically culturally and ethnically by imposing Assamese language, culture through heinous policy of assimilation and conversion.(Mosahari 10) In spite of having a glorious past they were pushed back. Patriotism and courage inherited from their ancestors, the Bodos took part in the Freedom movement of India. Leaders like Ratan Kachari, Jetuki Sonowal, Madan Boro, Moniram Boro, Bhatiram Kochari, Raotaram Boro etc. laid down their lives for the country.

The reformation brought in by the great Bodo social and religious reformer, Kalicharan Brahma and spread of western education brought in revolutionary change among the educated Bodos. For the first time, Assam Bodo Chatra Sanmilan was formed in 1918 at Dhubri which was the headquarter of undivided Goalpara District. In 1927 the Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilan, a Sonowal Kachari youth organization was formed which voiced their grievances. They started involving themselves in political activities.

The great Bodo social and religious reformer, Kalicharan Brahma accompanied Mahatma Gandhi to Rupsi (Old Goalpara District) and joined the Swaraj Movement till his death. His

leadership inspired the Bodos to take part in the movement. But after independence the Bodos were marginalised and deprived from distinct political identity and state administration. All their aspirations were laid to rest. When Simon Commission arrived in Shillong in 1928, Kalicharan Brahma along with some elites submitted a memorandum. The demands placed in the memorandum are proof enough to show how the Bodos were deprived of their rights and facilities. The demands of the memorandum were –

1. Separate Electoral Roll for the Bodo community
2. Formation of Bodo Regiment in the British Indian Army
3. Seat reservation for the Bodo-Kacharis in the State Assembly
4. Employment facility to the Tribals
5. Establishment of School in the villages for the Bodo children etc.

(Mosahari 15)

In 1930s, the Bodos realised that consciousness of identity alone will not help them. They must involve themselves in politics so as to seek political gain. In the annual session of Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilan held at Raha in 1933 all tribal groups including the Bodos came under one roof and in order to protect their interest and to stand equally with the advanced communities Assam Plain Tribal League was formed.

In the mid 19th century there was a growth of Assamese sub-nationalism. The Assamese identity was established under the guidance of the Hindu religious leaders. They urged the tribal people to convert to Hindus. The Bodos of Kamrup district objected to such strategies. But despite such objections many tribals took up Hindu religion. This attempt of caste Hindus to minimize the tribal population in Assam was countered by the Tribal League. The League demanded a separate electorate status of the plain tribes of Assam which was granted to the in 1937. From the year 1937 to 1952 the Bodos contested under the banner of Tribal League. Though they did not form any

government but they were the indispensable part in forming the Government. Gopinath Bordoloi could not have formed the Congress ministry without the support of the Tribal League. They maintained equal distance from both Congress and Muslim League. Later they joined the Sir Sadullah Ministry as their (Tribal League) conditions were agreed upon. As India was nearing Independence there was internal feud within the Tribal League over the issue of partition. Some tribal leaders joined Congress thinking that the interest of their community can be protected if they stay with the ruling party. Finally the Tribal League closed its political wing in 1953 and got involved in socio-promotional work.

2.5 Formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha:

On November 19, 1952 the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) was formed at Basugaon with the aim of promoting Bodo language and literature. They started organizing seminars and meeting to encourage scholars and writers of Bodo language. The BSS held annual sessions at various places inhabited by Bodos. This was another phase of Bodo Movement. In October, 1960, the Assam Legislative Assembly at Shillong passed the Assam State Language Bill making Assamese the only state language of Assam. (Ahmed 207). This Act brought about a lot of unrest resulting in creation of separate states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya. The same feeling of alienation from the mainstream Assamese society began to creep in among the Bodos. The BSS demanded that Bodo language should be introduced at the primary level in the Bodo dominated areas of Assam. Eventually it was introduced at elementary, secondary and as MIL at college level in 1963, 1968 and 1977 respectively.

In 1972 the Government of Assam wanted to abolish English as the medium of instruction at college and University levels. This was vehemently opposed by the linguistic minorities. Till 1974, the Bodos did not have their own script. They used multiple scripts like Assamese, Bengali, Roman and Devnagri. But to be introduced in the school as a subject it had to have a uniform script. The BSS formed a committee headed by

Mr.Thaneswar Boro which decided that the Roman script be used for Bodo language and would be implemented from session 1974-75. This step was opposed by the Asom Sahitya Sabha and the elite Assamese as anti-Assamese. A mass movement by the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) was launched and there were continuous agitational programme like bandhs and boycott in Bodo dominated areas. Later on the movement turned violent and 15 Bodo youths died in police firing (Sonowal 2013: 81).

Unable to control the situation Mr.Sarat Chandra Singha, the then Chief Minister of Assam referred the case to the Central Government. Just then Emergency was declared throughout the country. The Central Government used threats to force the Bodo leaders to accept Devnagari as their script. This further increased the anti-Assamese feeling among the educated Bodo youths.Gradually it became convenient for the Bodo people to accept the script. Finally in the 39th session of BSS held in Kokrajhar in March, 2000 it officially accepted the Devnagari script for Bodo language as they felt that it would act as a unifying force. However, the NDFB was not a part of the decision.

2.6 Beginning of Bodo Ethnic Assertion:

The year 1967 marked the beginning of a new phase in history of Bodo ethnic assertion (Ahmed 210). Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister announced that Assam would be reorganized on a federal basis. This declaration was made on 3 January 1967. The Bodos who till then were trying to improve their community by demanding seats in the Parliament and Legislative Assembly, started demanding for an autonomous region for the plain tribes of Assam. All this was done under the banner of Plain Tribal Council of Assam. Assam Reorganisation Act, 1969 was passed for reorganising Assam in a federal line. Accordingly Meghalaya and Mizoram were carved out of Assam in 1970 and 1972 respectively. This intensified the Bodo Movement and they hoped for a separate Union Territory.

2.7 Demand for Udayachal:

In 1972, the PTCA demanded a territory to be named as Udayachal comprising of Bodo and other plain tribes dominated areas of Assam. But the demand took a back seat as they had to involve in the Roman script movement in 1974-75. Later with the coming of the Janata Party in the Centre, Samar Brahma Choudhury, a top Bodo leader joined the Janata Party Government in Assam which divided PTCA into two groups – PTCA and PTCA (Progressive). This splinter group demanded a separate state Mising-Bodoland for two plain tribes. ABSU tried to unite both the groups since 1979 but failed. However, they did not give up. Their efforts gave birth to a new political party named United Tribal National Liberation Front (UTNLF) in 1984 under the chairmanship of Binai Khungur Basumatary. This party kept on submitting memorandum to the Centre from time to time demanding a separate state for the plain tribes of Assam. In a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India on July 10, 1985 they stated: “We desire a separate political identity recognising our age old political and geographical areas in the form of a separate state (Union Territory Status) to be carved out of the present artificial political arrangement called Assam, within the union of India” (Ahmed 211).

2.8 The Anti-foreigner Movement of All Assam Students Union (AASU) and Rise of Ethnic Feeling among the Bodos:

Around 1979 AASU started the anti foreigner movement in Assam, its main demand being the deportation of the illegal Bangladeshi migrants. The infiltration of the migrants had brought marked change in the demographic setting of the state. This movement was strongly supported by the ABSU which lasted for six years i.e. 1979 to 1985. The historical Assam Accord was signed on August 15, 1985 between the then prime minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi and AASU. As per the terms of the accord the then Congress led ministry of Assam resigned and paved the way for a fresh election in which the newly formed regional political party by the AASU leaders named Asom Gana Parishad

(AGP) participated. They won with absolute majority and formed the new ministry.

The ABSU supported AASU in the anti foreigner movement because they had a common cause – to drive away the illegal migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal. But later on they started feeling alienated as the Assamese leaders started dominating over all other communities of Assam. In all the table talks with the government the other cultural and ethnic groups were excluded. This made ABSU disassociate themselves from the AASU movement. Finally when the Assam Accord was signed with no provision for protecting the tribal interest the final straw was broken.

Clause 6 and Clause 10 of the Assam Accord created a lot of dissatisfaction among the Bodo people. They felt that it was anti-tribal. The clause 6 of Assam Accord asked for legislative and administrative safeguard “to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people” (Ahmed 212). The Bodos of Assam felt neglected because this clause did not mention the inclusion of the Bodos who were the most indigenous section of the population of Assam. Clause 10 of the Assam Accord stated that “Strict enforcement of all relevant laws would be made to endure prevention of encroachment of all government lands and lands in the Tribal Belts and Blocks” (Ahmed 212). The Bodos felt that the first part of Clause 10 would be implemented as most of the government lands were encroached by the Bodos as they were pushed away by the Assamese and the illegal migrants. So the eviction in the government lands would render the Bodos homeless. If the second part of the clause is implemented it would hurt the sentiments of many Assamese people but would surely help the Bodos. They feared the non implementation of the second part of the Accord as it would hurt the Assamese population.

2.9 Birth of ABWWF:

All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation (ABWWF) previously known as All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare

Federation (AATWWF) was formed on July 14, 1986. The name was rechristened because other than the Bodos, the women of the other tribes did not cooperate in the functioning of the federation. ABWWF took active part in the Bodoland Mass Movement which was spearheaded by ABSU to save the Bodos from the dominant Assamese culture. They organized mass rally of women in Kokrajhar on February 3, 1988 against the atrocities by the police force on Bodo women. The leaders of the Kokrajhar District ABWWF strongly protested against the Bhumka incident.

2.10 The Beginning of the Bodo Movement:

In 1986 Upendra Nath Brahma became the president of ABSU and motivated the organization to start a political movement. To unite all sections of Bodo community an organization named BPAC (Bodo People's Action Committee) was formed. Both the organizations i.e. ABSU and BPAC decided to start an agitation for redressal of their grievances. As feared earlier the AGP Government started large scale eviction programme which made the people staying in the government lands and forest areas homeless. There was no provision for their rehabilitation. ABSU and BPAC vehemently protested but their protest was not given any importance. They then demanded a separate area for the Bodos comprising of the north bank districts of Assam. This proposal was not accepted by the AGP Government. Moreover, immediately after coming to power the AGP Government made Assamese the third compulsory language in all the educational institutions. This circular was issued through Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA). The Bodos rose against this and demanded immediate withdrawal of the SEBA circular.

The Bodos were so frustrated by the administration of the government that they decided to launch a huge movement by holding mass rallies in all district headquarters. This was launched on May 2, 1987 and marked the beginning of the Bodo movement. They also demanded the formation of separate Union Territory for the tribal people in the north bank and separate Autonomous District Council on the south bank. ABSU submitted

the memorandum on May 2, 1987. The dominance of the Assamese Caste Hindus over the other communities of the state was responsible for this kind of demands.

BPAC and ABSU started a movement modelled on the AASU movement. They held rallies, demonstrations, declared bandhs, rail and road blockades and submitted memorandum. This movement was dealt with police repression and stubborn attitude of the Government. This stand of the ruling party hardened the attitude of ABSU and BPAC leaders. This led to a strong demand for a separate state for the Bodos. With the movement there was a growth of militancy among the Bodos. A section of Bodo youths tired of repression formed the Bodo Security Force (BrSF), a militant group, under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary, on October 3, 1986. They started killing, bombing, and kidnapping rich businessmen and tea garden executives to put pressure on the government for a Sovereign Bodoland. ABSU, however, did not support this demand for sovereignty as their demand was for a separate state. Eventually the BrSF became one of the most dreaded extremist groups in the North East. They even started killing Bodo people who did not support their ideologies. The BSS interfered and called upon all the people of the Bodo community to stop fratricidal conflicts and work towards community development. But BrSF did not pay any heed and continued with their sabotage activities (Sonowal 83-84).

The geographical location of the Bodo dominated areas has been conducive for nefarious activities that were carried out by the Bodo extremists. The northern part of the Bodo territory is covered with thick jungles and hills and is not used for regular surface communication. Moreover, all communication to the North East region by road or rail has to pass through Kokrajhar which is a Bodo dominated area. Any kind of activities that leads to dislocation of this link cripples the economy of the whole of North East region. All these factors worked to the advantage of the Bodo extremist group.

Some major incidents of sabotage took place delinking the North East from the rest of India. This posed major problems to all the North Eastern states. The political leaders of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram started pressurising both the Assam Government and the Central Government for a quick solution to the long standing Bodo problem. The Central government then took the initiative and proposed for the talk with the ABSU-BPAC leaders and the AGP leaders led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the then Chief Minister of Assam. But even after several rounds of talks the Bodo leaders felt that the AGP Government never showed any sympathy towards them. The leaders rejected further talks and urged the Central Government to come out with an amiable solution.

2.11 The Bodo Accord and Formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council:

In 1991, when the Hiteswar Saikia led Congress(I) Ministry was formed in Assam some meaningful discussions started taking place with the Bodo leaders. Saikia had maintained a good relation with the newly formed political party of the Bodos named Bodo People's Party (BPP). The BPP, supported by ABSU and BPAC, contested in the 1991 election which paved the way for a smooth discussion between the Bodo leaders and the Central Government. Rajesh Pilot, the then Minister of State for home affairs in the Narashimha Rao Ministry was asked to take charge of the Bodoland issue as he was familiar with the problems of the region. Under his initiative, the Bodoland Accord was signed on February 20 1993 in Kokrajhar by the ABSU-BPAC leaders and the representatives of the State and the Central Government in the presence of Rajesh Pilot and Hiteswar Saikia. This Accord brought a peaceful solution to the violent agitation. The Bodo leaders accepted the proposal of forming a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and their demand for separate statehood was withdrawn. But problems started brewing when the Bodos demanded that a number of non-Bodo villages, towns and tea gardens to be included in the BAC area. Many political parties, different student organizations and tea workers vehemently opposed the inclusion of non-Bodo areas in the

newly formed BAC area. However, the Government of Assam issued an extraordinary Gazette Notification on December 10, 1993 where it announced the formation of BAC consisting of 2570 villages of which about 1490 villages had less than 50 percent of Bodo population (*The Assam Tribune*, August 21, 1997). Formation of BAC was only a temporary solution as the problem of Bodoland would continue till the 10 km stretch of Bhutan border is given to BAC.

To form an interim Council the State Government in consultation with the ABSU-BPAC leaders formed the BAC Executive Council with S.K. Bwismutiary as the chief executive councillor. To represent the non tribal people a few members from the BAC area was nominated as member of Executive Council. The responsibilities of thirty eight departments of the State administration were given to the Council for administration within the BAC area. However, law and order and the police department were retained by the Government. Though BAC was created and power was given to the Council it failed to meet the expectations of the Bodos.

2.12 The Beginning of Ethnic Conflict and Violence in the Bodo Dominated Areas.

There were reports of violent conflicts within the Bodo rival groups and ethnic killing between the Bodo and the non Bodo people. The BrSF rejected the Bodoland Accord signed by ABSU-BPAC and continued their extortion, killings, sabotage and kidnapping activities. BrSF was renamed as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) on November 25, 1994. Their main demand was creation of Sovereign Bodoland in the northern part of Brahmaputra. The victims of NDFB were mostly people belonging to the ethnic minority group, police, paramilitary forces and employees of Government undertaking.

According to the constitution, which was adopted on November 25, 1998, almost twelve years after its formation, the following objectives were declared by the outfit.

1. Liberate Boroland from the Indian expansion and occupation.

2. Free the Boro nation from the colonist exploitation, oppression and domination
3. Establish a Democratic Socialist Society to promote Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, and
4. Uphold the integrity and sovereignty of Boroland.

(Mosahari 47)

Meanwhile, another Bodo militant group, the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLT) was formed. They too indulged in sabotage and violent activities to pressurize the Government to create a separate state for the Bodo people within India. This demand was contradictory to the demand of the NDFB who demanded sovereign Bodoland. This ideological difference resulted in fratricidal killings in which many Bodo people lost their lives.

Bodoland witnessed ugly ethnic riots between the Bodos and the Santals. There were constant conflicts in the forest areas of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Districts because of large scale encroachment of forest land and infiltration of people of doubtful identity to the Bodo areas of both the districts. The Santals too formed an armed group named Birsa Commando Force to challenge the armed Bodo youths. This resulted in ethnic riots between the two communities. Hundreds of people lost their lives, thousands became homeless and the affected people were languishing in the refugee camps. Though sufficient power was given to BAC, sufficient fund was not released as per the terms given in the Accord. This led to the resignation of S.K.Bwiswmutiary. Premsing Brahma formed another Interim Council of BAC. Brahma had come into some understanding with the Congress led government but he too resigned after snapping his relation with the government.

ABSU soon rejected the Bodoland Accord and started working towards unifying all factions of the Bodo people. The Bodoland Statehood Movement Council (BSMC) was formed with both the factions of BPP and ABSU. In the 31st Annual Conference of ABSU on February 20 1999, the ABSU and BPAC declared a fresh movement demanding separate state of Bodoland. They

pressurised the Central Government and held the view that only a state of their own can solve the problem. To calm down the Bodo leaders the Government of Assam included more villages under BAC but excluded the areas that they demanded. So instead of solving the problem it further aggravated it.

In 1999, the BJP led National Democratic Alliance came to power at the Centre and the ABSU-BPAC and NDA Government of India came to a ceasefire agreement with the banned outfit BLT. The ceasefire of the BLT came into effect from 15 March, 2000. Eventually, NDFB started feeling isolated from the Bodo people as the BLT settled for the extension of the Sixth Schedule to Bodo areas. They believed that stability and development can take place only at the time of peace. So the Bodo people now were eager to empower themselves with rights over land, ensure protection of their tradition and ethnic identity, and also enable to govern themselves. There were not less than 30 tripartite talks, between March, 2000 and February, 2003, before coming to an agreement. The Memorandum of Settlement was signed between the Central Government, Assam Government and BLT on 10 February, 2003. This was welcomed by different Bodo organizations including ABSU, BSS and All Bodo Women Welfare Federation. This was a historic settlement as it sought to develop and secure all ethnic groups and thereby bring in equality. This also fulfilled many aspirations of the Bodos.

2.13 The Bodoland:

In pursuance of MoS, an autonomous District known as Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council (BTAD) was constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Bodoland is situated in the north bank of River Brahmaputra in the state of Assam. The area is located at the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh which is mostly inhabited by Bodo people. The map of Bodoland includes the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). The BTAD was carved out of eight existing districts Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Sonitpur, Barpeta, Darrang and Kamrup. It is administered by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). The Bodoland Territorial Council was

constituted on December 3, 2003 and it took charge on December 7, 2003.

The Bodoland Territorial Council has four districts under its wings which together is called the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. The districts are Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri. Each district has its own headquarters. They are Kokrajhar, Mussalpur, Kajalgaon and Udalguri respectively. With a total population of 35,15,355 (2011 census) the BTAD comprises of 3082 villages. It covers an area of 8970 sq.km. Bodo and Assamese are the two official languages. The chief Executive member is Hagrama Mohilary. There are six nominated members of unrepresented communities in BTAD namely Assamese, Nepali, Rabha, Rajbongsi, Hindi Bhasi and Bengali and 34 elected members. Among the 34 members 5 seats are reserved for other communities, 5 seats are kept for open contest and remaining are reserved for Bodos. At present there are 12 Bodo MLAs in the Assam Assembly. There is one representative each from the Bodo community in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

2.14 Recent Ethnic Violence in the BTAD:

Ethnic conflicts mostly rise out of identity crisis as seen in most of the ethnic clashes around the world. This crisis brings in a fear of losing one's language, culture, land and most of all the unique identity. The problem of BTAD is no different. The violence in Kokrajhar and Chirang in July 2012 is the result of immigrants who were posing a threat to the economic and social life of the indigenous Bodos living in that area. According to the report of Seva Bharati, Purbanchal a gory violence broke out on July 19, 2012 in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang and Dhubri (though Dhubri is not a part of BTAD but the effects of these ethnic violence was also felt there) between the illegal Bangladeshi infiltrators and the aboriginal people of BTAD. This resulted in the death of hundreds of people. About ten thousand houses were burnt down and four lakhs people who lost their homes had no other way but to take shelter in the relief camps.

These illegal immigrants have changed the demographic pattern of the state more so in the BTAD, Dhubri, Barpeta,

Nalbari and Goalpara districts of Assam. The very existence and cultural identity of the ethnic communities became questionable. The Bodos were always apprehensive of losing their land and identity in the hands of the growing immigrant Muslim population in the BTAD (Goyari17). One immediate reason for the conflict was the encroachment of forest land in Fakiragram which the local people asked the immigrants to give up. But this led to violence in Kokrajhar and Chirang in which many people were killed. This spate of violence resulted in the killing of 109 persons of which 78 were Bengali speaking Muslims, 20 Bodos and the rest were from different communities of Assam (Goyari 14).

According to BTC officials so far 39,276 Bangladeshis have occupied 2,22,042 bighas of land illegally. The data of the districts are given below:

Table 2.1

Sl	District	No. Of encroachers	Land in bigha
1	Kokrajhar	20,423	1,30,269
2	Chirang	5,570	66,987
3	Baksa	7,562	8,252
4	Udalguri	5,721	16,534
	Total	39,276	2,22,042

In this long struggle for Autonomous Council and demand for separate state which gave rise to ethnic clashes from time to time claimed many lives. According to the SATP data, which was updated on October 23, 2016, 40 incidents that took place between 1990 and 2016 in the BTAD in which 16 civilians, 196 security forces and 382 terrorists lost their lives.

It has been observed that even after giving autonomy BTC has not been able to control the cycle of violence in BTAD. With only a few ethnic elite gaining a lot of power and important position majority of the Bodo population is seen living in deplorable conditions. There has also been an increase in fratricidal killings which is yet to be brought to negotiating table to end their differences.

Table 2.2

Violence in four-BTAD Districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri & Baksa [under BTC] since its formation (2004-2017)

Year	Districts	No of Incidents	Civilians	SFs	Terrorists	Total
2004	Kokrajhar	6	6	0	0	10
	Chirang	1	0	0	2	2
	Udalguri	0	0	0	0	0
	Baksa	0	0		0	0
2005	Udalguri	1	0	0	1	1
	Kokrajhar	6	2	0	4	6
	Baksa	1	0	0	2	2
	Chirang	0	0	0	0	0
2006	Udalguri	1	1	0	0	1
	Kokrajhar	0	0	0	0	0
	Baksa	0	0	0	0	0
	Chirang	0	0	0	0	0
2007	Kokrajhar	2	6	0	0	6
	Chirang	0	0	0	0	0
	Udalguri	3	2	0	6	8
	Baksa	7	2	0	6	8
2008	Kokrajhar	8	8	0	7	15
	Chirang	6	7	1	2	10
	Udalguri	5	7	0	0	7
	Baksa	20	18	0	7	25
2009	Kokrajhar	31	18	0	22	40
	Chirang	17	5	0	13	18
	Udalguri	8	0	0	17	17
	Baksa	19	7	0	23	30
2010	Kokrajhar	22	7	0	23	30
	Chirang	7	1	4	5	10
	Udalguri	16	3	0	19	22
	Baksa	5	2	0	5	7
2011	Kokrajhar	11	5	11	8	26
	Chirang	0	0	0	0	0
	Udalguri	1	1	0	1	2
	Baksa	1	0	0	1	1
2012	Kokrajhar	3	2	0	2	4
	Chirang	2	2	0	0	2
	Udalguri	2	2	0	0	2
	Baksa	1	1	0	1	1
2013	Kokrajhar	8	3	2	8	13

	Chirang	2	0	2	2	4
	Udalguri	0	0	0	0	0
	Baksa	1	0	0	1	1
2014	Kokrajhar	5	32	0	3	35
	Chirang	5	7	0	2	9
	Udalguri	1	1	0	0	1
	Baksa	3	7	0	0	7
2015	Kokrajhar	13	0	0	13	13
	Chirang	6	2	0	5	7
	Udalguri	2	0	0	2	2
	Baksa	0	0	0	0	0
2016	Kokrajhar	17	17	0	17	34
	Chirang	3	2	0	2	4
	Udalguri	3	0	0	3	3
	Baksa	0	0	0	0	0
2017	Kokrajhar	0	0	0	0	0
	Chirang	2	0	1	3	4
	Udalguri	1	2	0	0	2
	Baksa	0	0	0	0	0
Fatalities (Grand Total)*		285	188	21	242	452

Major incidents of terrorist violence from 2004 to 2015 in BTAD area, as shown in the above tabular form, reveal continuity of violent occurrences. The findings imply that the Bodoland Movement bears a characteristic of sustenance to establish self identity at any cost.

As mentioned earlier, the Bodos, the largest indigenous community of Assam always felt that they were dominated by the Assamese speaking community and voiced their resentment through political protests and submissions of memoranda. It was only in 1987 that a mass movement was launched under the leadership of ABSU. Women too participated in this movement for a separate Bodoland. However, they were never a direct combatant in the violent activities that took place under the BLT and NDFB.

The election that was held in BTAD for formation of BTC in 2006 saw a mad scramble for position and power and this created various sections within the community including women who were not given and representation in the council. Factions were created even among the signatories of the Bodo Accord.

As per UN Guiding Principles 5 and 6, it is the responsibility of the states to prevent and avoid the condition that leads to displacement. However, the UN Committee on Refugees, 2000 has found out that

In the North East, New Delhi does not address the causes of ethnic conflicts. At times it responds to the violence associated with the conflicts but it does address the causes per se. This is particularly problematic because displacement continues. The government's response to the displaced in the North East as it might to the victims of a natural disaster- that is a population needing temporary assistance. It does not respond to them as a group for whom it must find solutions, nor does it address the need to prevent further displacement." (Manchanda & Sharma 22).

This kind of handling of the problems by the state authorities will always be a recurrent factor for continuing violence in BTAD. The threat of losing their land has been a great challenge to the Bodo population which needs to be addressed in a prompt manner if this violence and conflict is to be controlled.

2.15 Women and Bodoland Movement:

The Bodo women too participated in the struggle for political self determination which they felt would give them space as it would assert their ethnic and nationalistic pride. The AFSPA increased incidents of rape and the perpetrators have often got away scot free. In Udalguri two CRPF personnel were accused of raping a couple of women and in spite of being identified they are yet to get justice. There was a huge protest with hundreds of members of BWJF with "Rape Us" inscribed on their bodies. There was active participation of Bodo women in the movement.

Pratima Brahma, a Bodo community activist and writer when asked about the ethnic violence said that the politicians want to keep BTAD disturbed for their personal and political interests. She feels that it is "lack of governance and political leaders in Dispur who are behind the recurring violence" (Manchanda and Sharma 22).

Sucheta Sen Chaudhuri in her book *The Bodo Movement and Women Participation* stated that though the struggle for a separate Bodoland has been there for long the participants in the meetings, *dharna*, and protest rallies were mostly males. Women's participation was almost negligible. It was only when the movement for Roman script started in 1974 that women came out of their homes and the AATWWF leaders' like Malati Rani Narzary, Hirabari Narzary, Mira Rani Basumatary and others actively participated. AATWWF was the first organization where large number of women participation was found. Women in teaching profession also joined the Federation.

Women who were willing to join arms training did so with the initiative of Volunteer Force (VF) and ABSU. It was in 1989. They were trained to use rifles but were not involved in direct combat. Many young college going girls were given training in nursing in different rural primary health centres. However, some AATWWF members did not support girls joining VF for they were concerned about their marital future. This did not deter ABSU and VF and they continued to train girls and also formed groups, the members of which were mostly drawn from AATWWF. Since access to all areas were not possible for members of ABSU, these unsuspected members of the women groups helped in carrying messages and articles when necessary.

Leaders like Upendranth Bramha and Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary felt that participation of women was important and that a society cannot progress if women were not set into the path of progression. On July 14, 1996, the first meeting of AATWWF was held under the founder President Pramila Rani Brahma and convenor Maloti Rani Narzary. AATWWF not only contributed towards the Bodoland movement but also played a philanthropic role in improving the society. The issues initially addressed by AATWWF were: (i) health and hygiene (ii) family planning (iii) necessity of cleanliness (iv) mother's role to keep babies clean and tidy (v) mother's responsibility to educate children (vi) problem of alcoholism in family and society (vii) bad effects of polygamy, etc (Chaudhuri 121). Polygamy, which was in practice in the Bodo community, was not considered as a social

offence. But after the ABSU movement and formation of AATWWF the educated women started enlightening the rural people about the evils of the society that deterred the progress of women. This helped in curbing the practice of polygamy and also other related evils.

During the clash between ABSU and PTCA, AATWWF played the role of a mother. They tried to unite the whole community with focus only on the demand for a separate state. To protect themselves from any kind of atrocities, the women of the villages were asked to stay in groups and were also trained to be bold during army or police operations. They were taught how to file an FIR and asked not to suppress any kind of torture inflicted on them. Members of AATWWF who were mostly relatives or sisters of the ABSU members engaged themselves in cooking and supplying food them. They also were an interface between ABSU members and the common people. This laid the foundation of mass participation of the women in the struggle for Bodoland.

The movement resulted in a lot of displacement and loss of home and property. The AATWWF members went to different places to collect clothes and relief items and gave them to the victims who were in the relief camps. The Bhumka case in Kokrajhar, where women were raped repeatedly by the security force was handled by AATWWF and the culprits were brought to books. They have also been successful in compelling the authorities to release the innocent people of the villages who were arrested for no reason during the search operations by the police force.

Some of the women who participated in the movement received training on courses which are given to nurses in the nursing colleges. They were taught to tie bandages for different types of wounds, handle burn cases, take out bullets from the body and operate if required. They were also taught about common diseases like diarrhoea, malaria, bedsore, viral fever, gastroenteritis and jaundice and the medicines used for such ailments. They were given the basic knowledge of human

anatomy. When most of the doctors left their jobs in Bodo dominated areas during the peak years of movement, these trained girls were of great help to the villagers and performed duties like the doctors.

During the movement even the political organization of the villages became powerless. For solution of any kind of conflict in the villages the people approached ABSU and AATWWF. Most of the cases were related to extra marital affairs. The Bodo women are grateful to AATWWF members for their stand against polygamy which was not an offence in their community.

2.16 Conclusion:

It can be said from the above study that the Bodo Movement was because of age old grievances that they had against the elite Assamese class who tried to impose the Assamese language and culture on the ethnic groups living in Assam. This led to formation of the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur too. The Bodo people too wanted to break away from and develop themselves economically, educationally and socially. Once a ruling dynasty of undivided Assam, the Bodo people felt that they were losing their identity in their own land. To protect the tribal interest, they started to struggle at various levels. The Line System and Tribal Blocks and Belts were created because of the constant effort of the Tribal League. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee representing Assam in the Constituent Assembly ignored the opinion of the tribal people and gave an impression that they had assimilated into the Assamese society. Hence, no safeguard was provided to the plain tribals of Assam in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, unlike the tribals of other states (Sonowal 92).

From the above analysis it can be concluded that the Bodo Movement was the result of an age old aspiration of the Bodo community to establish their own language and culture instead of assimilating into the mainstream Assamese language and culture. To make pertinent issues reach the masses so that it draws attention of the concerned authorities media is the only

vehicle that can be considered the carrier of messages. To highlight the problems of any social issues, media has a very important role to play. In respect to ethnic conflict and violence representation of women in media becomes a pertinent issue. Therefore Chapter III seeks to analyse the role of media in highlighting the problems of women in areas of conflict and violence.

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3

CHAPTER

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN: PRINT MEDIA AND VISUAL MEDIA

3.1 Introduction:

Feminist media scholarship began in a small way in the 1970s and the defining characteristic of work produced in its early phase according to Margaret Gallagher is its explicitly political dimension: "It was indeed a political impetus that first shaped the academic agenda of feminist media analysis" (Gallagher 19). Betty Frieden's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) inaugurated in some way the feminist intervention in debates relating to mass media representations of women. 1975-85 was declared as the United Nations International Decade for Women and this worked as a catalyst for debate about the many sites of women's subordination.¹ In numerous reviews initiated by UNESCO, media's role as a specific source of oppression was documented. These early analyses found the media to be deeply implicated in the patterns of discrimination operating against women in society – patterns which, through the absence, trivialization or condemnation of women in media content amounted to their "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978). In the late 1970s and early 1980s the two concerns central to these discussions were: an analysis of the structures of power in which

women are systematically subordinated; and a focus on the politics of representation and the production of knowledge in which women are objects rather than active subjects (Gallagher19).

In many respects the contemporary field of feminist media scholarship looks vastly different from the relatively straightforward terrain occupied by most "women and media" studies of the early 1980s. Early feminist theory had emphasised the commonalities of women's oppression, neglecting profound differences between women in terms of class, age, sexuality, religion, race and nation. As its exclusionary nature became evident, the collective "we" of feminism was called into question. The inadequacies of feminist theorizing that conflated the condition of white, heterosexual, middle class women with the condition of all women were highlighted in North America by black and Latina feminists (Hooks, 1981; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981), in Britain by black and Asian feminists (Amos and Parmar, 1984), and by the analyses of lesbian feminists (Lont and Friedley, 1989).¹ Black women's experience of sexism, to take one example, could not be conceived as separable from their experience of racism. Feminist scholars in the Third World, came up with quite different agendas questioning Western feminisms given (Bhasin and Khan, 1986). They critiqued the irrelevance of Western feminism's analytical frameworks to the lives of most women around the world, and attempted to reposition feminist debate within broader social, economic and cultural contexts of analysis (Gallagher 21).

In the context of women's representation in the media it will be in place to quote Bhasin:

We are not just concerned with how women are portrayed in the media or how many women work in the media. We are also concerned about what kinds of lives they lead, what status they have, and what kind of society we have. The answers to these questions will determine our future strategies for communication and networking. Communication alternatives

therefore need to emerge from our critique of the present world order and our vision of the future. (Bhasin 1994: 4)

Such critiques spoke from a post-colonial position, in which the self-assumed authority of Western feminists to speak about – or indeed for – others was disputed and de-centred. These positions were influential in highlighting a fundamental methodological issue in feminist media studies. This issue, which turned on an interrogation of questions of “identity” and “authority” in feminist media criticism, according to Gallagher was to affect the ways in which feminist scholars approached and represented their work, particularly in studies of media content and media audiences (22).

Media, both print and visual play a very important role in presenting not only every aspect of the society but is also supposed to bring women issues in mass debates. Daily sufferings experienced by millions of women, inside and outside their homes, widows and abandoned wives, daughters sold by fathers due to poverty, etc do not interest the media (Kumar 263). This subjugation of women has been persisting in India because of religious and cultural beliefs. However, it has been noticed in the recent past that women have been entering into different avenues of social and professional fields. This trend has been triggered by several debates which were put forward by both the media. The feminist movement of India was further strengthened by the famous Shah Bano case which brought forth women’s relation with the nation state by introducing constitutional law in which media played positive roles. With the introduction of television in India the feminist movement and gender consciousness had reached to the masses, both urban and rural. The stories of women victims highlighted in the media are found to have affected both genders irrespective of their educational qualification.

The incidents of brutality on women like Nirbhaya case, dowry cases, cases of witch craft victims etc have facilitated positive public opinion followed by state policies for the welfare of the state. A case of a woman being beheaded by her husband

and many cases of harassment in the name of witchery created mass debate in the television channels which drew serious concern of the policy makers and thinkers in the last decade particularly in Assam. These news items on television have paved the way to establish a dignified status to women through constitutional provisions. Further, this trend has also contributed to women empowerment through their accessibility to various professions where men were dominating since the beginning.

The above perspectives imply that media can play a key role in exposing the issues of women that were not discussed or brought to the table to improve the condition of women. However, it has been noticed that only a few cases of victimization of women have been given importance and justice by media. There are a great number of unreported as well as unaddressed cases of violence against women. This is mainly so because of the mindset of media persons which is basically patriarchal. In many cases victims are unwilling to let the media focus their problems relating to sexual abuse and molestation owing to the prejudice of the community and society they live in. This has been noticed especially in the violence affected areas.

The patriarchal pattern of our society has been found to subjugate many a stories of women folk and they remain in the dark. Further, the women images are presented differently in the male dominated society like India. This creates a prejudice and the image of women is set in minds of the people as submissive, obedient, caregivers etc. which is hard to break. In the world of advertisement women are often presented as sex object that further demeans the position of women.

3.2 Women Images in Media:

It has been revealed from many studies that Indian media has often presented women in a negative light. The news and especially the advertisements objectify women and present them as an item of entertainment rather than a responsible citizen. The medium of mass communication like newspaper, magazines, radio, television and films failed to make any concrete change in the conventional image of women. Several systematic research

studies pointed out that mass media so far has not been able to act as effective instrument to inform and prepare society about the role and importance of women in national development (Dhar and Patnaik 285). The opinions of women in different committees are not taken into serious consideration. In areas of conflict when peace building committees are formed the opinion of victimised women are often neglected to address their real problems and this aspect of ignoring women from important decision making process is not highlighted in the media. It is seen that the process of peace building is also biased and politicized.

The Committee is often under political influence and this aspect and ground reality of women in violence affected areas are often ignored by media. Since the media fails to uphold the true picture of women in such situations the policy makers too fail to penetrate into the real problems.

Moreover, in violence affected BTAD areas it has been observed that owing to lack of education, ignorance, patriarchy etc. women do not participate actively in media conversation. Moreover, they feel that if they express their opinions or problems it may lead to police investigation, bring bad name to their family, face social stigma etc. So to avoid such hassles they prefer to remain silent and hence the reporting is mostly incomplete.

Media are often found to keep the experiences of women during armed conflict in the dark. Although women are all too often victims of brutality in war, they are also survivors with active strategies of survival, and also often serve as community leaders and peacemakers. But many of such roles of women are hardly exposed in media. Women are generally very involved in conflict 'behind the scenes', by providing support for families, the war effort, or else as 'voices of resistance', challenging the war and warfare through various organisations and actions (Thomsom et. al. 436). The role of women in restructuring lives and spreading the message of peace, supporting each other in times of need has rarely been mentioned in the media reports. An idealistic view of women presented in media and the ground realities are quite different. Whenever tension arises the feeling

of motherhood becomes stronger and she tries to adhere to their children in every way possible. There are instances where women are found to jump into river to save their children from harm during conflict and face watery grave. These are concealed by the media.

This different experience has often been neglected by media. Though media plays a very crucial role in individual cases it has been observed that when it comes to experiences of a group or a community, media leaves the opinion to the political leaders or other 'intellectuals' who perceive the problems for their own political gain. This stands true even in the cases of the ethnic violence and conflicts that took place in BTAD. Badurrudin Ajmal had held a meeting in Mumbai when a group of minorities were attacked in BTAD which led to exodus of people from the North East from places like Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai etc. Deputy Chief of BTAC and BPF allege that Ajmal was indulging in mass propaganda against the Bodos which flared the problem out of proportion (*The Assam Tribune*, August 13, 2012).

Hagrama Mohilary, the Chief of BTC alleged that the district administration is not willing to restore peace and its failure to arrest Badarrudin Ajmal though there are several allegations against him is a glaring instance of this indifference (*The Assam Tribune*, August 25, 2012). The Adivasis in Jharkhand also got involved in the conflict between the Bodos and the Santals in BTAD. Such reporting and provocative remarks fuel the conflicts. Media should not explore and give prominent exposure to such incidents rather conceal them to contain the violence.

As reported in *The Assam Tribune*, the 'Friends and Members of the North East Community' in Bangalore urged the media in the North East to exercise restraint in the way they carry stories about the exodus. Situation has become tensed fuelled by rumours of potential violence as well as stray incidents that resulted in the exodus (*The Assam Tribune*, August 20, 2012). Media which reaches to the public can restrain

themselves from exaggerating news that could possibly lead to more violence.

Further, instead of motivational roles for a positive gender-consciousness, media are often seen to depict women images as sources of cheap entertainment, amusement, etc through various commercial advertisements ignoring their real status. Such activities performed by media have impacts on building mindsets of people for the perpetuation of patriarchal structure of the society. Some of the selected advertisement programmes displayed by a few so called popular TV channels are given in the following table 3.1

Table 3.1

Different images of women as projected in advertisement for male products.

Sl. No.	Type of Product	Projection of women
1	Wild stone Aftershave	The woman is shown to be attracted towards the man using the advertised aftershave.
2	7 O' Clock, Shaving Razor	A woman is seen caressing the man's cheek because of his neat and close shaved cheeks.
3	Sunsilk Shampoo	A woman being loved by man because of her beautiful hair using that particular brand of shampoo.
4	Rupa Frontline brief	An objectionable portrayal of women where they hover around the man wearing the brief of that brand

There is a consensus that portrayal of image of women is always depicted in a negative manner. Dhar and Patnaik (2008) elaborated about the superficial projection in print and visual media which are against the prestige and status of women. In place of status and prestige of women the media knowingly or unknowingly are contributing for lowering the image. The above table shows how the display of physical and sensual characteristics of women in various advertisements such as promoting the sale of cigarettes, razor, male undergarments etc is shown in which women are no way related. Objectification of

woman and her body in the media has become a norm for most of the advertising agency.

Moreover, passivity of female character in media as projected in the television serials, films, radio, theatre etc has further lowered the image of women. Media has not been able to play an effective role in making the mass understand the contribution of women in national development. The mindset of the people that the problems of women are only minor and can be handled at home has made problems even deeper. The problems of women in the conflict ridden BTAD area have not got much importance and the cause is nothing but the indifferent attitude of the patriarchal media.

3.3 Ground Realities during Conflict:

Idealistically one of the major functions of media is to create an ideology. However, "reality is distorted and misrepresented. Such misrepresentation leads to distorted thinking and planning" (Bhasin 297). This is in accordance with the findings of the field study done in BTAD area.

The situation in BTAD in Assam during and after the conflict have been found to highlight only on the political interest rather than the pathetic condition of the victims especially the women and children whose needs and experiences are quite different from their counterparts. The following section of this chapter tries to unearth the truth related to media highlights.

3.4 Media Reports on Conflict Ridden BTAD:

The paradigm of male domination in reporting of pros and cons of conflict and violence in BTAD area was spontaneously revealed. Since most of the reporters from the ground were male, many crucial issues pertaining to women, especially during camp living in the post conflict period remained sidelined. Data on reporters and local correspondence of both print and visual media engaged in the area during the conflict and post conflict period show that a very negligible proportion that is about 1 per cent was female reporters. It implies that the media sector is solely male dominated and it is one of the outcomes of patriarchal structure of our society.

The patriarchal structure of media is very much evident in the way the news is brought forward. It has been observed that women and their problems were hardly focussed on unless it was of some national, political or vested interest. The ground realities about women issues were not highlighted to the expected level. The conditions of women inmates in the relief camps which could have been highlighted by media are enlisted below.

1. **The problem of space:** The inmates were huddled in a single room and there was no private space for women.
2. **Insecurity of the camp dwellers:** The inmates had lost faith in security personnel and took to guarding the camps in their own hands. The women did not feel secured with insufficient army and para-military forces patrolling in and around the affected areas and the camps. They felt their security was at stake.
3. **Condition of pregnant women:** In some camps women gave birth in camps without medical aid and at times the child died because of malnutrition.
4. **Lack of relief materials:** The special needs of women were never highlighted. They were deprived of the supply of sanitary pads, special nutrition for pregnant women and children, proper clothing etc.
5. **Lack of proper sanitation:** The reporters did mention about poor sanitation facility but it did not make much impact on the government or the general public to take necessary measures.
6. **Fear psychosis:** The women in some camps suffered from fear not because of perpetrators of violence but from their own camp inmates.

The above points reflect that the condition of women in conflict ridden zone was highly pathetic and the media failed to focus on these ground realities. However, it was seen that even if there were mention of the situation and living condition of women in the areas of violence and government aid and schemes were provided, nothing much was implemented to improve the

condition of women. Despite the presence of a large news regime prominently working in India for influencing economic and social transformation, certain areas related to women issues were being ignored. The following section seeks to focus on media regime in general and news coverage in particular with reference to BTAD.

3.5 Media Regime and News Coverage:

According to the report of Registrar of Newspaper for India, Government of India, 2014-15, there are 1, 05,443 registered publications of which 14,984 are newspapers and 90,459 are periodicals.¹ In the sphere of visual media there are 399 non news channels and 438 news channels as per the annual report, 2015-16 of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. If we compare it to previous years there has certainly been a growth in media. Media brings forth the important issues of national and international interest and helps in creating awareness among the citizens around the world. This awareness also brings more participation of common mass in the process of policy making. Now the question is how the politics of gender is projected in both the print and visual media.

Media in India has become a world whose existence mirrors reality, magnifies issues to bring it to the national consciousness, sometimes distorts with conflicting messages to touch base with existing paradoxes, but definitely a medium that is vibrant in the Indian democratic set up (Goswami & Mathur 239). But it has been observed that women and their problems do not get enough coverage. Most of the women oriented programmes focus on enterprising urban women which results in marginalization of rural women and especially so in conflict zones. The coverage is not enough to expose the real issues so as to bring effective change in lives of women.

Media, which is structured on patriarchal norm, did not give much attention to women till the 1980s of the Indian scenario. It was only in 1990s after the declaration by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation as the Decade of Girl Child in 1991 that the coverage of women's issues was taken up

by the media. Increase of activity in the media houses on issues pertaining to women is seen around the International Women's Day.

In India the status of women has always been contradictory. Women in urban area to some extent has been able to achieve a position in the patriarchal society though there are reported and unreported cases of dowry deaths, domestic violence, rape, molestation, female foeticide etc. But other vital group of women exist 'in the 'other' India whose stories struggle to find space in media' (Goswami & Mathur 240).

Mathur in her article has mentioned that the former Chief Sub-editor of a leading Marathi newspaper, Ms. Varsha Kulkarni regrets that regional and mofussil news items that have a potential for serious handling are often neglected. "Many women's issues do come out of other development stories like water problems, sanitation and environment issues. Reporters must be able to recognize and understand this perspective" says Kulkarni (as quoted in Goswami & Mathur 246). The visits to the affected villages in BTAD reveal that the problems and issues faced by women in the conflict zone were mostly neglected by media and only the political aspect of the problem was highlighted. That the experiences and difficulties faced by women were different from their counterpart have been silenced while reporting.

In the context of the distorted and panicky situation in the post conflict period in BTAD area, Akhil Ranjan Dutta, a renowned social scientist, raises serious concern about the role of media(*The Assam Tribune*, October 27, 2008: 8). His article expresses grave concern about the catalytic role of Assamese print media. Referring to the role of media and general public he called for maintaining social harmony and not to encourage divisive elements for further repetition of the situation.

3.6 Depiction of Women in Media:

Media has a very important role to play to depict women and their problems. However, it has been seen that the media has its own agenda on representation of men and women. In the

words of Margaret Gallagher "The roots of inequality are buried deep into the cultural consciousness. Cultural meaning decrees that women mean love and the home, while men stand for work and the external world" (quoted in Srivastava 125).

The depiction of women in media often tends to be negative. Women are generally portrayed as housewives, submissive and obedient daughters, dependent coy and submissive. The television programmes aimed at women and the contents of the magazines on women are not relevant to the lives and needs of most women. They are often related to traditional feminine topics like beauty tips, interior decoration, recipes and making of toys and dolls. The commercials also depict women as homemakers with cleanliness compulsion for ever sniffing the kitchen floor or the family wash. The commonly shown advertisement depict that there are some special joys derived by women from washing clothes with a particular brand of detergent or the use of a particular soap essential to get married and win her husband's heart. Such programmes in spite of creating awareness regarding the problems of women reinforce stereotypes and project a contradictory image of women. Women's struggle for economic independence, political and legal rights, meaningful identity within marriage, women's plight and crisis during violence – be it domestic or ethnic, and for relevant education fail to get adequate coverage in media.

Media paid very little attention to women's issues till 1975 when it was declared as the family's year and women's decade. In the same year Government of India published a report on status of women titled "Towards Equality". In 1985 in the Nairobi conference India endorsed the forward looking strategies for improving the condition of women who are the most oppressed group. The year 1983 was declared by the United Nations as the International Communication Year. This gave further impetus to dissemination of news, views and information of women's issues. With this began a new era in 1985 from the point of view of media's coverage of women issues like rape, child abuse, prostitution, dowry deaths, bride burning, adoption and discrimination against the girl child, drug addiction amongst

women, illiteracy and unemployment, exploitation of women labourers in the unorganized sectors, problems of women in organized sectors, gender discrimination in the upper position of the civil services, journalism, politics and other higher positions, issues pertaining to women's legal rights etc. These issues were brought into focus due to the contribution of the growing number of women journalists, editors, reporters, film producers, story writers, directors etc. Earlier these issues were discussed as problems of individual women, now they are being seen within the socio political structural context. However, if we look into the visual and print media it is noticed that the problems of women especially in the conflict ridden areas are hardly brought into the fore.

In the words of Bhasin and Agarwal, media interacts with cultural images of gender and with individual identities in three ways.

- Media reflects cultural values and ideals about gender. They portray women from men and relationships between the sexes in ways that mirror widely shared understanding and ideals
- Media reproduce cultural views of gender in individuals. By defining normal women, men, and relationships, media suggests how we should be as women and men.
- Media are gatekeepers of information and images. They control what we see and know by deciding what programmes to air, what news to future, how to represent issues and events and hoe to depict women and men.

(quoted in Srivastava 125)

In spite of attempts by generations of women through centuries to keep their privacy intact, now a new era as emerged that marks the death of privacy – a digitalized era. There is now a digital invasion into the lives of women instead of the privacy which women always craved for.

Crime against women in India is broadly classified under two categories: 1. Crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code

(IPC) and 2. Crimes identified under the Special Laws (SL). The crime under the former category includes eight types:

- a. Rape (Section 376 IPC)
- b. Kidnapping and abduction (Section 363 and 373)
- c. Dowry homicide (Section 302 and 304 B)
- d. Torture – physical and mental (Section 498 A)
- e. Molestation (Section 354)
- f. Eve Teasing or Sexual Harassment (Section 509)
- g. Importance of girls (Section 366 B)
- h. Murder (other than dowry homicides) (Section 302)

The crimes under the latter category include four types:

- a. Immoral trafficking (1956 Act)
- b. Demanding dowry (1961 Act)
- c. Commission of Sati (1987 Act)
- d. Indecent representation of women (1986 Act)

(Sharma & Das 16)

Mass media plays an important role in shaping the mindset of the people. It has been influencing political, social, cultural, spiritual, economic and religious sentiments of the society. Newspaper, radio and television, the major source of information also influences the thinking, feeling and acting of an individual. Media considered as the fourth pillar of democracy plays a crucial role in the life of an individual. The media has a great role to play especially during conflict. It has been noticed that women have not been given enough representation and has been marginalised in the presented news. Media can play a great role in gender sensitisation by providing the women reporters the opportunity to cover both female and male oriented news. The patriarchal structure of media can be broken by the women journalist who has a wider perception of the problems of women rather than the stereotypical and unrealistic media representation made by the male journalist.

Moreover it has been observed that in spite of specific legislations like the Indecent Representation of Women

(Prohibition) Act, 1986, IT Act, 2000, section 292 of the Indian Penal Code the existence of the Censor Board and the Advisory Committee attached to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, the projection of women as an object is still prevalent (Bansal 203). The problems that women face in regard to relief material, food etc. hardly gets highlighted in writing but pictures of half clad women and children are flashed to represent the conflict situation and their ordeal. This makes them doubly ashamed as they are already victims of voyeurism in the relief camps and flashing their photographs in print and visual makes their situation worse.

The concept of women as “soft target” grows out of social construction of women – the women who are essentially accommodated within two poles of good and bad (Hussain & Dasgupta 175). Women experience great deal of violence in every society because they can be easily targeted and victimised. Many molestation and rape cases go unreported because of the stigmatisation that the victims are subject to in the society. Women often suffer from withdrawal syndrome because the society considers a raped woman as unsuitable for the institution of marriage which stresses on virginity. Sadly enough the physical abuse of women lowers the position of women and they are viewed as erotic object cum victim in the society.

Media has deviated from its objective of presenting an unbiased reporting and this is more pronounced especially in the conflict ridden areas. Male journalists look into and judge the women’s position and problems from a different angle and their understanding of the situation is different from that of a female journalist. Absence of women’s media agency to take up reporting in conflict situation has led to misinterpretation of problems faced by women in the conflict zones.

The reality about the camp living condition of women in BTAD is almost absent owing to the lack of professionalism among the reporters in the field who are mostly male and untrained. Absence of female media persons and women media

organizations has lead to under reporting of problems of women in BTAD area.

These findings imply that in respect to highlighting ground realities of women victims in BTAD as a whole the role media is negligible.

3.7 Positive Role of Media:

Media has a very important role to play in forming a positive portrayal of women. It shapes the mind of the society and has the power to construct an image where women are not treated as an object of entertainment rather as an individual to be respected. The importance of women and her contribution towards her family, society and the nation needs to be recognised which can be achieved only through mass media. Once the image of women is constructed in a commendable manner their condition even during conflict would surely improve. It is not as though general guidelines do not exist on the depiction of women on television. The P.C. Joshi Committee (1985) had recommended ways in which women should be portrayed. It has said:

The government must at the earliest formulate clear cut guidelines regarding positive portrayal of women on television. This portrayal must take note of women in all facets of their lives: as workers and significant contributors to family survival and national economy. Women must not be portrayed in stereotyped images that emphasise passive, submissive qualities and encourage them to play a subordinate secondary role in the family and society. Both men and women should be portrayed in a way that encourages mutual respect and the spirit of give and take between the sexes.

In order to promote a positive ideology that is sensitive to women's need and that which permeates the total programming and also to have a coordinated, and consistent policy, it would be necessary for all Doordarshan policy makers, programming, and production staff to have regular orientation courses that sensitize them to women's issues (Punwani 231). Journalists need to build up a commitment towards the

problems of women especially during conflict as most of them go unrepresented.

Looking into the history of media from their earliest to the present time we can see that it is purely male dominated. They occupy almost the whole management and the top editorial ranks. As the MacBride Commission pointed out, "Journalists dealing with serious issues and political events are seldom women, and few women become editors or holds directing positions" (Kumar 129).

Women started discussing their own perception, manner and nature of portrayal in media openly after the declaration of women's decade in 1985 in Nairobi. U.N declared 1983 as the International Communication Year which gave impetus to the dissemination of news, views and information on women's issues. Thus a new era began in 1985 from the point of view of media's coverage of women's issues like rape and child abuse, prostitution, dowry deaths, bride burning, adoption, discrimination against girl child, problems of delinquent children, drug addiction amongst women, illiteracy and unemployment, exploitation of women labourers in the unorganised sector, problems of women in the organised sector, gender discrimination in the upper echelons of the civil services, to women's legal rights etc. These issues were brought into focus due to growing number of women journalists, editors, reporters, women film producers, story writers, directors etc (Mittal 186).

The content of communication reflects the ideas and attitudes of the society at any given time. How women are treated in the society is largely reflected through mass media. Special programmes for women are broadcast from all radio stations of All India Radio. As a large number of women are illiterate, radio and television are major source for educating them. However, most of the programmes related to women are confined to beauty tips, cooking or home decoration. In case of major incidence of violence against women there may be telecast or broadcast of the suffering of women through panel discussion. A proper follow up is hardly done in a disciplined manner.

Media plays a vital role in reaching out to the masses. It has a great impact both on men and women irrespective of their age. Television, radio, print, films, theatre and at present the internet are mediums through which attitude and behaviour of people are influenced. Media has thus a very responsible role.

Media carries the responsibility of bringing the correct news to the masses. However, it has been observed that most often the issues relating to women are neglected. Whenever these issues are highlighted it is usually to glamorize or create sensation. Media being patriarchal in structure has barely given women the space that they deserve in the media. Women are supposed to be the bearer of culture which is manifested through media. It is a form of social control over how a woman should dress, behave, what should be their social code of conduct etc. In BTAD the so called guardians of the Bodo community monitor the dress code of adolescent girls and women making them wear '*dokhona*'. This movement started way back in 1987 when movement started to make people conscious of their language and culture. Bodos residing in different parts of Assam were at one time shy to speak their own language and wear their traditional dress. A resolution was passed that the Bodos must wear their traditional dress. Media played an important role in telecasting and broadcasting this news without any one questioning why is the dress code valid only for women. Though the resolution was taken also for men but they never wore their dress except on very few occasions. Many schools also took resolutions that the Bodo students and teachers must wear *dokhona*. Rape need not mean physical rape alone. To deny women of her freedom to dress or movement is a kind of psychological rape. This can be stated as violence against women. But these were not sufficiently brought into table of media for public debate.

Further there was a paucity of news items to highlight post conflict consequences in BTAD. Although there was not enough news coverage in visual and print media pertaining to women issues of BTAD area during conflict and post conflict period, yet few of them could draw attention of many thinkers.

Some of the news coverage in regional and local media pertaining to BTAD is elaborated below.

3.8 Conflict Zone and News Coverage:

Mass media has a great social responsibility in highlighting different aspects of camp living condition. However, it has been observed that women have been sidelined in their news. Although the news coverage regarding ground realities is very poor, some of the print and visual media highlighted certain issues related to women living in camps in the post conflict period. The prominent news coverage highlighted during the period in BTAD is summarized below. The following analysis relates to the period of major conflict in the BTAD in the years 2008, 2012, 2014 and January 2015 only.

The situation in BTAD during the conflict period has been highlighted in the local newspapers but there is hardly any mention of it in the national media. The plight of women is even worse because the patriarchal structure of media deprives the mass from the true picture of the sufferings of women. It ignores and distorts the real experiences of women in the conflict zones and in the relief camps.

According to a report published in *Times of India* dated December 12, 2016 a 12 year old girl from Goreswar in Baksa district came to Guwahati to work as domestic help. Poverty, no prospects of education and unemployed parents forced her to the city in search of employment. A few months ago, the city unit of Childline rescued her and sent her home. However, they received another call recently informing them that she was working in a tea stall in the city again. This instance is characteristic of the problem child rescue organizations are facing, the cycle often becomes self-perpetuating. "Without proper rehabilitation schemes, children who are rescued from the clutches of traffickers or child rights violators continue to remain vulnerable and fall victims to similar rackets," said Nirmal Deka, coordinator of Childline's Guwahati Unit (*Times of India*, December 12, 2016). The above news item shows how the victims of ethnic violence especially girls and women fall prey to unprecedented situations.

As per the records since April 2015 and April, 2016 the Childline, Guwahati branch intervened in 754 cases. In between 2014-15, the figures were 591 while it was 581 in the previous fiscal year. The growing trend in such cases reflects a sorry picture. However, such cases are not followed up by mass media to bring a permanent solution to the menace.

A culture of oral tradition has prevailed in India as the rate of literacy is not high. Thus to reach to the masses the print media cannot be depended on for social or political change or any kind of awareness and reforms. Audio visual media plays a very important role. However, even there vulgarity, violence and insensitive projection of women destroy the image of womanhood. In an open letter to the producer of a popular television programme entitled, 'It is a woman's world', a Bangalore based women's group Vimochana mentioned – "The communication media has after all always been an integral part of society's myth making machinery consciously or unconsciously recording, defining, channelizing and reinforcing attitudes and value structures, the status quo in short. The images have fluctuated between the much maligned and (disrobed) vamp to the over glorified mother, sister, daughter or wife" (Desai& Krishnaraj 279).

As per the news report, "AHRC defunct after last member completes term" published in *Times of India* dated December 16, 2016 is a matter of grave concern. A very important Commission for addressing the needs and injustice done on people has become virtually defunct after its only member demitted office on December 15, 2016 on completion of his five-year term. The non-judicial member, Jyoti Prasad Chaliha, had retired in February 2013 and the post has been lying vacant since then. The chairperson of the commission Justice Aftab Hussain Saikia completed his term in November, 2016. The State Government is yet to look for replacement for Saikia (*Times of India, December 16, 2016*). This shows the lackadaisical attitude of the Government towards common justice. Women who are the marginalized section of the society are further marginalized without proper functioning of Assam Human Rights Commission

and Assam State Commission for Women which is in an apathetic condition. According to N.Ram, the editor of *Frontline* magazine “the role of media is not just to stand behind any policy, but rather to play the role of a dissenter” (*The Assam Tribune*, January 30, 2003:9).

A content analysis of the news items in *The Assam Tribune*, *The Hindu*, *Amar Asom* and *Dainik Asom* of the major conflicts in BTAD in 2008, 2012, 2014 and January 2015 has been done and it has been found that the intensity of the problem faced by women during and after the conflict does not get reflected. The stories of the women and the testimonies gathered during the field visits show a different picture. Sexual violence and dearth of commodities of women’s needs are far more than reported by mass media. The women displaced and women who are resident of the conflict zone have different stories to tell which are never recorded and focussed in the media. The official records and statistics have a different record than what the mass media represents.

3.9 The Print Media Analysis:

As a part of four pillar of democracy, print medium is considered powerful source of information to bring forward the cries of the suffering lot. Relating to the ethnic violence and conflict particularly in BTAD area, media is expected to highlight issue of women in the conflict zone for greater interest and well being of the society. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of news items highlighted in few popular regional print media, regional and national is adopted.

3.9.1 Local English Daily - *The Assam Tribune*:

Conscious readers of the North Eastern Region in particular, usually go through many regional and local newspapers and *The Assam Tribune* is one of the prominent ones. The women issues relating to BTAD area ought to have been covered by the news papers. However, maximum of the sensitive issues about conflict and women especially during 2008 to 2014 in BTAD area remained uncovered by the media. As a prominent daily, *The Assam Tribune* has been taken into consideration and

an attempt is made to analyse its news items during the above mentioned period for analysis. However, to point out a couple of vital issues, two publications of *The Assam Tribune* beyond the period, i.e., the year 2003 has also been taken into consideration. On January 18, 2003 a resolution was taken in the Office of SP, Kokrajhar that a women's committee would be formed in the Police Station. However, it took almost five years to get the women's committee functioning. Another report dated January 29, 2003 stated that the violence and its impact on women were not confined to BTAD area alone. It flared up to the neighbouring districts too, especially Dhubri.

As the most widely read newspaper of the North East region, *The Assam Tribune* was expected to cover all the pros and cons of women's issues in the conflict ridden area of BTAD. But findings of the study reveal an opposite scenario. After an assessment of 299 news items including analysis of renowned scholars' published in *The Assam Tribune* during the climax of violence and post conflict period, it was found out that only 21 news item and only 4 analysis covered issues of victimized women and child (refer to appendix 2).

3.9.2 Local Assamese Daily - *Dainik Asom* and *Amar Asom*:

- *Dainik Asom* highlighted in 17 news items, 12 new items, 20 news items cases of kidnapping, rape, murder of pregnant woman, suffering of women from various diseases, loss of privacy, missing of women and girl child during 2008, 2012 and 2014 respectively. In January, 2015 6 news items highlighted similar issues (refer appendix 2).
- In *Amar Asom* only about 20 news items relating to women and children during conflict and in camp living in BTAD area in 2008, 2012, 2014 and January 2015 were covered (refer appendix 2).

3.9.3 National Daily- *The Hindu*:

The Hindu has only a few news items on Assam in their issues. The only reporting that has been done is mainly on flood issues which too are not highlighted as much. The violence that took place in BTAD was not covered sufficiently. The newspaper

had reported only 36 news items on the BTAD violence in three years i.e. during 2008, 2012 and 2014 and women were mentioned in only three of them. It is noteworthy that in these reporting no important issues on women in the conflict zone was highlighted except the number of women who lost their lives. This fact implies an existence of gender biasness among media players.

It is noteworthy that Professor Akhil Ranjan Dutta of the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University when questioned on the massacre in Udalguri in 2008, said that the clashes intensified because of rumours that people believed in. He also mentioned that the role of especially the Assamese newspapers was not positive. The same view has been expressed by Zamser Ali when he says: "They have played a negative role. On many occasions, these newspapers have published partisan reports and have tried to communalize the incidents. All this has resulted in the conflict" (Source: documentary, Zamser Ali).

The above observations indicate that the reports on violence were hardly focussed in the national newspaper. The local English daily carried the news during the incidents but more focus was on the political arena and if at all there is mention of victimised women, no follow up action was reported. However, in the Assamese daily mention has been made of women being killed or victimised but lack of action on the injustice shows the lackadaisical attitude of the government. Non implementation of policies made for protection of women is a major drawback for protection of women folk especially in conflict situations. None of the lines in the news items were directed to women's suffering.

The issue on violence in the BTAD has been put up in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Though the problem and the possible solutions were discussed nothing on the issue of women and their problems were brought to the fore.

3.10 Visual Media:

The debate on the ethics of media was on since 17th century. Renowned journalist Paranjoy Guha Thakurta said that

to deliver quality new one has to be self regulated. According to him the TRP system is meaningless for assessing the popularity of TV channels. The 20,000 devices used to access the number of viewers are constricted to the urban areas only. This system has totally ignored the rural viewers and this has resulted in negligence of the rural folk and their choices and needs. The interests of the rural viewers are totally absent (*The Assam Tribune*, July 28, 2012).

3.10.1 National Television Channel:

Before entering into the local news channels that is supposed to cover the issues pertaining to ethnic conflict and violence at proximity, it would be justified to look into the visual media at national level. There is no denying of the fact that the news relating to the North East is not highlighted in the national news channels. The news relating to flood and violence gets only a small space compared to the same natural or man-made disaster in other parts of the country. Northeast being marginalized in general, women in such situations are not mentioned at all.

It can be said that not only are the women victims of the perpetrators but also of the media both print and visual, who come to gather information and highlight the problem. The focus is not given to the serious problems faced by women but they are talked to and also shown on the screen as crying or in half clad condition. However, the problems faced by them and the ground reality are never highlighted. Hence the reality and gravity of the situation does not reach the masses.

There has been a huge uproar in the recent incident that took place in Bangaluru on New Year's Eve, 2016. All national newspapers and media had wide coverage on the incident and panel discussions were telecast to get into the problem and there was demand for justice from almost every corner of the country especially the metropolis. Sadly enough graver and more serious problems faced by women and children in places like Assam, especially the riot hit areas are scarcely brought into the fore. Whatever the local media covers fail to reach the mass in other

parts of the country for which the gravity of the problem is not given its due attention.

3.10.2 Regional/ Local Channel:

A number of private television channels have been working in Assam such as *Prag News*, *News Live*, *DY365*, *News 18*, *Pratidin Times* etc. The BTAD conflict accelerated around 1990s when print media and radio were the only sources to reach the masses. The trend of visual media started with *Prag News* channel from March 4, 2001. Two other major television channels were added to the arena of visual media in the state. However, the role of these visual media in respect to women issues particularly in conflict ridden area of BTAD during 2008 to 2015 is a matter worth exploring.

Although there were some news items and talk shows during the conflict and post conflict period in BTAD area, least emphasis was laid on issues relating to women. There were some panel discussions in the local television channels namely *News Live*, *DY365* and *Prag News* on the BTAD issues which were mostly political. There have been no instances of women living in camps being brought to the floor of discussion. The channels telecast the plight of women and children only to highlight the gravity of the situation without much concern about pertinent issues and crisis the women face in such conflict situations.

In a telephonic conversation with Mr. Pranoy Bordoloi, Chief Editor of the news channel *DY365* when I asked about the archive and the news on BTAD for the major violence, Mr. Bordoloi replied that the system has crashed and they have no records at present. They have sent the crashed data to Kolkata to check if they can restore the records. This is a glaring instance of media callousness pertaining to documenting of major news events or maybe unwillingness on the part of the respective media house to share sensitive information.

3.11 Magazines:

In the national magazine, *Frontline* (January 23, 2015) Sushanta Talukdar in his article "Killing fields" discusses the militant attack on Adivasis and how a large number of people

have been displaced and ignorance of most of the victims regarding the reason for the attacks. Women and their plight do not find a place in the article and that leaves the large reading public ignorant of the sufferings which are quite different from men. A content analysis of the photographs also show that though the write up is on violence and nowhere do they mention women and how they are affected the photographs mostly represent women and children in a distressed state. This trend of representing women only through pictures seems to be universal.

Two popular well circulated Assamese magazines on women, *Nandini* and *Priyo Sakhi*, has failed to focus on problems of women in conflict zones of Assam and the relief camps. They mainly concentrated on fashion, cookery, home decoration and general short stories and poems. It is indeed a matter of concern that popular magazines have failed to create awareness among the literate public the gravity of the problems of women faced during and in the post conflict period.

A prominent magazine *Jonaki Baat*, a progressive women's journal has many articles published on serious issues on women like women empowerment, witch- hunting, domestic violence, women in politics etc. which are written by well known feminists, activists and writers like Dr. Anima Guha, Junu Bora, Dr. Rani Mudiar Deka, Rubul Sharma etc. However, it has been noticed that the issue on the problems of women faced in conflict zone of BTAD has not found a place in the volumes of this magazine. An article by Sandhya Devi titled "Sontraxbad aru Nari", in the July, 2012 edition of the magazine, focussed on conflict situation in general and tried to look into two issues - (a) why women join terrorist organizations and (b) impact of terrorism on women. Devi concluded that in conflict situations the movement of women are restricted for fear of being attacked.

This also halts their daily wage earning activities. Moreover, during conflicts most of the educational institutions remain closed and this results in interruption of education of the girls. Women also face psychological trauma because of the death of the father, husband, son or other male members who are

usually the bread earners of the family. Their death brings untold misery, insecurity and also increases the degree of poverty.

The above findings correlate with some of the finding of the investigator in the BTAD area.

3.12 Bodo Women Writers:

Some Bodo women writers are penning the realities of mindless violence and suppression their community is facing in their own land. These grim realities have found reflection in their writings. Renu Bodo, the first Bodo woman postgraduate in Assam has endeavoured to create a forum for all Bodo women writers so that their voices can be heard. Though she has not written exclusively on subjects pertaining to the Bodo community, yet her writings on cultural and social issues have succeeded in arousing cultural pride and social consciousness among the Bodo people. She hopes that that her writings would “inspire us to look within and identify our shortcomings, instead of blaming those around” (Renu Bodo as quoted in *Dainik Janambhoomi*, November 25, 1998).

Pramila Narzary, a Sahitya Akademi awardee, in her fictions critiques the evils in a new light. *NREGAJagra Hagra*, her short story narrates how the 100 days state sponsored job programme, NREGA has been misused by political and community leaders and how the poor people were deprived of their dues. The story ends with a hope when the common people rise against corruption and also points out the importance of political protest.

The number of Bodo women writers is only a few. Though the Bodos have been engaged in a conflict with the state for more than three decades, there has not been enough writing to address the issues of the politics of identity, insurgent violence, sovereignty etc. in their writings. Reno Boro informed that at the request of the ABSU leaders they wrote plays and poems with political message which are published in journals or souvenirs and soon forgotten. Their works are never compiled.

There has been scarcity of political writers, both men and women, in Assam. Only a few wrote on contemporary political

realities and even fewer used literature for protest. This is true even among the Bodo community. Even the literary pursuits of Dr. Anjali Prabha Daimari are not overtly political. Anju Daimary, a writer based in Kokrajhar, the headquarter of BTAD says that her writings are based on impulses. She wrote a satire in verse after witnessing the first election to the BTC which was full of irregularities. The satire was on 'corpse of democracy' (as reported by Uddipana Goswami, *Dainik Janambhoomi*, November 25, 1998).

She also wrote how people were affected by the armed conflicts in BTAD including her family members. Her short story, *The Test*, indirectly focuses on insurgent violence. The protagonist is a trainee militant who resorts to mindless killings as he has to obey the commands of his leader. The story has succeeded in creating a powerful image of struggle and conflict within the mind of the protagonist which is common to the experiences of the people of BTAD which has witnessed violence and conflict for long decades.

Readers hope that there will be more writings on the violence and sufferings of the people that are plaguing the communities living in the conflict ridden area of BTAD.

3.13 Alternative media:

As per the Annual Report (July 2012-June 2013) presented to the Government of Assam by the Assam State Commission for Women a group of ASCW members visited the relief camps occupied by Bodos and Minority community in Kokrajhar and Chirang District on September 19, 2012 in order to know about the condition of the people and take stock of the situation. They reported that the displaced people were given temporary relief camps, government institutions and other buildings to stay. The inhabitants of the relief camps faced acute shortage of food, drinking water, sanitation, medicine supply and many other problems. They also encountered deep psychological problems and had a deep sense of insecurity even while staying in the camps. This had also manifested the people in their behaviour of the unwillingness to return back to their places of

original residence due to an embedded fear of security deficit (Annual Report July 2012-June 2013, ASCW 20).

3.14 Interview with some Eminent Persons:

The investigator in search of data had come across different people in different positions.

Ms.Indira Laskar, ACS, Member Secretary, Assam State Commission for Women (15/12/16) said she has recently joined and is trying to systemize the data. It was found that the office could not provide any data of victimized women in the BTAD to the investigator except the annual report and a few pamphlets on dowry and witch hunting.

Sri C.S.Tiwary, APS, Deputy Superintendent of Police cum Officer In charge, CIDP.S, Assam said that they do not provide any data but admitted that there are many unreported cases of women victims in the conflict ridden areas of BTAD. They cannot take any step if no complaints are lodged.

Mr.Pallav Bhattacharyya, IPS, Additional Director General of Police, Special Branch (15/12/16) said that they can provide the data on the number of people killed and injured in the BTAD conflicts but has no record of male and female separately. It is only from 2012 that the records were maintained gender wise. Moreover, the records that they could provide were till 2012.

For solution to any problem feedback and follow up plays a very important role.

Despite playing a positive role in all spheres of society, media must have acceptability enriched with trustworthiness. There is a general consensus that media have been losing their trustworthiness for certain reasons. The following are the responsible factors identified for the loss of trust in media.

- Yellow journalism
- Easy entry as mofussil journalist both for print and visual media
- Power group pressure for biased news
- Biasness of reporters

- Orthodox and conservative outlook on certain ideologies of the reporters

3.15 Trust in Media:

Mr. Ranan Kumar Goswami in his article *Paid News Virus Threat to Media Health* stated that over a period of time, prior to 2010 trust in TV news dropped sharply from 61% to 36%, that of business magazines has gone down from 72% to 47%, and of newspaper has gone down from 61% to 40%. Trust in media in India as a whole declined by 7% (from 65% in 2009 to 58% in 2010) (*The Assam Tribune*, July 15, 2012). Though it is generally thought that media plays a very important role in all aspects of life yet yellow journalism and insensitive projection of women in insignificant news has reduced public trust on media. This has been observed in news items coverage during conflict period where women issues are almost neglected. Only pictures of women are projected when the journalist, both of print and visual media, need to highlight the gravity of the problem without analysing or stressing on the real problem faced by women in such conflict areas.

3.16 Media Analysis:

The above evidences of the preceding sub sections conform with the observation of various scholarly works particularly to women and girl child issues. They are elaborated below.

- Not to mention about covering news item relating to women and girl children rights, it is evident that both the sects are victims of various crimes. It is worth mentioning here, specifically, for Assam that the state has been pointed as one of the most vulnerable places in India (Priyadarshini, *The Assam Tribune*, July 15, 2012). It was placed in the second position in respect to vulnerability towards women and girl child in 2011. The article identified women's deprivation and insensitive behaviour towards them in general and the police and the administration in particular as a responsible cause of crime against women.

- The article by Mukhim (*The Assam Tribune*, July 19, 2012) focussed on role of media particular to women issues and referred to the dissatisfaction expressed by the then Chief Minister in case of the incident involving Laxmi Orang.
- Emphasizing on the possibility of breeding anger, hatred and rape particularly in camp living situation Sanjoy Hazarika (*The Assam Tribune*, July 25, 2012) focussed on the responsibility of media to unearth the reality.
- Keeping in mind the general overview regarding crime and violence against women, Dr.Namita Devi (*The Assam Tribune*, July 27, 2012) observed that there is an existence of silence in cases of such violence that is similar to the silences in conflict ridden area of BTAD area.
- With regard to performance of television channels, Pranoy Guha Thakurta's observation was highlighted. His observation was that television channels are found to be serving the corporate houses and render less service to journalism (News report, *The Assam Tribune*, July 28, 2012).
- Along with the news of deaths of inmates (16 persons including 4 babies), *The Assam Tribune*, August 5, 2012, however highlighted report of department of the Government of Assam that about 2428 pregnant women were being deprived proper medical care (refer Appendix 2).
- Referring to Napoleon's statement about the relationship between good mother and good nation, Dr.Mamani Kalita focussed on women education for reducing gender gap and understanding the importance of peace and harmony even during tussles (*The Assam Tribune*, August 18, 2012).
- An endeavour was adopted by a group of NGOs to draw attention of National Human Rights Commission to

intervene in the matters of relief camps in BTAD area for ensuring the rights of children and women protection (*The Assam Tribune*, September 4, 2012).

- Similarly, in *The Assam Tribune* dated 4 September 2012, a news item reported children and women issues in particular stressing on pregnant women's plight in relief camps in BTAD area.
- A news item reported about an attack against 21 women and 18 children by a militant group in BTAD (*The Assam Tribune*, December 24, 2014) (Refer Appendix 2).
- A news report covered the condemnation of women and children killing in BTAD area by North East Network (NEN) (*The Assam Tribune*, December 27, 2014).

The implication of the above findings is that media is not only patriarchal in nature but equally insensitive to many of the issues that surface in violence affected areas and issues of women do not get proper space and importance.

3.17 Marginalization of Women in Media:

Besides the patriarchal attitude of the media the following are the main reasons for marginalization of women in the news highlights.

- a. Relief camps are mostly situated in the rural areas where infrastructure is not adequate. Moreover, the mode of communication is very poor. The journalists often fear attacks from either the perpetrators or the camp inmates.
- b. Unbiased reporting is rare. Most of the mofussil reporters are influenced by pressure groups. Male reporters overlook problems faced by women.
- c. Paucity of women media person to access in backward area.
- d. Rural women are shy to communicate freely with unknown male media persons.

Many studies conducted on Doordarshan reveal that men outnumbered women as far as television coverage is concerned. According to P.C.Joshi Committee report on software for

Doordarshan, "Indian television lacks proper perspective on women's issues"(Dhar & Pattnaik 286). It held Doordarshan guilty for its failure in furthering the stated national objective of women equality.

3.18 Conclusion:

Though much is hyped about freedom of expression and freedom of press it seems to be a myth. The reality is but only partially reflected in the news coverage on conflict and violence. Moreover, media is controlled by a section of people who prefer to sensationalize news that would bring them political and financial gains. The in-depth discourse into the media scenario and their roles as elaborated above indicate that there is least concern on the issues of women in spaces of ethnic conflict and violence. The above analyses clearly reveal the lackadaisical attitude of media towards the sufferings of the camp inmates particularly women in the BTAD area.

Only a few news items and articles published in print media are found to highlight the women and girl child issues during conflict and on camp living conditions in BTAD area. It implies that acute gender insensitiveness exists in respect to the role of media persons. The findings establish the fact that media is patriarchal in structure and the problems of women are often silenced. In an international conference on women in Kala Lumpur in 1988, Indian delegates opined that "the mainstream media did not reach out to the poor rural or urban women or communicated their struggles and realities of life" (Kumar 268). This is the truth about media representations of rural India.

End Notes

¹ See Gallagher's essay on "Feminist Media Perspectives" in *A Companion to Media Studies* p. 19.

² Gallagher in her essay discusses the beginnings of other perspectives in debates on feminism. I refer to her discussions on media representations.

³<http://rni.nic.in/> dated 17/11/16

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4

CHAPTER

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN SPACES OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT

4.1 Introduction:

Assam was widely known as a peaceful state where people of different caste and community lived in harmony for ages. Assam has, for the last two decades, witnessed a series of ethnic violence. The violence was not confined to a particular region or between particular communities. Records show that there has been violence between the Bodos and the Muslims, Bodos and the Santhals in North Assam, Rabhas and the Garos in West Assam, the mainstream Assamese and the Immigrants from Bihar in Upper Assam etc. Though much has been said about peace keeping and compassion nothing significant has been done to contain the violence or prevent repetition of such violent eruption.

In any ethnic nationalist conflicts it has been observed that women have been the victims and images that stare at us are usually "the woman refugee gazing out hopelessly or witnessing the death of her child", "a woman with a rifle over her shoulder and a baby on her back", or, "images of mothers and daughters protesting on the street to prevent relief trucks from reaching

zones belonging to the “enemy” (Giles & Hyndman 4). These prevailing images of women in conflict zones have been largely spread by “state institutions, media, and military organizations and have come to constitute iconic representations and/or symbols of women at/in war”. These stereotypical representations while serving strategic nationalist, or state purposes tell us little about the diversity of women's experience during conflict, and their experiences or their care in refugee camps.

The nature of conflicts around the world is vastly different now. Most contemporary wars and conflicts occur within the borders of sovereign states, not between countries as they once did. So much so that notions of what constitutes a conflict zone are similarly outdated. As Giles and Hyndman put it in the Introduction to their work *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (2004) “the idea that (feminized) civilian and (masculinised) military spaces are distinct and separate no longer holds. Civilian homes may be technically out of bounds according to the rules of war, specifically the Geneva Conventions, but in practice they are often targets”(5). Accordingly non-combatants are supposed to be safeguarded from war yet it is seen that in recent conflicts civilians compose the vast majority of casualties. Available statistics reveal that whereas most casualties at the turn of the nineteenth century occurred among soldiers at the battlefield, civilian deaths and injuries constituted 60 to 80 percent of casualties at the end of the twentieth century. One can therefore no longer distinguish between the spaces of battlefield and the home front as observed by Wiles and Hyndman.

The conflicts that have taken place in the BTAD area also reveal how the most affected have been the women though very little research has been done in this area. Conflict situation brings considerable insecurity to the women. An attempt has been made in this chapter to bring out the diverse problems that women encounter in conflict zones.

4.2 Complexity of Ethnic Violence- Its Nature and Implications:

As empirical evidences show, ethnic violence is steeped in complexity. So the study of ethnic violence involves a lot of diversified understanding. Unless and until there is an empirical understanding of the situation and the causes are investigated one cannot draw a conclusion on the kind of impact it leaves on the affected population. No matter where, why or how these conflicts take place it always has either direct or indirect impact on the people of the concerned areas. Therefore, an attempt is made to look into the nature of complexity and women's experiences in relation to ethnic violence.

Many thinkers observe that the complexity of ethnic violence and its indecisive nature leads to changing trends of social norms and elements of group behaviour. Bruck (2010) has rightly stated –

Violent conflict is a systematic breakdown of the social contract resulting from and/or leading to changes in social norms which involve violence instigated through collective action. This notion includes an element of mass or group behaviour and captures variety of conflict intensities spanning from violent protests and riots to coups, revolutions, civil wars, genocide, international war and terrorism". (Bruck3)

The negative effects of ethnic violence persist in the society for a very long period. These conflicts adversely affect the living conditions of the households not only during the conflict but also long after it has ended. The immediate distortion of social norms during and after ethnic violence begins to carry on physical and mental turmoil particularly on women.

4.3 Ethnic Violence and Societal Distortion:

The consequences of ethnic violence lead to multiple problems such as in-camp difficulties, loss of privacy, humiliation, sexual harassment, child labour, trafficking and sexual workers etc. Whenever there is a crisis or a problem involving a community or society, it has been observed that the women are the most affected both physically and psychologically.

Immense physical and mental turmoil is caused by violence. Liberty is being curbed in both private and public life. Due to vested political interests some leaders allow the conflict and violence to stay.

In a Rapporteurship on the Rights of Women by Inter-American Commission on Human Rights it has been mentioned that there is an increase of violence against women in armed conflict. The study was on Violence and Discrimination Against Women in the Armed Conflict in Colombia. As mentioned in the report, a study conducted by United Nations Development Fund for Women on the Situation of Women in Colombia show that in every 100 women affected by the internal armed conflict 43 have been victims of different forms of violence based on gender.

The findings in the BTAD area are no different from the empirical evidences highlighted by various studies on the women in conflict situation. During the field survey it has been observed that the women and children are the most affected section of the society. In the camps they do not feel secure even from people of their own community. Though only two cases of rape have been reported but many women complained of voyeurism and lack of private space. The divergent nature of ethnic violence is also aggravated by some exogenous factors such as armed and paramilitary forces to create certain turmoil.

4.4 Ethnic Violence and Exogenous Factor:

It has been observed that in some places, to take control of the conflict situation or the communities involved both the perpetrators of conflict and the armed forces resort to different forms of violence against women. They dehumanise the victims through sexual, physical and psychological assault and spread the message of terror in the community. As a result of this, the relationship as mothers, sisters, wives, friends etc. are at stake. To keep their women safe forced displacement takes place. This means they are removed from their homes, family and also community at times. This has also resulted in early marriage, school and college dropouts etc. The worst reality is that some

women are forced to render sexual services to paramilitary forces or the perpetrators of violence.

Women are easy targets especially in conflict zones. In Myanmar, along with the youths, women, children and even the aged were subjected to torture by the army. It is not that only the Rohingya Muslim youths were targeted, innocent women were also sexually abused by them (*Dainik Gana Adhikar*¹). It is perhaps in place to quote Coomaraswamy who observed in a report:

Perhaps more than the honour of the victim, it is the perceived honour of the enemy that is targeted in the perpetration of sexual violence against women; it is seen and often experienced as a means of humiliating the opposition. Sexual violence against women is meant to demonstrate victory over the men of the other group who have failed to protect their women. It is a message of castration and emasculation of the enemy group. It is a battle among men fought over the bodies of women.

Men who are socially structured to protect women from danger of aggressors face defeat when the honour of their women is threatened by either by the perpetrators or protectors of law. From the interviews and testimonies gathered from different sources it has been found that it is not only women but also men who are subjected to physical and psychological violence. AFSA has given power to the defence force to search homes, detain, torture men and women equally if they happen to be a relative or a friend involved in terrorist activities. To obtain information they often terrorize or punish the inmates during house search, and these inmates are usually women as men often go into hiding out of fear of being arrested and facing inhuman torture for no reason.

Moreover, the needs of men are different from needs of women more so when they lose their space. Women's needs, trauma, want of security, want of certain commodities are not paid attention to. The loss of private space in relief camps and outraging women's modesty in camps and toilets made of plastic

sheets add more woes to the lives of women. Almost every adult woman inmate has a story to narrate. They faced mental, physical, sexual, personal exploitation and harassment. There are unreported and untold stories of trafficking and rape.

4.5 Women in Conflict Zone:

Women are the most vulnerable group of the society. Especially when it comes to conflict situation their experiences are often quite different from men. Amartya Sen in his article 'Development as Capacity Expansion' mentions that the quality of life depends on the 'expansion of capabilities', 'doings and beings' or 'functioning' of men and women (Sen 43). A mere estimate of amount of property lost, or how poor they are or for how long they have been unemployed are not the indicators to understand how women rebuild their lives and empower themselves. The subjective experience of the women in a conflict situation varies from person to person and from situation to situation. Conflict often leads to displacement. During the process of displacement, women and men deal in different ways with terror, trauma and uprooting, renegotiate diverse aspects of their identities, rebuild social network at a dissimilar scale, and reformulate sometimes divergent hopes (Meertens 134).

In a conflict situation, women are directly affected and their struggle to survive and to be empowered is more than the women who live in non conflict zones. Moreover, in the post-conflict situation it has been observed that the community that has more empowered women recover from poverty and other problems faster. The study is undertaken to understand how women empowerment can help in overcoming the shortfalls of a community especially during armed conflict and post conflict period.

In a section on violence in *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*, Mary E. John stated that the problem of women has been "compounded by silences in women's studies, its initial failure to intervene and force the issue onto the academic agenda" (226). Urvashi Butalia in her essay "'Speaking Peace': An Introduction" explores the suffering of women in the conflict ridden valley of

Kashmir and compares it with the women in almost similar situation in Nagaland and war torn Sri Lanka. She also questions the invisibility of women in the reports and accounts of the conflict zone though they are the worst sufferers in such situations facing assault, insecurity and also loss of life. They struggle to build their lives through economic empowerment.

In Assam, lakhs of people had become homeless which led to internal displacement especially in BTAD. Women and children were the most affected section in this kind of situation. Keeping in view the above perspective, the present chapter seeks to unearth the ground realities of empowerment of women especially in the conflict ridden area of BTAD. It also tries to throw light on how women have succeeded or failed in improving their socio-economic condition in these areas of ethnic conflict and to suggest a few policies that could help women to raise their status in the society in the post conflict situation.

The recent happenings of ethnic violence especially in the BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts) area have been seen to affect the progress of women in the various fields. In spite of this some women seem to have overcome these obstacles. Therefore, in this study an attempt is made to look to what degree women are empowered in the conflict ridden areas and how they are able or not able to deal with the societal pressure in empowering themselves.

Women face a lot of risk during violent conflicts. This is especially true in the mentioned violence at Udalguri where civilian population was targeted. However, these kinds of conflicts diminish the gender barrier and women assume a new role in their societies. Though this change in gender role may seem temporary in most cases the women do not come back to the pre-conflict subjugated level.

4.6 Empirical Evidences of Ethnic Violence in Field Area:

To understand the ground realities of women in spaces of ethnic violence, it is justified to focus on real experiences of the affected lot. The following testimonies show the radical change of role and responsibilities of women in conflict situation.

4.6.1 Women as Head of the Family:

- i. My husband did not return from the field till late in the evening. Next day his body was found in a nearby forest. The conflict escalated. With no male member in the house we were forced to join the relief camp. After situation started getting normal we went back home to find the granaries and house burnt. I had my children and a sister in law to take care of. I became the head of the family and took responsibility of running the house, taking care of the members of the family etc. which was not normal in our society. The violence changed the family structure. - Rukmini Boro, Rowta Bagan.
- ii. My children don't seem to be normal anymore. They saw the militants' fire and burn the houses. We were asked by the headman to leave the village immediately. With whatever little we could gather all the families hurdled into a room in the primary school of the village. We had to stay there for three days without proper food and water. My husband who went to collect our belongings from our house never returned. This further dampened the spirit of our children and one can see the look of helplessness on their face. Now I have to act fine and build strength so that I can look after my children who are my sole responsibility now. - Rehana Begum, Hapachara.
- iii. Terrorized by the violent situation the villagers took shelter in the relief camp. Failing to find anyone in the village that they ransacked, the other party burnt our houses and granaries. After peace was restored the families went back to their homes which were burnt down. With little relief from the government we have tried to rebuild our houses. My husband who has always been a drunkard has started drinking even more and the sole responsibility of running the house has now fallen on me. - Mamani Basumatary, Rowta.
- iv. My family consisted of my husband, and three children. After the conflict began all the female members of the village including the children fled the village and took shelter at the village high school. I sent her my daughters along with

others to the relief camp. I could not leave as my husband as he was suffering from heart ailment and could hardly be moved. Moreover I had a toddler to take care of. There were no doctors available and I was too poor to take him for better treatment. Moreover the conflict caused a lot of tension in the area. Nobody volunteered to take this poor man to the hospital. In the meantime the male villagers who stayed back to protect their own property provided me with some rice and clothes that was distributed by the relief committee. The livestock that I owned disappeared. It has been presumed that the attackers looted all the livestock that she had. Unfortunately my husband died on Dec 1, 2008. I felt helpless as I was the only lady present in the village. I never got any government aid. At present I am working as a daily wage earner. - Romila Biswas, Madalpara.

- v. After the death of my husband, it hardly mattered where I lived. But I have to find some source of income to feed my three children. I could not send all my three children to school. To get over the financial I was forced to send two of my children to Guwahati to work as domestic help much against my wish. – Jamina Begum, Madalpara.

4.6.2 Loss of Security:

- i. After the stay in the relief camp going back home was not a happy proposition. The trauma of the violence got seeded in our minds. The security of our grown up daughters seemed to be at stake. With the help of a relative we have sent our daughter to a town nearby to work as a domestic help which we thought will buy her security and the money will help us rebuild our future. - Gopeswari Boro, Pakriguri.



- ii. We feel safe in the relief camps because we have no home to go back to. We live in the forest area which is the target area of the militants now. Our male members have left for the city to find source of income. With so many children to look after and no house or land to go back to we feel insecure outside the camp area. - Nachan Sarai, Ravanghat.

4.6.3 Sense of Loss:

- i. All the villagers left for the relief camps. Only the male members came during the night so that they could protect their property – house, cattle, granary etc. My husband was in the last stage of cancer. I could not shift him as he wanted to die in his own house. I stayed back with him. There was no way that I could consult a doctor. The villagers helped me in whatever way they could. After his death I went to the relief camp and stayed there for a week. Since I had no children I returned home to an empty home. Now I work in the landowner's fields to sustain myself. - Monika Boro, Jhargaon 1.



4.6.4 Sexual abuse:

- i. I was sexually assaulted by the paramilitary forces. They came in search of my brother in law in the dead of the night. When they started molesting me, my mother in law tried to protect me. She was pushed into a room, they took in out, raped and left me half naked in the field near the market place. The case could not be reported as the family thought that it would bring dishonour to their name. - Name withheld, Juiloga.

- ii. I am not afraid of the men from the army or the militants to keep my daughters safe. I have to protect them from my close relatives. I cannot report cases of sexual abuse by my relatives. It is a matter of shame. It was difficult to keep track of my children in the camp. And now back home, I am afraid they are molested here too. Name withheld, Khagrabari.



- iii. Staying in the room where innumerable inmates there were a number of us who were molested on the pretext that the violators did not realise as they were in deep sleep. Such excuses were difficult to buy but that is what most of us faced. - Name withheld, Ravanghat.
- iv. I was only 13 years. I did not understand why the riot started. They murdered my father, took away my brother and beat me up and my mother. They were drunk and threatened to kill me if I opened my mouth. (After a long silence) They raped me. - Name withheld, Bennabari.
- v. An old woman aged about 108 years lived with her widowed daughter in the village. She got married at the age of sixteen. She was loved by the young children as she used to narrate stories, feed them and showered her unconditional love. Two of these children grew up and joined the militant group. Every time they came to the village they misbehaved with the villagers. They demanded food drinks and she met their demands. On 4th May, 1998 these boys kidnapped a young girl and forced her out of the car to this house and tried to rape her. Both the women in the house protested and tried to save the girl from the clutches of the terrorists. The militants killed them and burnt the house along with the bodies.

However the kidnapped girl managed to escape and narrated the incident to the villagers (Dutta 81-82).

4.6.5 Trafficking:

- i. The whole family woke up to a great uproar. We saw fire in a nearby village. We feared the worst and it came to be true. The village was attacked. We ran helter shelter. I had two young daughters to drag along. In the commotion I lost hold of one of them. I don't know about her whereabouts till today (with tears in her eyes). - Monika Boro, Botabari.
- ii. I had sent my daughter to the city hoping that it would be safe for her to work there as a domestic help. In desperation I sent her with a person who promised to keep her safe in some good house. There has been no clue of her or that person till date. Later I heard that there were other girls who were lured with better life in the city and was trafficked to some unknown place. - . Lukali Boro, Hatigora.
- iii. Every time we take bath in the river near the relief camp a group of boys from the camp itself sneer at us. Though we discussed it with a few elders in the camp they snubbed telling us that there are graver problems to deal with. A few days later my friend eloped with one those boys never to return again. Later two more girls went missing. Nobody knows their whereabouts. - Roima Khatun, Rowta Bagan.



- iv. My daughter who was 11 years old wanted to go to school. But with no resources we discouraged her. She played around in the village with her friends. One day when she did not return till the dusk I went out looking for her. The friends said she had walked away with a young man who she said

was her uncle. I have no clue about her whereabouts. I have reported the case to the police but even they failed to find my daughter. I feel so guilty now. God knows where she is!!! - Jamina Rajbongshi, Pakhidiya.

4.6.6 Maternity problem:

- i. I was in the advance stage of pregnancy when the ethnic clash broke out. A doctor visited the camp twice a week and I was given the required injection on time. My labour started sometime around midnight. Luckily there were two aged women who could handle the situation. As our tents were made of plastic it had enough gaps for the curious eyes to witness what was happening inside. I was very embarrassed to face the male inmates as I had no clue who all saw me in that state. - Sasirani Munda, Lawripara



- ii. The Asha workers hardly visited our camp. I was in need of care as I was bleeding and in the eighth month of pregnancy. But the tension of being attacked prevented us from going to the hospital which was at a distance. I had to lose my first child because of the absence of medical care. - . Hamida Begum, Apoha.

4.6.7 Lack of Privacy:

- i. Look at the toilets that we use. The wind blows away the plastic sheets that enclose some areas to be used as toilet and bathing areas. You can imagine the plight of the women here. There is no privacy. Most of the women are victims of voyeurism and molestation and the culprits are inmates of the relief camp. - Santoshi Tanti, Ravanghat.

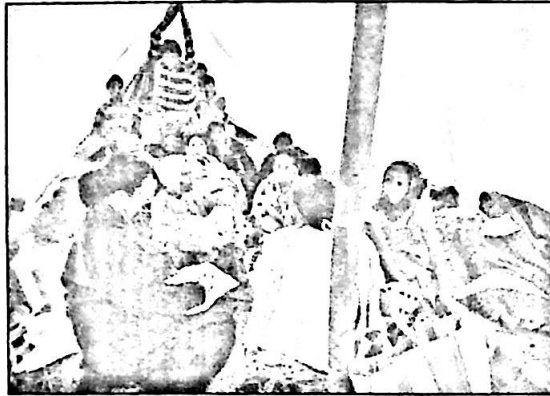


- ii. My daughter attained puberty and according to our custom she is supposed to be confined within the four walls and cannot even look at male members. But this was not possible as she was only 10 years old and in the camp it was impossible to keep her in the tent. She had to go to the open area to have her bath and use the toilet. There are other girls too who has faced the same problems. God knows what will happen now. - Monomoti Boro, Nagdolbari.

4.6.8 Lack of Relief Materials:

- i. Rain continued to pour down. Ugh! How terribly I spent the time with my children in the rain! Drenched, my kids shivered in cold almost to the point of death. The militants kept firing from all corners. We go hungry. We have no clothes. How can we bring up our kids? We are out of work. There are no toilets, no room to live in. How can we raise our children in such awful condition?¹
- ii. We could hardly carry ourselves alive in that situation. We were attacked in the dead of the night with arrows. We lived peacefully in our village and had sufficient land. Now we have turned to mere beggars. I don't have another pair of clothes.

God knows how long we have to be here. - Hapatun Kham, Jhargaon 2.



- iii. We had adequate food and clothes which was supplied by the government and local NGOs. Baby food was also provided. What was very difficult to get and a problem to ask for were sanitary pads. We had to compromise on hygiene in such way that some of the girls in the camp contacted infection which has not been contained even after several months. - Deepa Boro, North Nagdolbari.
- iv. The first ones to reach our camp were the NGO members. They gave us water, biscuits and some *chira* (beaten rice). But the supply was so less that most of us slept hungry. It is a pain to see our children in such a state. Despite having everything back home the children are sleeping half fed and half naked. - Sukhi Hajda, Lawripara



- v. Our lives in the camps were better. At least there we got some provision from local NGOs, Government and some student organization. With our houses burnt and no source of income now, we are suffering even more. I have to fend for a living as the male members have left for the city in search of

livelihood. Till they return I have no other option but to go from door to door to beg for food and money. - Champa Boro, Pakriguri.

4.6.9 Forced Discontinuation of Education:

- i. I was in Class IX and was preparing for my annual exams when the conflict began. Within a few hours we became homeless. After about a month's stay in the camp we came back to a partially burnt house. I stopped going to school as I had to supplement to the family income. Now though the condition has improved I have lost interest in studies. - Bina Begum, Bennabari.
- ii. I secured 74% marks in the higher secondary but now my family wants me to get married to a boy who has studied till class VI and has a shop in the town nearby. But on the day of my marriage Mr. Zamsher Ali, President, BTAD Citizen's Forum, Kokrajhar, our invited guest, on his visit to the camp asked me if I was willing to continue with my studies. I took a bold step at that moment. I refused to get married and with his help soon joined a nursing institute in Guwahati. - Alia Begum, Hapachara



- iii. I was interested to complete my education and it was my childhood dream to become a teacher. But the conflict shattered it all. I will be going to the town soon to work as domestic help. My family hopes that this will buy me security and at the same time bring some financial succour to my family here. - . Sunmun Boro, Hatigora.

(Note of the investigator: When the investigator visited this particular house she was shown the ashes of the burnt granary and toilets. They now use a make shift toilet which hardly give the women the privacy they need).

4.6.10 Loss of Self Respect:

- i. I, along with my two camp acquaintances decided to go out and seek work in the town nearby or in Guwahati as we were left without any earning member in the family. When we found work in the city, we were criticized by our own family members as women of 'questionable character'. Every time we came to our village people sneered at us. Now we work in paddy fields of other people in our own village. But people still talk ill about us. - Bandana Boro, Narayanguri.
- ii. I suffered humiliation in the hands of my husband throughout my married life. I thought my condition would improve after our return to the village from the camp as he had seen how I struggled to help not only my family members but also other camp inmates. But soon after our resettlement he became alcoholic and this worsened the situation at home. My children also have to suffer torture in his hands. - Name withheld, Hapachara.



4.7. Experiences of Camp Inmates:

After a trouble torn situation the people of violence ridded areas, the camp inmates had to live a harsh and inhuman life particularly the women in respect to all requirements of living. To understand the situation of women folk living in the temporary relief camps certain questions were put before the

sample units. The findings from the effort are highlighted in a tabular form in 4.1.

Table 4.1
Camp experiences of women inmates

Total sample: 285

S. no.	Indicators	No. of sample Unit	Percentage of Sample Unit
1.	Loss of property	216	75.78
2.	Privacy	285	100
3.	Feeling of insecurity	280	98.24
4.	Problem of Sanitation	234	82.1
5.	Food and water	173	60.7
6.	Fuel source	83	29.12
7.	Fear psychosis	248	87.01
8.	Loss of faith in administration	246	86.31
9.	Loss of mental stability	169	59.29
10	Loss of family members	18	6.31

Source: Field survey

The above table reveals an overall inhuman living condition of camp inmates during conflict and in post conflict period in BTAD area.

While interviewing the camp inmates and also persons who have gone back to their villages from the relief camp, the following pertinent aspects have been found.

Security: Security is one of the most important questions in places where violence takes place. Male fear arrest without reason, females fear molestation and rape. About 90% of the affected persons felt that they were more secured in the camps than their own villages as there is a constant fear of being attacked by perpetrators or massive search for culprits of violence by the defence personnel.

Sanitation: 82.1% were unsatisfied with the kind of sanitation. The women complained about the temporary toilets made of plastic sheets that are often blown away in case of strong wind.

They had no private areas to take bath and were often victims of voyeurism. The women faced immense difficulty especially during their menstrual cycle. However, the rest were satisfied with whatever they were provided for, mostly because they have no proper knowledge of proper sanitation. Illiteracy and poverty made their attitude towards sanitation a very meagre matter.

Food and water: 60.7% of women were not satisfied about the quality and quantity of food supplied to the camp inmates. Water was not much of a problem as most of the victims were camped in schools and colleges. In some places where camps had to be set in open fields tube wells were dug almost immediately. There was dearth of baby food and nutritious food for the sick.

Fuel source: The camps inmates had to collect woods for preparation of food from nearby forest area. At times they also had to go without food for lack of fuel. Fear of attack often stops them to go into the forest area to collect firewood.

Fear psychosis: 100% of women suffered from fear psychosis. They were in constant fear of ill treatment, molestation and mental torture from militants, police force or from camp inmates itself. A feeling of restlessness too has been noticed among the women.

Loss of faith: 95% of women inmates were expressed that they have lost faith in government agencies, neighbours and even local peace bodies.

Loss of mental stability: 80% of women above the age of 40 years have landed themselves in a state of confusion.

There was another issue that came out while interviewing the women. Men were constantly interfering in whatever the women said. The patriarchal domination in the society was clearly felt. But a pertinent point emerged out of those conversations. In the affected villages and the neighbouring villages members observed that when the NGOs arrived they came with the knowledge of which community resided in that area. Seva Bharati was often seen to visit Bodo and Adivasi camps while the Ajmal Foundation visited the Muslim camps.

This division further sowed the seeds of differentiation among the victims of ethnic conflicts.

4.8 Unreported Cases of Sexual Violence:

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a total of 244,270 incidents of crimes against women, including nearly 25,000 cases of rape, were reported in 2012, an increase of 6.4% over 2011. NCRB figures show that the number of reported crimes against women has been and are continuously rising since 2009. It is widely believed that these numbers may be underestimates, because of widespread under-reporting due to issues of security, social stigma and fear of reprisals.¹

The above statement stands true because while interviewing the women affected by conflicts in BTAD there were a number of women who did not disclose even cases of voyeurism or molestation. Reporting sexual assault is a far cry for women in those areas who are in constant fear for the safety of their families and their own self.

There are examples of sexual violence even by relatives during the conflict and it is immensely difficult in documenting those cases. The women prefer to be silent on issues of aggression especially sexual aggression because of the fear of being reproached by the aggressor or being out casted by the family member. This kind of situation has resulted in the rise of unreported cases of violence against women.

However, to ensure that women can report sexual violence without fear and with dignity, Amnesty International India has intervened with the process. They monitor that a women can report such crimes without facing any prejudice. Surveys show that an estimated 30.53% of women who experience sexual violence actually tell someone about the incident, but only 1% out of these ends up reporting to the police. This is mainly owing to the concerns of security for self and family, discrimination and most of all social stigmas.¹

There are many such untold stories which are yet to be retrieved. Talking to women both in the relief camps and in their villages (post-conflict) one can feel that there are many incidents

in some of their lives that will probably never be told and will remain undocumented.

4.9 Women Facing Hardships and Insecurity:

The three basic needs of man – food, shelter and clothes are a far away cry when there is a sporadic incident of violence. When the affected people are allotted shelter by the district administration, food and water becomes a problem as the supply of relief materials take some time to reach the interior places.

During conflicts displacement takes place and there is disruption in the family settings. The violence affected people of BTAD were no exception. Uprooted from their homes and devoid of family income the main concern of the families was survival. Schools and colleges were taken by the district administration that served as relief camps. Once these inmates of these camps go back home it takes them quite a while to settle down. Education does not fall in their priority list.

From the above testimonies a conclusion can be drawn that there is complete lack of protection among all women and the gender based violence that violates the integrity and dignity of women is very much present. This results in psychological and physical trauma especially among the victims of sexual violence. There are numerous unreported cases of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, depression, alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted disease and trafficking. Most incidents go unreported because there is a social stigma attached to any kind of violence against women, especially among the village community. There is a fear of social rejection.

In her presentation on *Access to Justice in Andean Region Countries*, Doctor Maria Cristina Hurtado-Sánchez had mentioned that during the visit, testimonies and interviews conducted with the Office of the Ombudsman for the Rights of Children, Women and the Family and the Office of the Attorney General, show that fear of retaliation by aggressors, economic and affective dependence that women may have with their perpetrators, the social acceptance of violence against women, and the victim's lack of knowledge about her rights, are weighty factors, among

others, that contribute to the underreporting of cases of violence against women.¹

This stands true in all cases. The reason for under reporting is because of social stigma and at times lack of legal knowledge. Interestingly, in case of data gathered by the government officials of the police department, the data did not have a separate count for male and female victims. It was only in 2012 when the National Commission for Women asked for separate data that the government started gathering data on gender basis. Surprisingly, in spite of a large number of female victims in these ethnic conflicts no stringent measures have been taken to curb or supervise the problems of women. Moreover, the data provided by the state administration do not reflect the accurate picture as some concerned authorities do not try to get the exact figure for the fear of being threatened. The failure to keep and maintain gender based data till 2012 has posed a problem. The magnitude of problem and violence faced by women do not get reflected if a separate data base is not maintained.

Another challenge is to get the true story out of the victims of sexual abuse. When interviewed the women very clearly narrated their state in the camps, the difficulties they faced in regard to relief materials, problems of education, safety of their children etc. but only a handful of women came out with stories of sexual abuse which had to be dealt with a lot of tact.

A woman faces a lot of psychological trauma when her role changes suddenly due to the death of the husband. Suffering becomes worse when she is displaced and has to adapt to a new way of life to sustain economically and socially. There is every possibility that she might not be accepted in the new area. With a female head and no other male members in the family the women has to face untold misery. They are often exposed to violence and threat. The displaced population face a different set of problems in the area that they settle – discrimination and a feeling of alienation.

Socially constructed, women were always occupied the private sphere in the pre-conflict situation. When circumstances force the displacement of the family and with the male members either gone to hiding or to other place in search of work the women has to take the responsibility and learn to adapt to life in the public sphere. They now has to empower themselves with whatever skill they have and also try and find out the various facilities the district administration provide during the crisis situation. In the process of reconstruction in the post violence period, the traditional and socially structured behaviour of women are bound to change. Women try to bear the economic and emotional burden and involve the other family members in contributing towards the family income. Men seem to lose their authority and power in face of such crisis situation.

From the interviews it was found that the displaced women or the women in the relief camps or post conflict settlements were in need of health and psycho-social support. Sudden change in family structure, economic instability, scarred memories result in nothing less than horror in their lives. Discrimination, threats, violence etc. gave women nothing more than insecurity, desolation and more instability in their unstable lives.

Nedan, a Kokrajhar based NGO, revealed that the district stands second and third in terms of school dropouts and child trafficking in Assam. Pratibha Brahma, editor-in-chief of *Bibungthi, The Opinion*, a quarterly magazine stressed on the need to form women task force along with village council development committee, civil society organizations and other governmental schemes in the vulnerable areas for safety of adolescents and women. She also spoke about setting up women's cell as Kokrajhar has been witnessing increased crime against women (*The Telegraph*, 27 November, 2016).

Among the affected women there are a number of them who need special care, especially the pregnant women. The whole trauma of being displaced, adolescent pregnancies, rebuilding lives and homes post conflict period - all these needs

both physical as well as mental care. They are deprived of basic human rights. They fail to enjoy the fundamental rights because of the unstable condition created by the conflicts. During conflicts it has been observed that multiple violations of human rights take place.

4.10 Suppression of Psychological Problem:

As per the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement No 19, "special attention should be paid to the health needs of women, including access to female health care providers and services, such as reproductive health care, as well as appropriate counselling for victims of sexual and other abuses" (8). It has been observed that such health care is almost absent in the conflict ridden areas of BTAD. Women affected by armed conflict situation suffer the most because of the terror and fear produced by the situation compounded by their displaced situation.

However, the magnitude of the problem cannot be accurately measured because in most cases women suppress their own health and psychological problems and talk more about their material problems and difficulty they face in rebuilding lives. On terms of anonymity, a person reported that some forced recruitments were made during the conflict and these young girls act as informers who also serve as sex workers.

There are families where the women has left the village in search of work to nearby towns not because the sole earning member has been killed or has gone missing but because it becomes risky for their daughters who faces threat of either being molested or being used for some undercover work. This threat is not only from the armed militants but also from the protectors of the victims.

A group of women complained that the security of the young girls were at stake for which they prefer to either get them married off at a very early age or send them away from home to work as domestic helps in towns and cities. However, among the girls sent, some were reported missing.

Women are always an easy target and both the militants and the defence personnel. This has been noticed in all conflict

zones all over the world. Women are molested, raped, killed to set an example to the rest of the creed and terrorize them. Sexual and reproductive health becomes a major issue in these areas. Most cases go unreported because of the fear of social stigma and also the fear of being intimidated by the violators of dignity of women.

Moreover, there are instances where in the name of security police or the defence force, these groups pose a threat to the women in the conflict ridden areas. One such incident took place in No.12 Bhumka of Bismuri near Gossaigaon of Kokrajhar District. It was the night of January 25 and 27, 1988 when the Assam Police Task Force (APTF) suddenly went to the village in search of militants. There were no male members in most of the houses due to fear of police atrocities. Taking advantage of the situation, they policemen raped three young girls aged between 14 and 16 years on January 25. The same beastly act was repeated on the night of January 27. This time they raped seven girls aged between 12 and 18 years. Other women of the villages who tried to stop them and protect the girls were severely beaten up (Mosahari 75-76). Once the conflict ends it is observed that many families lose their family members and property worth thousands of rupees. Hundreds of people are displaced from their homes, women are tortured and raped and many families lose their sole bread-winner.

The fear, the trauma that the victims undergo, especially women, results in psychological disturbances. The constant feeling of anxiety, fear, insomnia, dreams, and hallucinations may lead to suicide. It has been observed that most of the victims do not protest or disclose their plight owing to the fear of becoming a social outcast. Moreover, lack of legal knowledge among women especially those of the rural areas is a major handicap.

Women play different roles in the ever changing social setup. After independence our constitution guaranteed gender equality and a number of schemes relating to women development have been adopted. But when we examine the real scenario, the struggle of women to survive in a complex socio-

cultural, historical, political and economic realities are apparent. Though we often talk of empowering women which helps in establishing their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives but in real life the situation and quite different. What we fail to realize is that the problem of women is the problem of humanity. The question is why is women treated as minority when we are talking of India as a progressing nation which believes in empowering women. Women are continued to be treated as a possession and an object where safety cannot be guaranteed.

4.11 CEDAW:

Various global and national provisions have been laid down by the highest national and international body. However, women experiences highlighted above show the reverse picture in reality, particularly in conflict ridden areas. It is necessary to look into the available provisions in favour of women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict. The succeeding section depicts various norms, conditions and recommendations by **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2010**.

The Recommendation of the **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2010** lays certain provisions for women in conflict prevention, conflict and post conflict situation. Accordingly directions are given to state parties on legislative, policing and other appropriate measures to ensure full compliance with their obligations to protect and respect women's human rights. Further, it forwarded guidelines to address women's rights in conflict affected areas and enhance substantive gender equality.

The suggestions of the CEDAW have immense scope to implement by the state parties to protect women's rights when distortion arises out of conflict and violent situations. The state parties can resort to legislative policy framing for balancing transition from conflict to post conflict which has the tendency to be cyclic. Therefore the recommendations accord with the adoption of strategies to curb the problems of displacement,

statelessness, refugee population and other evil consequences of conflict.

After any natural disaster or conflicts, it is the women who always suffer the most. They very often lose their protective space-their homes, at times torn away from their own community and placed in places where they may face rape and the risk of unwanted pregnancies become very high. To protect their young daughters, most of the parents try to marry them off at a very young age. Marriages are fixed even in the relief camps. This is done mostly to protect the family honour and also reduce the financial burden which becomes another major crisis in such situations.

It is often seen that in conflict situation the routine life may be derailed but that cannot deprive woman from her rights. However, we see that the sexual and reproductive rights are violated in these areas. Early marriage also deprives a woman of better health, education and empowerment. Margaret Pollack of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration has rightly stated that "Engaging women in development efforts and shifting the focus of humanitarian aid from crisis response to recovery and resilience can "lay the foundations for long-term development, which in turn can provide community-changing benefits, enabling individuals, institutions, and communities to withstand crisis and help accelerate recovery".¹

4.12 Findings from Case Study in the Field Area:

During the collection of primary data, a field study was conducted in the sample area. The findings of the case study are briefed below.

In most of the cases women were found to have faced trauma, deprivation from life support, education, lack of proper nutrition, underweight, anaemic, over burdened etc. The results of the study show a continued dismal status of women in the sample area and these are in accordance with the findings of Mishra and Pandey (Mishra & Pandey 3).

Stone relayed a story about Malak, a 15-year-old Syrian refugee in Jordan who was about to enter into an arranged marriage. After she and her parents went to a UNPFA-funded clinic and learned about the many benefits of delaying marriage, her parents broke off the engagement. Now Malak has the chance to finish school and pursue her dream of becoming a police officer. This kind of incidents is very common in the conflict and war zones. It can be stated that wherever the conflict be, the plight of women is almost the same.

In the context of ethnic violence and conflict in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) of Assam, the issue of women in places of conflict in the society brings forward the need for a new discourse. In the clashes a number of men, women and children have been rendered homeless, turned into refugees, lost labour, land and property, lost education and above all lost security of life. The immense impact of all these fall harshly upon women, especially in the post conflict periods.

4.12.1 Ethnic Violence in Kokrajhar:

A number of ethnic clashes took place in various phases in the Kokrajhar District during 1993-99, 2001-06, 2012 and 2014 displacing lakhs of families of Bodos, Muslims and the Adivasis who had to take shelter in hundreds of temporary relief camps. However, the ethnic clash which took place in almost all the district of BTAD had increased the number of displacements i.e. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and numbers of temporary relief camps as well as a number of inmates. The women inmates in all the camps had to face all sorts of harsh reality that compelled most of them to do odd jobs and work against their will for the sake of survival. The feeling of alienation, fear psychosis, scarcity of basic requirements, and loss of privacy, land, property and relatives, health hazards, paucity of drinking water, food and shelter made them face severe humiliation. Such inhumane situation of women undoubtedly should not be a norm for a country like India which has traversed through several decades of Independence

Ethnic clashes in BTAD area have resulted in numerous problems for the women, especially in the post ethnic clashes. The BTAD witnessed a number of ethnic violence since a couple of years for protecting their land rights and identity. In 2012 conflict between Bodos and Muslims in the BTAD area many were displaced and had to be sheltered in the relief camps. Besides, many lives were lost. The human tragedy had not only taken place during the violence rather it accentuated in the sheltering temporary camps with immense tragedy of women of all ages.

As one of the consequences of the ethnic violence in BTAD the Bodo, Muslim and Adivasi women have significantly been humiliated. The vulnerable women of the society in that area have drawn serious concern in respect of their spaces over time. A look into the intensity of humiliation of women at the ground level would pave the ways for reducing humiliation, miserable livelihood and for sustaining a dignified space for women in future.

Spurt of violence since 1993 has affected the socio-economic condition of the people of the area. The Bodos felt threatened in their own land and as a part of ethnic cleansing Rajbonshis and others were killed in 1987. Later in other incidents of violence Muslims were killed in 1993, Adivasis were killed in 1996, 1998, Muslims were again killed in 2008 and 2012 (Choudhury 8).

The brutal killings in April, 2014 are a grim reminder of the violence of 2012, in which hundreds were killed, and over 400,000 people were displaced and sheltered in 273 temporary relief camps. The violence marked the largest internal displacement of people in India since the Partition in 1947 (Choudhury 8).

The following are the data as per field verification in the reports of the Abstract of Relief Operation during 2012 violence in Kokrajhar District

Table 4.2**Number of houses fully and partially damaged:**

Name of sub-division	Fully damaged houses	Partially damaged houses	Total
Kokrajhar (Sadar)	5620	189	5809
Gossaigaon (Civil)	8269	733	9002
Parbatjora (Civil)	223	0	223
Total	14112	922	15034

Table 4.3**Number of persons killed and injured:**

Community	Killed		Total	Injured		Total	Missing
	Male	Female		Male	Female		
Bodo	15	4	19	2	0	2	0
Minority	35	15	50	66	21	87	0
Others	2	0	2	1	1	2	0
Unidentified	4	0	4	0	0	0	0
Total	56	19	75	69	22	91	0

Source: Abstract of Relief Operation during 2012 violence in Kokrajhar District (DC Office, Kokrajhar)

The above data is an example to show the pattern of damage to life and property during ethnic violence. Such losses have also taken place in the incidents of violence that has occurred during the previous years.

To look into the condition of the affected people, especially women, which is the prime area of the study, the investigator visited two villages namely Bedlangmari which is an Adivasi village and Madalpara, a Bodo village. Three relief camps namely Hapachara, a Muslim relief camp turned to settlement under Kokrajhar sub division, Kachugaon, an Adivasi camp and Pakriguri, that sheltered the Bodos under Gosaigaon sub-division was visited to interview the women about their living condition both in the relief camps and after their return to their village after the conflict.

The killing of innocent people unmindfully forced the affected villagers to seek refuge in the camps which they thought would be a secured place for them and their families. Number of

people mostly men were killed in these ethnic violence. Families that lost men who were the sole bread earner suffered the most. Being placed in a structured patriarchal society the women who till then played the role of a submissive home maker had to now take the reins of earning for the family. It was a difficult task. Talking to women who lost their husbands both in Bedlangmari and Madalpara villages it was found that after returning to their homes from the relief camps they were at a loss. The men, who lost their lives, earned mostly through agricultural farming or were daily wage labourer, the work that was difficult for a woman to take up since she was used to looking after the household work. Now she had to look for other source of income.

These women either worked in houses of people in the village or were forced to send their children to urban areas to work as domestic help. This state of helplessness brought about a lot of mental agony to women.

Many women suffered neglect by the family members, closed relatives deserted them for they considered the widows to be burdens, some women had forgone marriage for the sake of children, some were forced to marry for property reasons and had to suffer the physical and mental torture that came along with it.

Some villagers became homeless as their houses were burnt down during the violence. The compensation given by the government was too less for rehabilitation. The investigator saw half built houses where the members of the families somehow managed to live. Moreover, there were burnt granaries. Since the violence took place in April, 2014 the granaries of most of the villagers were full and these were burnt down by the miscreants. These villagers were struggling for survival. Some male members were seen drunk even during the day and when asked if it was a regular habit, they replied that only '*lau pani*' (local alcoholic drink) can bring solace. Such logic further pushed the woman of the house into depression as it turns the house into a living hell. The investigator in her interaction with the women of those villages and relief camps found that most of the women were not aware of the reason why such violence occurred.

Moreover, even after the violence was over, the police force often patrolled the areas and in the name of searching for culprits of the violence and providing security to the villagers they often molested the young girls who out of fear remained silent. In the relief camps the condition of the inhabitants especially women was very pathetic. Irrespective of which community the affected women belonged to, the condition was almost the same. Women's rights were violated everyday in these relief camps. Threat to the dignity of women was not from people from outside alone but also within the camps. In all the relief camps that were visited namely Hapachara, Kachugaon and Pakriguri the main complain was lack of private space for women. Few areas near the camps were cordoned by black plastic sheets which were made into toilets and bathing places. This resulted in voyeurism. On windy days the plastic sheets were often pulled down which had to be adjusted almost every day but with little success.

The relief materials that came from the government, NGOs and other local bodies were mostly clothes and food which was not sufficient to meet the needs of the large numbers of inmates in the camps. Though most of the women were shy to say but what they needed the most, apart from food and clothes, in the camps were sanitary pads which hardly came with the relief items. Condition was worse for pregnant women because the doctors who visited the camps were not available round the clock. The investigator came across five such instances where the woman had to deliver their babies in the camp itself with assistance from other women. But what one of the women said was that it was very embarrassing as the tents in which they lived and delivered their child were not fully covered. Any men could peep in to see what's happening.

After any natural disaster or conflicts, it is the women who always suffer the most. They very often lose their protective space – their homes, at times torn away from their own community and placed in places where they may face rape and where the risk of unwanted pregnancies become very high. To protect their young daughters, most of the parents try to marry

them off at a very young age. Marriages are fixed even in the relief camps. This is done mostly to protect the family honour and also reduce the financial burden which becomes another major crisis in such situations.

Though a sample study has been made to analyse the condition of women in the violence ridden areas, it throws light on the trauma of the people as a whole especially women in the conflict ridden area. The study exposes that the suffering is not only physical but also psychological. People living in these zones are often displaced or uprooted from their homes. They suffer from untold misery. Family life is destroyed; women are trafficked, some raped and killed, some are shown dreams of better future and transported to unknown destination never to return again. There are hundreds of such unreported cases, either out of fear of being an outcaste or they feel that they cannot live with the social stigma. Thus, it can be concluded that directly or indirectly women are the worst sufferers or victims of ethnic violence.

4.12.2 Ethnic Violence in Udalguri:

The main reason behind the conflict in BTAD is identity crisis. Moreover, in the recent past, BTAD have witnessed a regular flow of immigrant Bengali speaking Muslim population into their area especially the reserved forest area. This created a fear psychosis among the other people living in that area. They felt that these immigrants may soon establish themselves in various spheres causing a threat to the very existence of the local people who have been residing in those areas through ages.

Udalguri district was formed on June 14, 2004 with a population of 8,32,769. There are 802 villages and 10 police station and 10 police outposts. The major part of the population consists of people from the Bodo community. It was an area where people from Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities lived together with great harmony. However, from mid 1980s various communal clashes began to take place between the Bodos and the migrant Muslim population. The conflict resulted in high level displacement in the district.

A close study has been done through field visits to Rowta Bagan, Phakidiya, North Nagdolbari, Jhargaon 1 and Jhargaon 2 and an analysis has been done based on the observation on the lives of the affected women based on the narration of their experiences in the camps and after their return to their villages or rehabilitation centres.

It has been observed that during conflict and the post conflict period women go through a lot of suffering yet they gather strength and find ways to empower themselves, mostly because the gender norms are disrupted and they have to find means of livelihood. To contribute to the household income women diversify their economic activities mainly to rebuild and recover from the aftermath of violence.

However, the experiences of women in post conflict reconstruction and development differs from women to women and markedly from community to community. The Bodo women were found to be more empowered and courageous than their Muslim counterparts. To improve their financial condition and livelihood, women formed their own groups or joined some existing groups and a few tried to become politically active. These women belonged to the Bodo community and from villages in and around Rowta. Some women joined Brahama Kumari, a spiritual organization to spread the message of peace in the conflict affected villages. To recover their community and families from the trauma of violence these women took the liberty to become more independent and at times refused to be tied down to the structured norms of the society.

The Muslim women, however, were found to be subjugated even in the relief camps. Poverty being one of the major issues during the conflict period the Muslim women was seen to be dependent on the male members of the family to fend for the family. For them poverty does not bring empowerment. But they were seen working in groups with some amount of local security within their own community.

Whatever be the community, the post conflict recovery period offers a rare opportunity for the women to strengthen

their role and participate in rebuilding their lives and bring the affected people out of the covariate shocks. The environment becomes more fluid. Given independence and opportunity, women can contribute immensely towards the economic welfare of the family and the community as a whole.

There has been a reduction of violence in the district in the recent past. However, the condition of women has not changed much in the area of empowerment. Though there have been conflicts of low intensity but there has been a high level of displacement especially of the Muslim immigrants. In the process of displacement it was seen that again the women folk are affected more than their counterpart.

Empowerment of women depended on their culture, social, occupational, economic and migration history. Some young girls were forcefully pushed into marriage even during conflict because the parents thought that that way their daughters would be secure. These young girls were utterly distressed. They had no control over the key areas of their life, for example education, marriage, child bearing, work etc. Some women were, however, found to be substantially empowered. They could make independent decisions on what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do. They joined local self help groups, developed friendship with people outside their family, voiced about their decision on child bearing, some started working in whatever capacity they could, and others resumed education. More mobility was seen among the women in the post conflict period. Commonalities and differences were identified among the women of various communities.

Assets and capabilities are the two important resources on which the mobility and power to pursue their interest depends. Based on the interviews with women both directly and indirectly affected by violence it was found that 68 percent of the women in conflict riddled area were more empowered than the women who were not affected by the conflict directly (48 percent). Women by nature are care giver and hence the responsibility of physical and psychological well-being of the

family, harmony among the members of the society and at times livelihood (if she has been orphaned or widowed during the conflict) automatically comes to her.

In the villages that were visited, most women were found to have little education or were illiterate. Most of them worked during childhood that resulted in their inability to continue with their studies. As adults they engaged themselves in economic activity like agriculture and informal non-farm work. Because of the crisis that rose out of the conflict most of the male members were supportive and did not oppose the women members joining the community groups that were formed to support one another economically as well as psychologically. The women enjoyed more respect and support from their families. However, there were exceptions where women suffered because of gender norms and household conflicts. They were the ones who faced poor security and suffered economically.

Post conflict resettlement programmes and housing did not reduce gender inequality in ownership. The land or the housing facility was entitled to the male member of the family as a norm which no woman dares to break. However, they were given independence to provide for the family livelihood. During conflict periods working in the fields or tending livestock in open fields became dangerous many of them started working as street vendors or engaged themselves in non-farm activities. Women were willing to work on low wage to cater to the needs of the family. One important skill that the women acquired during the conflict period is coping with skills that made them more independent. Many started joining informal sector based on the experience gained during the conflict. Families that depended on agriculture alone started diversifying their income sources. Women started opening small shops to sell items of daily use or food counters etc. The problem of continued insecurity, weak market after the conflict, competition among the local worker sometimes limited the gains.

4.12.3 Ethnic Violence in Chirang:

The relief camps visited in Chirang district were set in open fields. The people from Adivasi community took shelter in the camps. There was a small club room that housed the relief materials like food, clothes and other requirements. Women were seen searching for clothes to fit members of their family especially their children. The camps here too were made of plastic sheets that could hardly give any private space for the women. Interactions with the women were often interrupted by men who felt that the women had little knowledge about the cause and consequences of the conflict.

Though the camp inmates had to leave their village for security purpose yet they were prepared to face any kind of attack from the Bodos. They were armed with bows and arrows and kept a constant vigilance. The reason they decided to leave the village was because they were concerned about the security of the women and children who they feel would be victimized if there is a sudden attack in the village. Here the people set up tents using tarpaulin sheets or sarees. However, administration refuses to recognize these camps and do not provide relief materials as per the norms.

The condition worsens during rainy seasons. During rain the inmates run to the nearest tinned shelter and sit there till the rain subsides. There were times when they sat in those shelters throughout the night in the cold, shivering. The women said that it was better than staying back in tents as the floor was wet and muddy. Their main concern was their children.

Moreover, since the number of camps were not enough the women had to lose their privacy and live in cramped up spaces with unrelated men which increased the risk of sexual violence. In all the relief camps in Chirang namely Ravanghat, Lauripara and Juiloga there were old women, widows and pregnant women who came forward to voice their problems. The pregnant women were concerned if they would get timely attention in the camp from the doctors as even the Asha workers feared to visit the camps during violence. The old women and the

widows were at a loss as they saw a very bleak future with no means and money to resettle in their villages.

4.12.4 Life Experiences of Women in Baksa:

In Baksa district the villages visited namely Apoha, Narayanguri, Khagrabari and Bennabari the gender inequalities was marked. To cope with the conflict situation the women and children were trapped into the vicious cycle of sex trade, early marriage and child labour. During their stay in relief camps the girls and women at times had to walk long distance for fuel or clean water which had put them at risk of being molested or bad mouthed. Yet for desperation for survival these victimised women withstood all exploitative conditions. The sanitation needs were not addressed and because of the poor hygienic condition in the camps old women and very young children often fell ill. There have been records of women giving birth in the camp unaided and owing to lack of basic health care some babies die which goes unrecorded.

The community conversation brought forth the plight of the women even after they came back home. They are denied a life with dignity. To keep the heath burning they often deprive their children especially daughters of basic education and send them to work as domestic helps in nearby towns. These girls are deprived of the security and education which traps them in the intergenerational chronic poverty.

The district administration had formed peace committees and most of these had "those accused of the violence and anxious to get the survivors/victims withdraw cases against them" (Manchanda and Sharma 17). Women were either not included or even if they were included their opinion was not taken into consideration.

Through the field study it has been observed that women are deprived of her basic rights even in a conflict situation. They have no voice even in building their own lives. Young girls are forced into marriage for the sake of security and they further lose their liberty to live a life with dignity. Rice, *dal* and mustard oil – the standard emergency response of the government does not

suffice the needs of the people in camps. Moreover, when these camp inmates return to their villages their mobility are curbed and when circumstances demand, they were forced to expose themselves to vulnerable situations.

The gender inequality is more pronounced in these areas when monetary compensation is given. The money is usually transferred to the bank account of the male household head. They spend some amount on essential items but refuse to spend money on children's education or other household needs. The woman of the house knows that there is money in the bank yet they live a hand to mouth existence. This has led to increase of violence against the wives and affected the relationships.

Alcoholism is another factor that affects the lives of women especially when in conflict ridden areas. It has been seen that men both in camps and in the villages waste their time playing cards and unfruitful conversations. To get rid of their frustrations they resort to alcoholism and violence.

4.13 Some Marked Differences:

- a. Bodo women are more empowered than their Muslim counterpart. Traditionally Bodo women, during normal situation, go to the fields to cultivate, assist their male counterparts in the small business setup etc. Comparatively Muslim women stay in their houses as caretakers and caregivers. Those that move to the nearby towns work as daily wage labourers. But in their villages or settlements they are noticed to be occupying the private space i.e. they are mostly confined in the house taking care of the home and the heath.
- b. During camp visits it has been observed that the Adivasi camps are cramped up while Bodo camps have less number of inmates. The reason could be that the Bodos do not fear to go back to their villages as they feel that they are the son of the soil. It is only during extreme conflicts they take refuge in the schools and other institutions that are turned to camps. They soon return to their homes after the conflict subsides.

However, in case of Adivasi and Muslim victims they prefer to stay in the camps as they feel more secured.

- c. Muslims go back to the rehabilitated village which is set up by the government as they have no land of their own while the Bodos and the Adivasis go back to their villages and have to struggle to build their burnt or destroyed home and rebuild their lives. This is another type of crisis that the people face.
- d. Government has not provided relief materials to different ethnic groups equally. This was evident in the living conditions of the people in the camps and also returned villagers. The Bodo camps inmates were provided with better facility than the Muslim and the Adivasis. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Rita Manchanda and Aparajita Sharma (2016).

The women's experiences explored in the BTAD area and elaborated above have some other aspects too in various fields for social reorganization. Some of the experiences that helped in evolving a positive attitude for social set up are discussed below.

4.14 Different Roles of Women in Social Setup:

Women play different roles in the ever changing social setup. After India's independence our constitution guaranteed gender equality and a number of schemes relating to development of the status of women have been adopted. But when we analyse and examine the real scenario is too grim. There is a constant struggle by the women for security and survival in a complex conflict ridden world, be it in the socio-cultural, historical, economic or political areas.

In armed conflict situation women are most vulnerable targets of violence. In the absence of male members in the family who are either dead or are missing or has gone into hiding for the fear of being attacked or torture, women in the house has to take the responsibility of jobs performed by men beside her own household chores. Moreover, in conflict ridden areas where displacement is a common phenomenon – the complete shift from their homes to a new environment- people especially

women, find themselves in a multiple risk situation both physically and psychologically. This often leads to domestic violence, broken homes and single-handedly managing homes in extremely difficult situations.

Rape as a weapon of armed conflict is visible in many towns and cities (Vernal 2). It has been seen that in most of these cases the security personnel who are given the responsibility of protecting the people becomes the violators of law (rapists). There have been instances of women being active participants in various rebel groups. In the North East there are women combatants in National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) and United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). Even though these women cadres actively take part in the fight for the larger cause of the struggle they are often unhappy within the organizations which are patriarchal in structure.

A study carried out on NSWON (Women's wing of NSCN-IM) of Nagaland and People's Liberation Army of Nepal over two years (2007-2008) revealed that women rebels had been denied their rightful place within the organizational set up (Vernal 2-3). In a regular organization women have to struggle hard to break the glass ceiling and only a very small percentage of women have reached the top. Worse is the case in the terrorist organizations where women have to fight for their basic rights.

4.15 Women and Peace Building:

In conflict ridden zone women play a vital role in peace-building. Peace does not mean absence of violence. A peaceful and secured environment can be attained if safety and security can be provided for the vulnerable section of the society. If the role of woman in a conflict ridden zone is taken seriously it is found that she has multiple functions. Being a woman she has a better understanding of the needs of woman in a conflict situation and requirements for a peaceful environment. However, it has been observed that the opinions of women are often sidelined by the powerful organizations and political leaders. The patriarchal dominance is prominent even in a crisis situation where women are the worst sufferers.

Time has come for women to form strong organizations to fight against some evils which is common in times of crisis. Drug abuse, rape, alcoholism, trafficking, sexually transmitted diseases, molestation are some major problems that needs to be addressed. Women have come forward to negotiate for peace in different conflict zones. In Nagaland, the Naga Mothers Association was formed in 1984 and has been active ever since campaigning for peace. 'Shed no more blood' was the slogan coined by them. In Kaskmir, Parveena Ahangar whose son has been missing for two decades has set up the Association of the Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) whose members are mostly women. Their main agenda is to try and track down the missing members of the families so that they get back their loved ones.

In Assam there are examples where women took initiative to reduce the impact of conflict. In the early part of the 20th century Mahila Samitis were formed with the welfare approach of Gandhi. It gave women the chance to freely take part in the freedom struggles and thus build a network among women from different places. In 1990s the Assam Matri Samaj tried to negotiate for peace with ULFA. They have also tried to bring positive change within the communities. Anima Dutta, a worker of Assam Matri Samaj tried to negotiate with the Bodo rebel outfit in Baksa District.

In BTAD area women like Dr. Anjali Prabha Daimari, a human rights activist and founder of the Bodo Women Justice Forum, Ms. Golapi Basumatary, a well-known and respected activist and others have come forward to spearhead organizations to voice their protest against atrocities of the security forces especially women and also contributed towards bringing peace in the violence affected areas of BTAD.

Dr. Daimari vehemently protested against the Arms Force Special Power Act (AFSPA) and voiced that the Indian security forces were using the Act in North East India and committing heinous crimes against the innocent civilians. (*Bodoland Observer*, March 26, 2016). Being the only graduate from her

village then, she felt it was her duty to protect her community from the injustice. She observed that in most conflict situations, waged either by BLT or NDFB or any other ethnic groups it is mostly the women, especially Bodo women who had to face the blunt of the security forces. Many women were tortured, molested and raped. In 1992 she formed the Bodo Women Justice Forum to address the issues relating to their community. Though it has only women members they worked towards the justice for the whole community. They went from village to village to bring consciousness among the people to bring in peace.

Dr. Daimari represented the Bodo tribe at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Population (UNWGIP) in Geneva in 1996 and 1997. This has surely brought the issue of the ethnic conflict in BTAD on the table of UNWGIP. Ms. Golapi Basumatary who was the general secretary of the Boro Women's Justice Forum and a well-known activist voiced protest against the killings of innocent people and framing them as terrorists. She too fought along with their members of the forum for restoration of justice and peace in the BTAD area.

One question that still remains to be addressed is that peace may bring end to the external ethnic conflict but can women expect peace within the four walls of her home? Through the interactions with various women belonging to different communities, different age groups, different levels of education one can conclude that the position of women whether in public or private space is always subjugated and the patriarchal social structure is hard to break though the contribution of women in both the spaces is immense in both conflict and post conflict period.

4.16 Role of NGOs in Violence Affected Areas:

Dr. Arupjyoti Choudhury addressing at a national seminar remarked that it would be a very wrong idea to wait for the politicians to solve the problem of ethnic conflict and violence. They work as a watch dog of their own chair of power and therefore whatever steps or initiatives are taken by them it is

according to their political needs. Social groups, NGOs, eminent people, scholars, and teachers have a great role to play in policy making and bringing in a solution to the ethnic problems of the state.

To address the issue of violence the platform should be democratic. Problems of violence can be solved only when democracy is in power. India has proclaimed democracy since its independence in 1947. But despite this it has failed to address the problem of ethnic violence. This is mainly due to internal colonialism. When East India Company first came to India in 1836 it exploited the country's natural resources such as coal, petroleum, tea, limestone etc. This gave rise to discontent among the people who felt that they were being robbed by the British.

The Independence Movement brought freedom to the country but unfortunately internal colonialism still continues in post colonial India. Though it has been 67 years since independence we are yet to free ourselves from internal colonialism which is one of the major reasons for ethnic conflict and violence.

The demassification syndrome also contributes to emergence of violence. When the ethnic groups feel that they are being exploited, they voice their willingness to form separate council or state which gives rise to a movement that eventually turns violent. The areas become a fertile ground for ethnic conflicts. In order to address the problem this dynamic has to be taken into account. There is a need to pursue policy of development without destroying nature.

4.17 Millennium Development Goals and Women:

Recognition of the status and problems of women made the United Nations declare 1975 as the International Women's Year and the period between 1975 and 1985 as the Women's Decade. This was recommended in the United Nation World Conference in Mexico in 1975 to initiate plans for raising the status of women. It also recommended full involvement of women in the process of development at all levels.

In India the first attempt to improve women's position in society was made with the appointment of the National Committee in 1972. The report published in 1975 brought about a great change in the social scenario. In 2003 UNDP (United Nation Development Project) had brought out its Human Resource Development Report which spoke about The Millennium Development Goals (Mandal 4). The Millennium Development Goals targeted to give basic rights to all people so that there is substantial control over hunger, income poverty, disease, exclusion and lack of adequate shelter. Moreover, they advocated education for all, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

The Millennium Development Goals¹ has eight goals:

1. Eradicate extreme hunger and Poverty
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
4. Reduce Child Mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability
8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

A significant progress has been made in achieving most of the goals. Records of Millennium Project show that in between 1990 and 2002 there has been an increase in average income by approximately 21 percent. Compared to previous records the child mortality rate fell from 103 to 88 deaths per 1,000 live births. More people of the developing world have access to water. Life expectancy has risen from 63 to 65 years. Access to improved sanitation services has shown a growth of 15 percent. However, there has been no uniform progress. Large disparities are seen within and across the countries.

However, if the truth is looked into in the conflict ridden area of BTAD none of the Millennium Development Goals have been achieved. Just to set goals will not meet the needs of people.

These are to be worked upon and implemented. Though

we often talk of empowering women that helps in establishing their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives but in reality the picture is quite different. Empowerment and status of women is an issue that cuts across all countries of the world. It has gained momentum in recent years. However, in conflict zones the progress towards empowerment is often hampered for various reasons as discussed earlier.

4.18 Conclusion:

During the field survey it has been observed that there is a disturbing noise in the silence of the women and the camp inmates prefer to stay in the camps rather than go back to their villages as they felt safer here. The women felt unsure about the future. They were under constant fear of being attacked or displaced again. Moreover, few pregnant women could not get medical attention as, even the Asha members feared to travel to the camps and affected villages during the trouble torn period. There was scarcity of food, proper drinking water, warm clothes, baby food etc in the relief camps.

Another observation that became very prominent during the study was that the villagers belonging to different communities, who co existed in peace and harmony for many years, helping and cooperating with each other had become strangers to one another soon after the ethnic conflict began. There was total loss of faith. The people who were co-strugglers turned to co-enemies. In a situation like this the women become the worst sufferers as by nature they are caretakers, caregivers and lover of peace. The pain that violence affected women goes through and the problems that they face are often not heard especially in the conflict zones. Dr.Seema Samar said, "Because we don't have guns nobody listens to us". This words ring true because it is seen that the government and the administrative bodies are found to invite the gun trotting militants to the table for discussion in search for a solution. They obviously fail to address the women issues and their views in tackling with the problems. The method of community conversation must be

considered which will help in taking decision on issues of women that would fit into policy making.

Women in the camps are more concerned about their children, husband and with time for their camp mates. This concern is out of insecurity. Male members show aggressiveness towards their wives, children and also the perpetrators. The escapist attitude or surrendering to the helpless situation could be the reason.

End Notes:

¹Source: "Human Rights, A Big Question in Assam"- Documentary by Zamsar Ali

² Source: <https://www.amnesty.org.in/our-work/stop-violence-against-women/show>

³Source:<https://www.amnesty.org.in/our-work/stop-violence-against-women/show>

⁴ Source: Presentation by Doctor Maria Cristina Hurtado-Sánchez, Office of the Ombudsman for the Rights of Children, Youth and the Family of Colombia at *Experts Meeting: Access to Justice in Andean Region Countries*, organized by the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Women of the IACHR, *Instituto de Defensa Legal*, Lima, Peru, August 1-2, 2005

⁵See <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2015/12/shelter-storm-state-world-population-2015-report-launch/> 6/11/16

⁶ See <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals> for Millennium Development Goals and records

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CHAPTER

SUMMARY OF
FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION



5.1 Introduction:

The chapter tries to throw light on the main findings followed by a conclusion based on the elaborate explanations in the contents of the study. Further it tries to suggest policy initiatives and recommend necessary actions urgently called for improving the women in spaces of ethnic violence and conflict in particular.

On October 31, 2000 the Security Council adopted a resolution (No. 1325)¹ on women and peace security. It upholds the importance of the role of women in prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace building and humanitarian response. It also stresses on equal participation of women and their full involvement in promotion of peace and security. The resolution urges the increase of women participation in all committees so that the gender perspective can be incorporated in all United Nations peace and security efforts.

The resolution also makes provisions to take special measures to protect women and girl child from gender-based violence in armed conflict situation, particularly rape and sexual abuse. It provides many important operational mandates, with

possibilities of future action for Member States and the other units of the United Nations system.

In the study various aspects of women in conflict zone have been explored and it can be concluded that there are hardly any inclusive role of women in peace building or policy making.

5.2 Concepts and Literature Review:

The first chapter attempted a brief overview of the condition of women in India in general and especially Assam during and in post conflict situation. It also conceptualized the basic terms like ethnicity, ethnic conflict, violence, spaces of women etc. The methodology followed in this study was explained. The literature review done showed that though there are numerous works on ethnic conflict and violence, very little study has been done on women in the conflict zone of BTAD.

5.3 Formation of Bodoland:

The second chapter delved into the causes of the movement by the Bodos for a separate state. Historical evidences show that the Bodos were the original inhabitants of Assam but with the advent of the Aryans they were eventually marginalized and their language and culture were at stake. To protect and retain their own identity instead of assimilating into the mainstream Assamese society they started a movement for a land of their own. The participation of women especially AATWWF was highlighted in the chapter.

5.4 Women in Conflict Zone and Media:

Media, the fourth pillar of democracy, has a very important role to play in disseminating information to the public. The third chapter tried to show how news on women is rarely highlighted unless it is of some political interest or there is a public uproar. From the analysis that had been done it was found that the physical, emotional, psychological problems of women in violence ridden BTAD area was hardly been given space in the print and visual media.

5.5 Women and Violence:

The fourth chapter focused on the interviews and data that were collected during the field study. The women in conflict zone of BTAD, both in the relief camps and in their villages, were shadowed by the fear and insecurity of being attacked or displaced. The physical discomfort and the loss of privacy of women during the period of conflict were overwhelming not to talk about medical attention and food supply. Even in a situation like this, the dynamics of patriarchy dominated.

5.6 Findings of the Study:

The main findings relating to women in spaces of ethnic conflict and violence in BTAD area are summarised in the following points.

- Irrespective of causes and nature of violence and conflicts, the women and girl child are always found to be more affected and victimized.
- The situation in the areas of ethnic violence affirms that women are marginalized and they experience marginalization differently and face socio-economic insecurities during conflict and also in the later period.
- The societal distortion created by community clashes resulted both in short term and long term consequences specifically for women and girl children either in-camp living or their condition in post conflict period. The following are the aspects identified by the study.
 - Loss of home and property leading to absolute poverty
 - Deprivation from medical attention because of which health of women and children are at stake
 - Interrupted education makes the future of the children in these conflict zones uncertain
 - Persistent fear psychosis
 - Direction to trafficking
 - Sexual abuse
 - Trauma

- Victimization from their own relatives
- Lack of trust among the communities
- Improper sanitation
- Lack of baby food and sanitary pads
- A comparative look into three phases of women's condition – pre-conflict, conflict and post conflict revealed that the nature of subjugation remains a cyclic phenomenon. During the conflict though the women were not bound by the chains of dos and don'ts because of the crisis but once they went back it is observed that it was the women who were again suppressed and failed to lend a voice in the affairs of the family. However, they never complained for they have accepted the conventional norms of patriarchy.
- Camp living condition of women was found to deprive them of their private space and was subjected to humiliation which was reported to be overlooked.
- Though it is usually assumed that women are vulnerable, it has been observed that crisis arising out of conflict situation make women stronger.
- The experiences that the women underwent during conflict and post conflict period both in relief camps, rehabilitation centres and in their villages has brought immense change in their thinking process.
- The women politicians hardly participated in discussions on the conditions of women and their needs in the conflict zone.

The above findings draw the following conclusion and recommend the actions called for.

5.7 Concluding Remarks and Actions Called For:

Women have created new pathways for themselves to sustain their families that were ruined by violent conflicts. Conflict situations have opened a window to women empowerment that cannot be ignored. This has not only improved the lives of women but also helped the communities to recover fast from the disaster and reduce poverty.

However, based on the field work and interviews of women staying both in their own house and women who lived in relief camps during and also post ethnic conflict period, the investigator found that the following areas needed to be addressed:

- During conflict and in the post conflict period there is a special need to arrange local security for women.
- To encourage women to develop connectivity to market outside and thereby strengthen their economic participation.
- Women should be allowed to accumulate and have independent control over major assets.
- Women's empowerment and community participation must be encouraged for the foundation for development programmes and post-conflict reconstruction.
 - Support has to be provided to affected women to create their own income sources. Specialized technical and financial support from the government to enable women to invest in profitable business should be provided.
 - Social networking should be provided for access to active market, exchange ideas, information and financial or material resources.
 - Women should be encouraged to join self help credit groups sponsored by public agencies or NGOs so that there is some authenticity.
 - Social assistance should be provided especially to poor widows and orphaned children.
 - Participation of women in peacemaking policies, planning refugee camps, reconstruction of families and society in conflict zone is recommended.
 - There is a need to take up confidence building measures for restoration of permanent peace and this cannot be done without the sensitive participation of women.
 - Sensitizing the affected people in the rehabilitation centres on women's issues becomes important so that the women who are already marginalized do not feel desolate

and despaired. It is only through such efforts that women's respect can be restored.

- Vocational training in camps that has been there for many years
- There is a need to include more women in making policy especially concerning women issues.
- Women must be included in peace-building efforts, peace negotiations committees and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.
- Policies should be initiated to see women become the agents of socio economic growth and not victims of the society.
- More women must actively involve themselves in the field of journalism to highlight the women issues which are ignored by men and contribute directly or indirectly towards the development of the image of women and bring solution to their problems.

5.8 New Directions:

There are some examples of initiatives adopted by governments to give agency to women and improve their situation which is a healthy move. A news item titled '*A lot happens over a coffee in Ethiopia*' states that 'Bunna Tetu'- a coffee ceremony that is a routine affair in Ethiopian households- is one occasion being utilized by the government to promote health care and healthy life style practices.

Another programme initiated by the Ethiopian Government through the 'Women's Development Army' is where women volunteers are trained by health extension workers to focus more on behavioural changes such as encouraging good hygiene, sanitation and setting up separate cooking spaces (*The Hindu*, November 25, 2013).

From the above an example can be drawn how the government can promote women centric health care plan. Similarly a number of problematic issues arising out of conflict can be resolved. From the study it can be seen that women are

the worst sufferers in a conflict situation and more often than not their sufferings are overlooked. They have to find their own ways to solve their crisis for which self confidence and empowerment is very important. The empowerment special schemes for women must be introduced. Moreover participation by external partners who will stand by these affected women needs to be encouraged. Post conflict situation can be taken as an entry point towards empowering women. This will certainly help in bringing the affected people out of psychological, social and economic crisis.

End Note:

¹<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/dated11/05/2017>

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