

**“EXPERIENCING THE REPERCUSSION OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT: A
STUDY AMONG THE BODO AND BENGALI MUSLIMS OF THE CHIRANG
DISTRICT, ASSAM”**

*Thesis Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of*

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KUHELI DAS



Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health

School of Social Sciences

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi-110067

India

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CENTRE OF SOCIAL MEDICINE & COMMUNITY HEALTH

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

New Delhi- 110067

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled “**EXPERIENCING THE REPERCUSSION OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT: A STUDY AMONG THE BODO AND BENGALI MUSLIMS OF THE CHIRANG DISTRICT, ASSAM**” is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, of Jawaharlal Nehru University. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University and is my original work

Kuheli Das

Kuheli Das

We recommended that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Rajib Dasgupta

Prof. Rajib Dasgupta

(Chairperson)

Ramila Bisht

Ramila Bisht

(Supervisor)

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Introduction

The process of creating identity of a community on the basis of shared ethnicity of its members, are often marked with violent conflict. The underlying reasons for these conflicts are often structural. However violent ethnic conflict results in more death and disability than any epidemic. In case of ethnic conflict it is the ethnicity of the people that decides their chances to get affected with conflict. The direct effect of conflict is death and mass destruction, injuries, closing down of many health institutions, restriction on mobility, displacements, threat to personal security and safety. Along with direct physical harm, many events lead to traumatic experience of the people. Many survivors of conflict live with physical and mental scare throughout their life. The direct consequences of conflict like death and disability are most visible in nature but all these direct consequences of conflict impact the emotional well being of the affected population.

The unequal power distribution among men and women makes her vulnerable to many crime like rape , eve teasing, molestation. In conflict time the notion of powerful and powerless are more pronounced. According to United Nations report (2002),ICRC report (2001, 2004) and Jansen (2006), women experiences conflict differently owing to their biology and gender role perceived by society. Conflict produces threats to both men and women but women are often unarmed and unprotected as compared to the men. Rap, mass rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced sterilization, and forced termination of pregnancies and mutilation are increasing being adopted as a strategy for war. Rape is used as a weapon to transmit HIV, and for ethnic cleansing. Torture on women during wartlme is increasing being documented; women are tortured to get information about the men. But women's proximity to such types is due to their ethnicity. War time crimes on women are used as a tool for ethnic cleansing thus their gender and ethnicity makes them susceptible.

From access to health care perspective, the conflict which leaves lasting impression on people and their communities also leaves the health care paralyzed. As women's

movement during conflict time is severely controlled and disruption of primary and reproductive health care severely restricts her access to even emergency health care.

Along with direct physical consequences of conflict specifically on women, many traumatic events experienced by them during the course of conflict have adverse effect of their well-being. The manifestation of these traumatic events may vary according to their cultural context. Adolescent girls being married off early as an attempt to ensure their safety have been reported from many south East Asian countries.

As women's functioning is considered essential for "normal" functioning of society, thus their traditional role expectation as a caregiver compels them to take care of their family and relative even in changed circumstances. Thus in the changed circumstance of conflict when access to food water and livelihood becomes difficult, it is expected from women to provide all these. Moreover, in situation of food scarcity women tend to skip meal or eat less to support or to provide food for the children and men folk. It is also expected from her to eat at the last, after all her family members have eaten. This role expectation also affects her nutritional status. In case of loss of livelihood, women assume the role of bread winner. Women and adolescent girls work in informal sector, usually done by the male member of the family. As the International Committee of the Red Cross(ICRC) report 2001, Conflict results in raise in epidemics, communicable disease and lack of access of health care facilities, which affect men, women, and children. But in a situation which is marked by resource scarcity, it is more likely that resources to pay medical bill will be used on men rather than on women.

This over burden of women and relative inactivity of men results in frustration and domestic violence for example in ICRC study on Women Peace and Security(2002) all the women interviewed in Burundi has experienced domestic violence at the time of their stay as a refugees.

But women are not helpless victims only; rather, conflict gives women to take up new role, thus challenging the traditional role of women in a patrilineal and patriarchal society. Women, Peace and Security, ICRC report (2002) show that women in Chad, for example, utilized the networks formed during their stay in refugee camps to do extensive cross-border trading in Nigeria and the Sudan. In pastoral communities in Eritrea, north-east Kenya and the Sudan, women have expanded their traditional trade in milk products to include items, such as handicrafts, beer, incense and other products traditionally sold by men.” Even as this informal sector provides job opportunity for the survival of the family but it lack labour protection and it resulted exposure of women and adolescent girls into exploitation and danger. Thus, studying the consequences of conflict only in terms of mortality and injuries will limit its affect and would restrict us to comprehend its outcome on the society. Although women gaining from conflict are still a debatable topic in the academia but women using their agency at various degrees to negotiate their way out is also documented well. Many of the partition literature reflects that as well, where women crossed the threshold of her house or inner world to step in at the outer world Bagchi(2003) captured that aspect when women from east Pakistan were settled in at the refugee colonies in and around Kolkata.

Assam has a long history of conflict starting from Moamoria rebellion in the 18th century to the present day movement for autonomy by various ethnic groups like Bodos, Koch Rajbanshis, Karbis, Dimasas etc. In most of the conflicts in Assam, ethnicity has been the main cause of conflict. The study has been conducted in area where ethnic conflict on resources and identities has been a historical phenomenon .In fact ethnicity has been the main issue of mobilization in north eastern part of India. The three theoretical views namely, Primordial, Instrumentalist and Constructivist underlines three different components for creation of identity around ethncity viz fix and permanent with historical context, for material gain and creation through constant interaction. These theoretical views on ethnic identity formations are contradictory with each other. A broad reading on ethnic conflict in Northeast India and specifically in Assam brings out one or more reasons from the above mentioned causes. Various scholars is of the opinion that the ethnic conflicts within the Bodo

Territorial Autonomous Districts is a result of constant negation process, focusing more on the changing inter community relationship. .

Keeping this as the background, the present study would try to see how ethnic conflict in the Bodo Territorial autonomous Districts influences the health of the population specially the women. The study tries to see what aspects of health get affected by the conflict. Capturing their journey from their village, through various refugee camps and back to their village remains one of the prime objectives of the study. How their experience of conflict shapes their idea of wellbeing and their future lives. Along with that it will be interesting to see how women negotiate their way out without succumbing to the existing circumstances.

The following chapters would present the ideas in a more elaborate way. The study would see whether ethnicity makes them vulnerable to conflict related crime and how ethnicity proves vital in shaping their experience in ethnic conflict.

Chapterisation

Chapter 1 introduces the major theoretical and empirical concepts related to the study. Secondly, the chapter reviews the related literature on conflict and its effect on society especially on women's health.

Chapter 2 conceptualizes the research problem drawing from the gap identified in the previous chapter. Further it talks about the methods used to conduct the field work. It introduces the readers with the "field" and the process of selecting the respondents. It discusses the experience gathered while collecting the data and limitation of the study .Finally concluding with the ethical issues addressed while collecting the data

Chapter 3 basically sets the tone for the analysis chapters coming up next. The chapter focuses on history of conflict and history of migration in Assam. Further, it talks about the history of Muslims in Assam and the status assigned to the women in the Bodo society.

Chapter 4 Gives an over view of the selected villages in terms of their location, socio – economic profile of the households of the villages .Their histories and occupation of the people of the villages are also dealt with. This gives an idea of the inter community ties of the people of the villages.

Chapter 5 focuses on the life of the people of both the villages before conflict. This sets the background to understand how the conflict affected their inter community ties, which, eventually inform their understanding of well being. The next section of the chapter brings out how people from both the villages encountered conflict in term for the first time and what consequences did it bore on their physical health and emotional well being . Further, it also focuses on what were their immediate responses.

Chapter 6 : Traces the journey of the people of Bashbari and Sonai villages though various camps and what specific health problems did the women from both the villages encountered during their stay at various camps. It also captures how they overcome these health problems posed by conflict. Throughout their journey what factors (subjective and objective) forms their idea of well being was also being probed.

Chapter 7 portrays the return of the women to their respective villages and their struggle to rebuild their lives. The health issues that were raised in those circumstances were also studied and how those health issues were address also came under the ambit of the study.

Chapter 8 The final chapter came up with the empirical findings of the present study, focusing on the similarities and dissimilarities experienced by the women of both the villages in the backdrop of conflict. It tried to co relate with the literate already reviewed in the previous chapter and finally, giving policy recommendations to help frame a more gender sensitive policies.

Chapter 1

An overview of conflict and its consequences: Review of Literature

There is plethora of studies which brings out the multiple dimension of conflict. However the central focus of the present study is on ethnic conflict and its effect on women's health. Below some of the literature reviewed that brings out the theoretical approach to understand ethnicity. This is followed by some empirical studies on conflict and its influence on society at large. To understand the specificity of woman's condition in a society ridden by conflict, relevant literatures are reviewed. The next section specifically deals with women's health in the conflict situation. The following section addresses the issues of accessibility to health service system in conflict situation. As the consequences of conflict is multi-dimensional the literature reviewed are often over lapping which shows that impact of conflict in one component would influence the other as well .

1.1 Ethnicity and ethnic conflict

According to Jenkins (cited in Shale 2004: pp1) the word ethnicity is derived from ancient Greek word "ethos" which implies a situation in which a collection of individual lives and acts together.

However many people uses ethnicity in a narrow sense that includes only linguistic or racial group. But according to Horowitz 1984 cited in Varshney (2003),all ascribed group identities whether real or imaginary like race, language, religion tribe, or caste can be called ethnic. Paul Brass (2013 pp19) defines ethnicity as a sense of ethnic identity which consists of subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups. An ethnic group that uses cultural symbols in this way is a subjectively self- conscious community that establishes criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the group

There are four main theoretical views to describe ethnic identity and ethnicity and these are – Primordial, instrumentalist, materialist and constructivist. According to Primordial view, ethnic identity is given, fixed and permanent. They claim that people are born into ethnic group and thus they belong to a particular group by birth. They believed that people have an essential need for belonging which is satisfied by groups based on shared ancestry and culture. This theory further explains the reason for ethnic conflict. According to this theory, with different culture and value of each ethnic group mutual hatred is inevitable and that leads to the emergence of ethnic conflict. (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016). This theory fails to explain the emergence of new ethnic group.

One of the groups which challenged the Primordial view was the ‘Manchester School’ and according to those anthropologists who belong to the instrumentalist group, ethnicity is a means to gain material resource and political power. A sense of ethnic identity is created to lay claim on resources .People are mobilized in the line of ethnicity so that more claims are made on social and economic resources that will give social status to the ethnic group in larger society. (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016)This theory fails to explain why people are ready to sacrifice their live for the mobilization when they may not survive to claim the resources that might be allotted to them.

According to Constructivist, ethnic identity is created through social interaction. The member of a particular group produces and re-produces ethnic identity through interactions in a society. This approach initiated a discussion about how ethnicity is constructed .(Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016)

According to materialist approach ethnicity is a result of class relation and ethnic conflict is the result of economic inequalities exploitation by the elites. However, this approach was heavily criticized and now it is accepted that ethnic conflict is not a result of economic exploitations.(Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016)

But these theories fail to answer why religion or culture becomes the focal point of the conflict. According to Varshney 2003, culture and religion provides the guiding force that will judge any human act as right or wrong. But plurality of religion and culture can’t be

blamed for the conflicts in a society. There are multiple groups in society and they are ranked in a hierarchical order .however presence of multiple group in a society doesn't it self threatens the peace and order. Infact groups which are ranked lower in the society may easily accept their position as shown in the process of "Sanskritisation" or "Hegemony", in both these process those who are placed lower in the social accepts their ascribed status. Thus a hierarchy based on ascribed status can exist. In this type of social order one's identity was decided by birth and thus it was fixed, which can't be changed. But in modern society one doesn't take their identity as fixed, which is determined by their birth. As a result people strive for "dignity" .But this pursuit of dignity requires recognizes from the society. In present world, two ideas of dignity prevails, one that comes out from the ascribed concept of group that ranks them as high or low and another that raises due to decline of the previous system of hierarchy and increase in equality. In the present world the sense of dignity that arises due to raise in equality seems to challenges the ascribed notion of dignity. The problem with this type of socially recognized ascribe notion of dignity is that, it tends to define one's identity over which one doesn't have any control. Conflict arises when one group refuses to accept their ascribed position and strives to achieve better position in the society and other group refuses to give that position to them.

Thus, the conceptual understanding of ethnicity drawn from various reading can be defined as, a sense of common identity drawn from common history, common language, common religion, common homeland, or any other aspect of culture that is distinct from others. Ethnic identity can be used to create an impression of unity amongst a group of people and to distinguish them from others. The different aspects of ethnicity as defined have been the bone the contention between groups and that raises conflict between the groups. History is full of examples where one or more aspects of ethnicity has been the focal point of tension.

In the present context the Bodo claimed their difference from the Assamese community on the basis of language- which is one of the battlegrounds of Bodo cultural politics, the other two aspects of differentiation were food and dress. (Baruah 2001)

Following this line, ethnic conflict, can be defined as conflict between two or more ethnic groups over resources or any other issues that might threaten their identity. According to Ismayilov (2012) the dominant aspect of ethnic conflict is ethnic, tribal religious or linguistic difference. These type of conflict often involves a mixture of identity and the search for security where the prime contention concerns the devolution of power. Paul Brass states that claim to ethnic identity involved in demand to either equal or superior to other group. Ethnic groups, as mentioned by Paul Brass (1991), in many context demands complete control over a fixed territory within a country or a sovereign country. They claim their rights to preserve their identity, through control over public system of education, in their area of concentration so that they can teach their history, language, their culture to their own children. The ground of conflict among Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo was in the same context. The Serbs were in minority in Kosovo, which is the southern province of Serbia. Albanians were allowed to use Albanian language in school and were allowed to develop their culture and this was unacceptable for the Serbs as they consider Kosovo as the seat of their history and relates their civilization to that place.(Heymann, 2001) .The ethnic group after claiming their ethnicity on the ground of common features demands full control over a piece of land that could be with in the country or their own sovereign country. In the latter case Bangladesh was formed a separate nation from Pakistan on the basis of different language. And today the essence of Bodo movement follows the same line, As mentioned by Baruah (1999) The first demand for separate state by the plain tribes of Assam was proposed by the Plain Tribal Council of Assam in the year 1967, which was to be named as “Udayachal”. But it was only in the year 1987 that the demand of separate Bodo state which was to be called as “Bodoland” started gaining momentum. .In case, the ethnic group claims full sovereignty, they are aspiring to national status and recognition.

Therefore, looking at any ethnic conflict requires the recognition of historically existing patterns of dominance and subordinations among the groups. To study the motivation behind participating in any ethnic confrontation needs to address the power relation prevailing among the groups. But factors that translates these motivations into ethnic mobilisation needs specification, the presents of a group of people with a strong sense of ethnic identity is the primary condition for ethnic mobilisation. The reaction of dominate group and the state determines the future course of action of these ethnic mobilisation. If the dominant group allows negotiation of power structure and inclusion of elite of the dominated group conflict can be avoided but in case the dominant group and the state do not allows any alteration in the power structure violent outcome may be faced by both the group. (Varshney 2003)

The above review of literature shows that ethnicity is a form of social stratification that differentiate one group from another on the basis of some traits of culture, but the presence of multicultural groups in a society is not the sufficient prerequisite for ethnic conflict. To understand the emergence of ethnic conflict it is necessary to address the power relation among different groups in the society. The relation of dominance and sub ordinance among the groups is necessary to take into consideration before addressing the issue of ethnic conflict. But, the literature on ethnic conflict fails to show whether the people who are actually affected by ethnic conflict also identifies with the “dignity” which is considered as the motivation behind any ethnic mobilization.

1.2 Conflict and Society

Prolong conflict led to the closure of schools, colleges and other infrastructure. In fact schools and other educational institutions are the first one to suffer interruption. Frequent bandhs, road blockage makes it inaccessible for students to reach to educational institution. In addition to it, flight of teachers from the conflict zone and reluctance of parents to send their children to school is a major reason for the setback. Diminishing employment opportunity led to the migration of men followed by young boys and the women, who are the most vulnerable group.

“As the conflict expanded into a civil war in 2001 and the cadres of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) spread their control over the villages and the security forces fortified district headquarters and bazaars, the masses of the displaced swelled. Generalised violence, forced recruitment, the use of food as an instrument of war, the disruption of agricultural production, food for work programs, education and health services, drove thousands to leave and thousands not to return from seasonal migration”.(Manchanda 2004 pp)

Access to land and water for agriculture is impossible at the time of conflict as crops and water sources would be destroyed deliberately as a strategy in conflict as they provide support to the opponents. Even forced eviction is also quite possible in conflict. People are forcefully evicted from their land and property by armed groups. This forced full eviction might also include physical assault. (ICRC report 2001)

Displaced populations who are staying at the refugee camps have insufficient access of water. Water is usually supplied with the help of water tankers but in the absence of safe and adequate water supply the risk of water born disease increases. In worst situation water shortage reduces food production, increases disease and aggravates poverty. (ICRC report 2001)

Conflict followed by displacement results in loss of political voice of the displaced people. They are deprived of their voting rights. As India doesn't recognize internally displaced people as a category, the displaced people of Kokrajhar and Chirang district couldn't vote since they left their place from where they have displaced since their names are enlisted in the electoral list there. Along with that they are not in a position to avail the facilities of various schemes by government. To add on to that some of the middlemen both from the community and from outside demand their share from the grant that these refugees receive. . (Goswami 2008)

Social cohesion is a very important feature of tribal society, and clan unity- that includes shared responsibilities and social support, are the key aspects of maintaining social fabric. Conflict can either breaks down this social network or, on the contrary, it may grow stronger. (ICRC 2001)

For the tribal migrants of the North Easter states who have moved out from that region in search of job or for education the only way to stay connected to their home is to accept the clan duty at a very early age as compared to their counterparts back home. Clan duties are important link to their place of origin and network of support in the place of their destination. Politics is another aspect that brings or binds the migrants together. By taking this more politicize role they confirm their identity in a place where they are minority in number. This is again, a link to feel connected to their friends and relatives back home who have preferred to stay back and get involve in a more active political or advocacy role. (Mc Duie-Ra 2012)

Or, conversely, conflict can also affect the social fabric adversely as one of the respondent in ICRC's study states how conflict has impacted their relation with their community and individual behavior.

“War has affected our traditional behaviour that is distinctive to us. We are doing many things that should have been the responsibility of the community but are now individual responsibility .Failure to share and live together as family or as tribe has encouraged adoption of individualistic behaviours which are not helpful to our communities. Even eventual help that we could receive from organizations are not meant for groups but for individuals. The community-orientated behaviour turned into an ‘I don’t care for the others’ attitude.”(ICRC 2001)

The above review of literature shows that conflict not only results in destruction of infrastructure and employment opportunity. It also displaces people. These displaced people who are at loss of any political voice without any proper document or recognition. Conflict also results in tearing of social fabric. As all these conditions affect both men and women but, women being a member of society where she has already been given a lower status to men certainly, exposed to differential consequences. The next section would deal with the section and would try to see how and why women face conflict differently.

1.3 Conflict and Women

As men and women both experience and remember conflict but women remember the major events in relation to some events in their own lives as Urvashi Butali's (Butalia, 2000) *Other side of silence* also mentions about how women and men remember partition. For men they locate partition as an event that changed inter community ties or in terms of politics. However women's narratives regarding partition talk about loss of a child or loss of any family members in partition.

Women and children constitute 80 percent of the world's refugees and internally displaced people (UN Population Fund 2002). Women flee to escape the conflict specific crime like rape, forced pregnancy, sexual violence. But long term effect of conflict is marked with male specific migration in search of livelihood. With the migration of male members from the violence affected zone, women are left behind to take care of the rest of the family, land and property. Conflict, which revolves around identity politics uses rape as a weapon for war and women are left behind or rather 'internally stuck' (borrowed the term from Manchanda (2004:pp4179)). They are left behind to face the difficult situation of violence and deprivation.

“In the Bhutanese case of ethnic cleansing, persecuted Lothsampa (ethnic Nepalese) men fled the country, leaving behind families who were labeled anti-national. Female heads

of household, disabled women, and girls were particularly abused.” (Manchanda 2004:pp4182)

The above example shows that women’s proximity to violence makes them vulnerable to poverty, misery, unemployment apart from physical and psychological affect. But women’s proximity to violence is determined by her ethnic identity.

As, murder, rape, torture becomes common in ethnic conflict a sense of fear and insecurity is instilled in women .This fear and insecurity shapes their choice about their own mobility, about the mobility of their family member and choices family members impose on them .This restriction on mobility has a lasting impression while accessing the health care facilities,, livelihood and employment opportunities and education. (Gill cited in Mc Duie–Ra 2012; Hynes HP 2004)

In conflict stuck areas of Chirang district of Assam the displaced people are at loss of livelihood as most of them are farmers who have lost their land. Detached from their land these people are dependent on daily wage earning as their source of income as they are neither equipped not trained to do anything skilled labor. (Goswami 2008)

For women who are displaced and are recipient of aids from humanitarian organization, the aid produces local patriarchy for them. Especially in south Asian region where society is governed by strict patriarchal norm the state through its law and practice supports this patriarchy and justifies this male’s claim over women. This is illustrated by the Bhutanese women refugees experience in Nepal.

“The registration and ration distribution system issued to the refugees based on household cards listed under the name of the male household head. The government of Nepal will issue a separate ration card to a woman only if she obtains a legal divorce. But under

Nepalese, law divorce endangers their custody of children and their property rights on return to Bhutan. Consequently, Bhutanese refugee women who face domestic violence are either forced to stay on in abusive and polygamous situations or make ad hoc arrangements with the refugee camp management to collect their food rations separately, thus relying on the mercy of the management rather than a system fair to women. They are unable to obtain separate housing and have to find refuge with other family members in already overcrowded huts.”(Manchanda 2004:pp4182)

An ethnic conflict raised question on the existence of entire community. Therefore, both the warring groups in fear of being marginalized in a fix geographical area put gendered control over women of the warring communities.

The large array of partition literature focuses on how women are considered as honour of the community in the normal times and in turbulent times this notion becomes even more pronounced. To protect this prized honor of the community the women are put under sever gendered control like marrying them off, restricting their movement and even to the extent of being killed by the men of their own community, because loss of the women of any community to the men of other community is seen as the loss of the honor of her entire “original” community.

This not only put them under control of patriarchy of their own community but also by the patriarchy of the other community.

Since conflict also marks diminishing employment opportunity, displacement, along with loss of livelihood .All this results in weakening of men’s role as the ‘bread earner’ of the family and women replacing them rapidly. Men’s desire to protect the women and confirm to the social role of ‘protector’ and ‘bread earner’ is being questioned. Conflict thus challenges the social construction of masculinity and femininity .The failure to confirm to the social role results in more domestic violence towards women. The more insecure the men the stricter control imposed over women. Aggression and violence becomes a marker of masculinity and culture is being re –defined where stricter patriarchal rules are laid down.

Manchanda brought out some of the similar kind of experiences of Pashtoon women refugees in Pakistan

“uprooting and dislocation, the loss of the male identity as breadwinner, the exigencies of the mixing of tribal ethnicities in a refugee situation, produces and reforms ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ as evinced in the reconstruction of the majority Pashtoonwali identity. In a refugee situation, the group’s need to preserve community and culture intensifies. The jihad comes to be aggressively centered on women’s bodies by making them invisible. A fatwa issued by the United Ulema of Afghanistan detailing restrictions on women reveals the hysterical paranoia of a conflict destabilized society. The more insecure the men the stricter the seclusion of women, the more extra domestic activities are denounced, the more aggression and domestic violence marked the male identities.”(Manchanda 2004:pp4183)

As the extent of conflict increases, the responsibility of women to look after the family increases and illiteracy, lawlessness deteriorating social and economic condition forces women to get involve in unorganized sectors, mainly in domestic work. But these jobs are not enough paying for the survival of the families and these situations compels women to turn into prostitution. Thus, women have to bear a disproportionate burden of poverty and live painful lives in conflict. (Hamal 2007; Hynes, 2004)

But women are not helpless victims only. They refuses to succumb to the situation and rebuilt their and their family members lives. Conflict brings many gendered control on women but women negotiate their way out to reclaim their agency sharing this Manchanda (2004) brings out Afghan refugee women’s opinion about themselves

“We think that women can do so many things. Afghan women are strong and have the ability to work. They can take steps on the way to peace provided conditions are made conducive for them to work and facilities are provided them.”(Manchanda 2004: pp 4183)

Even Jashodhara Bagchi captured the same in her book *Trauma and Triumph* (2003) and emphasizes that in a situation of mass –scale displacement, the category that gets silence is the way women retrieve the daily requirements of social reproduction. Women start their family routine, re-built their daily rhythms of survival; organize the shelter in changed situation. As in case of partition when people migrated from then east Pakistan to Kolkata , women had to undergo a lot of change in the new circumstances. They had to adjust to one room small house with all the family members sleeping together as compared to their palatial house which had a separate quarters for women known as *andarmahal* and *kacharighar* or *bahir* (outside or men’s space) . No doubt partition displaces a whole generation of women but at the same time it also gave opportunities to women to venture out of their homes and be the bread winner for their families. Like in case of the women refugees from east Pakistan ,for the first time they came out of their close quarters into public . Women now started going to markets and other public places alone. As there refugee colonies had shared water source in the form of some tube well. These places also became source of various types of news for the women when go to fetch water. These places also served as a platform where new friendships, new bonds were created among the women who shared similar kind of situation. Scores of women labor force post 1950, these who have never worked outside their homestead have joined the public domain. Some as school teachers, tutors, office assistants .The need to come out and work in public domain was driven by their necessity to sustain their large joint family. Without the earning from their properties and the cumulative earning of the family, surviving in the city would become difficult.

However, this coming out was liberating or not is a matter of debate as some of the women returned to their domestic sphere as the family’s financial condition improved and some of the older women interviewed didn’t appreciate their exposure to public sphere.

Secondly, home is considered as women's domain, so it is expected from her that she should fight for its survival and coming put in public domain to earn should also be seen as in this context. She didn't cross the threshold rather she extended her domestic sphere to include this new role.

And following this type of case, some people argues that with the breaking of traditional gender role in conflict situation some positive impact has been noticed during that time like increase in decision making, participation in politics, capacity of holding responsibility towards both family and society and coping with the existing situation. (Hamal, 2007)

But feminist researchers have shown the example of Sri Lankan women and analyzed that it is quite difficult to bear the double burden of nurturing and being primary decision maker and income earner in women headed household. It had started unintended process of desirable structural transformation and not to mention the psycho-social trauma of losing the family members and displacement. The situations are worst for women who are displaced and forced to stay in refugee camps where domestic violence, alcoholism are quite prevalent. (Manchanda, 2005) (Manchanda 2004:pp 4185)

Thus the argument of positive impact of conflict on women is quite controversial where the evidence shows that the conflict brings with it double burden for women.

And in the backdrop of northeastern states of India which has been under the influence of conflict for quite a long time and where the differentiation between migrants and refugees are not very valid, the notion of masculinity and control over women, draws its legitimacy from its history of warrior past and contemporary situation where men are actively involved in conflict with the Indian state or with communities labeled as 'migrants'.

The social construction of masculinity in the contemporary situation saw them playing the role of ‘protector’ of their community from outsiders, through involvement in violence, strikes, boycott and moral policing enforced on women of their own community. (McDuierra, 2012)

This brings us to question, who defines culture and how women experiences conflict when restrictions are imposed on them in the name of culture and tradition. The review also reflects that conflict creates new conditions that are specific to conflict situation along with that the underlying structure of discrimination gets manifested in a new form. But the combined effect of this on women in terms on health will be dealt in the next section.

1.4 Physical and Mental Health

Conflict results in disabilities and deaths but these direct consequences are more prominent for people who are directly involved in the direct confrontation. Apart from death and disabilities conflict results in displacement and creates conditions that are conducive for communicable diseases. As(Zwi & Ugalde, 1989) Ugaldae *etal* (1999: pp 105-106) , elaborates it with some example across the globe. According to the encyclopedia, the physical consequences of the political violence results in disability and displacement of population apart from mortality. Although war related disabilities data are not captured well but data from Zimbabwe, El Salvador and Tigray shows that war time disabilities are quite high in these countries. In Zimbabwe 13% of all disabilities are all war related. El Salvador reported 12,041 war disabilities and in Ethiopia one third of 300,000 soldiers were disabled at the end of the war. Apart from disability the loss of livelihood and property compel people to take shelter in refugee camps.

But the conditions in the refugee camps many a times results in communicable diseases. Diseases which are communicable and are preventable causes maximum number of death among the refugees. With the reduction of health personal, destruction and closer of

health posts the incidence of communicable diseases increase. In Ethiopia , the crowded army camps and refugee camps were held responsible for the louse born typhus and relapsing fever. Crowded camps results in raise in communicable diseases , nutritional problem, and limited access to health care .(ICRC 2001; Levy B.S and Sidel 2008). As observed by ICRC Malaria is a major health problem among the displaced people and war and displacement plays a major role in displacing people. Malaria increases the risk of maternal anemia, abortion, still birth, premature birth and low birth weight.(ICRC 2001 ; (Levy, 2010) Levy B.S and Sidel 2008)

Along with measles, diarrhea, pneumonia, malaria, cholera, meningitis and tuberculosis, malnutrition also results in highest numbers of death and illness among displaced people. During the year 1994 about half a million of refugees crossed Rwandan border to move to Dominican Republic of Congo (DRC) and in the first month itself 50,000 refugees died This was mainly because of epidemics of diarrhea diseases caused by poor sanitation and inadequate water supplies. With maximum numbers of death reported from women and children of below five years of age.(UNIFEM 2002; Toole 2008 ;Hynes P 2004)This reflects the condition in which women are kept in the crowded refugee camps, and lack of adequate health service systems provides an ideal breeding grounds for the communicable diseases. Moreover, women's physiology is as such that they are vulnerable to iron and vitamin deficiency and in a situation which is hit by food scarcity and preferential treatment for boys and men the resultant malnutrition of women is inevitable. Unavailability of resource forces people to consume whatever is available, making them vulnerable to many dangerous consequences.

An epidemic of konzo, a type of paralysis, occurred among women and children in Mozambique during the last year of the war there, caused by eating insufficiently cooked bitter cassava, which has high cyanide content. Unable to farm their usual crops because of the war, rural people began to depend on the bitter cassava as a food source.(UNIFEM : pp 37)

Conflict traumatises people on daily basis and sometime leaves a long lasting impression for rest of the life. But people's response to this differs owing to the different level of exposure to violence, different personalities and their cultural categorization of violence. Yet it can't be denied that the psychological impact of conflict can severely reduce the quality of lives of affected with it. (UNIFEM 2002 ;Hynes HP 2004 ;)

Loss of life and property puts the victim of the conflict in emotional turmoil. Rape and sexual harassment is a common feature of any conflict, the victim of torture and rape suffers from long term effect. Witnessing these atrocities on relatives and friends is also quite painful and can put a lasting impression on people's mind. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) had been diagnosed among Vietnam veterans in a general community survey conducted in United States of America. Loss of life and property resulting in conditions of uncertainty and fear, lack of knowledge about relatives left behind puts stress, anxiety and severe depression on people staying in camps. Conflict and war results in indirect effect like alcoholism, drug abuse, violent behavior. (Ocasiones, 2007) ; (Meffert & Marmar, 2009)Meffert and Marmar (2008) ;(McGadney-Douglass & Ahadzie, 2008); (Ashwini, 2006); (Jansen, 2006), conducted studies in Philippines, Darfur refugees on Cairo and in North Ghana respectively and showed that women suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) , Nervous Breakdown ,many depression symptoms like hopelessness, tearfulness, apathy, weight loss, low mood, decreased concentration, decreased or increased sleep in conflict situation. To add on to their depressing experience, these Darfur refugees in Cairo are discriminated frequently on the basis of their race. As a result of this discrimination access to some basic amenities like health, education and work become difficult for these refugees. Displacement, associated with conflict results in considerable mental stress, confrontation with a new culture and loss of identity puts them in an emotional turmoil.

Many humanitarian organizations and NGOs have set up many psychological programs for the survivor of rape victims in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Kosovo and Rwanda. But

these programs have employed people from west who are quite unfamiliar with the local culture and traditions. Secondly, living in the same community where the incidence have occurred makes it an ongoing traumatic experience. Further the women survivor has to identify themselves as rape victims to avail the facility. This runs the risk of being ostracize from the community as it involves shame. (ICRC 2001)

Besides affecting physical and mental health problem, conflict also creates situation that give raise to condition that further worsen the condition of affected people. Among all other health problems reproductive health is one of the main concern during conflict, especially in the backdrop of basic health services systems. Reproductive concerns during conflict may range from no sanitary pads for menstruation to lack of birth control measures, from sexual violence to life threatening pregnancy conditions. Along with all these, spread of AIDS / HIV is common these days. (UNIFEM 2002 ;Hynes HP 2004)

Historically pregnancy has always being the core concern for reproductive healthcare and in conflict zone women are more vulnerable to pregnancy and delivery related complications. In DRC 42,000(approximately) women reportedly died during child birth in year 2001 only. In Angola one out of fifty women dies due to pregnancy related complications. Afghanistan repots one of the highest maternal mortality in the world . (UNIFEM 2002)

Along with that unwanted pregnancy, forced pregnancy and teen age pregnancies are the unfortunate realities of ethnic conflict. Rape and forced pregnancies are used for ethnic cleansing. Tens of thousands of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sudan and Nepal suffered the trauma of being raped repeatedly and impregnated by the rapist. The consequences that women had to face after this rape and forced pregnancies are very horrifying. In the absence of proper medical facilities especially abortion facilities she had to either abandon the child or face rejection from the family and society. So to avoid

such situation women often uses unsafe methods of abortion that puts their lives on risk. (UNIFEM 2002;Hynes HP 2004;Robson 2002; Arino 2008)(Robson, 2015).This shows that, in an ethnic conflict woman of a particular ethnicity becomes vulnerable to rape and physical violence and in the absence of proper medical care their conditions deteriorates. According to WHO representatives in Liberia,

“80 percent of displaced girls had an induced abortion by the age of 15. Such early pregnancy has serious implications for the health and well-being of young girls, whose bodies have simply not developed enough to deliver safely and who are not mature enough to be parents. Girls aged 10 to 14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth than women aged 20 to 24. Unsafe abortions also carry great risk for the approximately 2 million young women aged 15 to 19 who undergo them every year. (UNIFEM 2002)

In the earlier sections it was discussed that conflict situation reintroduces patriarchy that symbolizes women as honor for the family and community and in a situation where the honor of the community is under threat, early marriage of the daughters is the possible way to ensure their safety. This early marriage is many a times poses health problem for mother and child .All this points were highlighted in (Kottegoda,Samuel & Emanuel,2008) study, the study was conducted in six conflict affected areas of Srilanka to emphasis reproductive health concern of the women ,it was found that early marriage, high level of early pregnancies , home births ,high level of maternal mortality and low level of contraceptive use were found to be very common. Conflict results in the inter-ethnic tension. The safety of the young daughters was seen as major concern for their families and marriage is seen as the only way out to protect the honor of their daughters. As a result of early marriage, early pregnancy was also quite common in the region, miscarriages were also reported very high, which could be attributed to the poor access to reproductive health care, restriction on mobility, poor reproductive health care. Along with that increase in work burden, multiple pregnancies further add to the existing factors. As a result of closing down of health service

systems and restrictions on mobility, traditional birth attended (Marauthuvivhvi) services were utilized more in the conflict affected areas of Srilanka.

But lack of appropriate medical care may not be the sole reason for abortion or pregnancy related complications. Rather close experience of trauma and violence may have an effect on pregnancy outcome. In south Sudan when a community faced high number of miscarriages, it was blamed on the fights and violence experienced by the community as a whole. (UNIFEM 2002)

As women experience more violence in conflict times, the risk of HIV/AIDS also increases. Transmission of HIV is influenced by a complex set of social factors like gender inequality, poor economic conditions, forced pregnancy, dangerous traditional practices, intravenous drug, and unsterilised surgical instruments. These factors intensify during conflict times. Women are more vulnerable to infection owing to their biology and their position in the social structure. Unfortunately, in some conflicts women were purposefully infected with HIV for ethnic cleansing. (UNIFEM 2002 ; Ashford 2008 ;Colombini 2002). Rwanda conflict exemplifies the above mentioned situation. In the ethnic conflict between Hutu and Tutsi community, infecting the Tutsi women with HIV was used as a strategy by Hutu men. The Hutu leaders directly encouraged their militias to rape Tutsi women in order to dilute Tutsi ethnicity; so as to infect the women with a virus that would eventually kill them. (UNIFEM 2002)

Poverty, powerlessness and social instabilities provides ideal situation for spread of STIs. A conflict ridden society that provides situation where social fabrics were broken and as discussed in the earlier section men who are not in a position to confirm to their social role of bread winner resort to drinking or abuse on their own women. They also get engage in unprotected sex making the women more susceptible to HIV and women are hardly in the position to control or negotiate their sexual relation.(UNIFEM 2002)(Hynes, 2004: 2008)

Disruption of food supply and scarce resources make people unable to meet their basic food requirements. The poor nutritional level accelerates the onset of AIDS from HIV.(UNIFEM 2002)

Although all these problems existed for quite a long time and reproductive health care in conflict zone included most of them but sanitary supplies were not included in the reproductive health services until recently. It's only recently that sanitary pads were included in the relief items provided to the displaced people.

Women and men are part of this society although they face differential consequences but they live in a same society, they are connected to each other through social ties and can't remain unaffected with each other's experiences. The United Nations report (2002), states that no doubt, women experience conflict differently from men, but looking at men's and women's experience in completely different spheres would be erroneous. They share common experience owing to their family and community. Their needs, aspirations are often shared needs and aspirations of the community. Psychological and social consequences of conflict are interwoven change in the social fabric of the society results in building up of negative psychological consequences. Even when women are not directly affected by conflict, the threat and violence suffered by their family members, displacements and loss of livelihood also puts psychological pressure. Increasing number girls are drop out from school as they have to shoulder larger responsibility of family. With more men involved in the war, the number of female headed household increases. This results in tremendous increase in workload of the women.

In case of ethnic conflict the community is attacked because of their ethnicity, where the individual identity is surpassed by community identity. Thus the attack on individual is seen as an attack on community and the effect of the attack is also shared. In a study by Centre for Northeast Studies and Policy Research(2011) conducted in three districts of Assam, namely Sivasagar, Dhemaji and Kokrajhar. It was found that most of the victims across the three districts were suffering from PTSD. Although the nature of the conflict

across three districts were different, but the mental trauma suffered could be equated for all the victims. Dhemaji and Kokrajhar witness ethnic conflict between Bengali speaking migrant community and Assamese community and Bodo and Adivasi community respectively. Whereas, Sivsagar is considered as the main seat of ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam), as ULFA was born here. The District witnessed many factional and fratricidal killing known as “secret killing”. In case of Dhemaji and Kokrajhar the trauma was more community driven rather than individual as the attack was seen more as attack on the identity of the community. The sense of community trauma left behind the sense of personal trauma.

But in a situation when two ethnic communities are at war with each other, the impact of conflict differs according to class and ethnicity affiliation. This disparity in the consequences of conflict is many times state sponsored where the state shows its biasness towards particular community and sometimes towards a particular class. This biasness is reflected through the functioning of state machineries. According to (Sachs, Sa’ar, & Aharoni, 2007) it is no doubt that conflict affects health and wellbeing of people, it also makes people more economically vulnerability. Women’s proximity to political and sexual violence makes them double victim. The study showed that women who were double victim of political and sexual violence are more likely to suffer with stress. National tension prevailing at the time of conflict affects all the citizen of the nation in general but women in particular. With the outbreak of second *Intifada*, the Israeli economy suffered a huge setback. This setback results in significant number of women’s earning power being reduced as compared to men. Further her gendered role, where women are directly responsible for keeping the household functioning. And in the time of resource crunch, she needs to stress and strain her available resource along with carrying the multiple burden of paid work, taking care of the family and providing emotional support to the family and community. But all these effect on women is not uniform on all the women rather it is very much influenced by their class and ethnic attachment. As a result of economic slowdown in Israel, the unemployment and cut back on welfare is basically on Palestinian people. The study suggests that Palestinian women are more anxious and less satisfied with their national wellbeing then

their Jewish counterpart. Amazingly women who are double victim of political and sexual violence are also ethnic minority and are economically marginalised group. This shows that the intersectionality of being poor, ethnic minority and women are the couple together to put women in a more vulnerable situation.

Similarly (Khanna., 2008) study on communal violence in Gujarat states that women suffered the worst consequences of conflict with not only physical injuries rather trauma and stress also added to their suffering. The study further captures the response of health service system towards the emergency , shows that health service system was sometimes biased towards a particular community .While many of the health personals tried to deliver their duties but there were very few incidences where the right of the patient were being protected. Many women who were sexually assaulted didn't turn up to the hospital and the reason, was their prior experience with the health services system.

This study truly reveal that patient's experience in health service system is very much influenced by their gender and ethnicity .Women may face greater difficulty because their group identity like nationality, ethnicity, religion is under attack or their identity as women simple makes access to health services difficult. (Lindsay, 2001) (ICRC 2001)

The effect of conflict on women's mental and physical health is quite evident .But the capturing the response of health service system at the time of such emergency would give us an insight on what are difficulties women have to face during conflict situation. The next section would discuss that in detail.

1.5 Health Access issues for women in conflict zones

Access, is mainly viewed as concept that is related to consumer's ability to or willingness to enter into the health service system. But access is also seen as factors that

influences entry or use of the health service system. While some authors draw the implications of access as that of availability, supply and resources whereas for some others it means equal use or equal entry for health needs. The first view focuses on the health service system that allows entry or use, if desired and suggests that access deals with only the limited set of such attributes. The second interpretation suggests that access encompasses all factors that influence the level of use, given a health care need. (Penchansky and Thomas 1981) .

Before discussing about difficulties faced during conflict time to access health service system, it was thought to discuss about the different dimensions of access. Access can be defined in terms of availability(availability of services, providers, facilities and programs), accessibility(in terms of location of supply and distance traveled by the patients, time travel, and cost), accommodation (in terms of arrangements of supply resources and patient's ability to use them),affordability (in terms of price of the services and patient's ability to pay for them) acceptability (in terms of acceptance of the service provider by the patient and vice versa along with their personal attributes like sex, age religion, caste, class and financial background) . (Penchansky and Thomas 1981)

When a patient actually seeks health care from health service system, the first dimension that comes into play is availability and availability undoubtedly encompasses accommodation and acceptability. Clearly the five dimensions of access are not separated from each other. (Penchansky & Thomas, 1981)

Conflict results in closure of health posts, feeling of health personals from the conflict zone, restriction in mobility .Many time's health posts are destroyed in the conflict. This entire situation hinders accessibility of the health service system in the most needed time, the longer the exposure to conflict the greater the impact on health services and greater the time required for restoration of the services.

In Rwanda, over half the health workers were killed during the genocide, the health infrastructure was destroyed and administrative capacities were disrupted. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 40 per cent of physicians, 60 per cent of dentists and 30 per cent of nurses left the country during the war and have not returned. Many times, health workers are targeted in conflict situation. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, dozens of health personals were kidnapped or assassinated. In the occupied Palestinian territories, ambulances and medical personnel were attacked, leaving a significant proportion of the civilian population without emergency services. (South, Regional, Conference, Beijing, & Ten, 2005)(UNIFEM 2002: pp 34)

Damage of health service systems can result in underutilization of the services. This underutilization results in morbidity and mortality rates, which are otherwise treatable. After the Gulf war in Iraq, women's access to gynecological care decreased radically. In Serbia the mortality of women aged 25 to 44 was significantly higher than in previous years, mainly due to urogenital diseases and endocrine disorders such as diabetes. Normally these diseases can be treated with relative ease, but they can be fatal in the absence of medical supplies. In the case of Serbia, these became expensive and took long periods to be cleared. A study of economic embargoes in Cuba, Haiti, Iraq, Nicaragua, South Africa and Yugoslavia found that economically vulnerable groups, particularly women and children under five, suffer most from the deterioration in the health sector caused by conflict. In such conflict affected zone where disease burden is also massive, it is impossible to provide medical care without huge international aid. (Moser, 2007) (UNIFEM 2002: pp 34)

Women and girls are often physically more susceptible to illness than men owing to their sexual and reproductive role. Reproductive health care is a vital need for women and generally covers the following five areas: safe motherhood, protection from sexual violence, family planning, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and emergency obstetric care. Limited access to health services or their reduced capacity can lead to problems being left untreated, lack of essential drugs and diagnostics, inadequate health personals; it is especially common to disregard the provision of health care

for pregnant women in a conflict zone. Therefore in conflict situation women subordinations and subjugation increases. (Lindsay, 2001)(Colombini, 2002)

According to (Casey et al., 2009), In a base line study, conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and CARE with support from RAISE initiative in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), to evaluate the capacities of the public hospitals to meet the RH needs of the local populations and to determine availability, utilization and quality of RH services including emergency obstetric care (EmOC) and family planning (FP), it was found that none of the hospital met the classification of the emergency obstetric facilities primarily due to lack of staffs ,limited or no availability of services to perform the signal functions to qualify standers. The results show that none of the hospitals have the complete package for manual removal of the placenta, removal of the retinal product, assisted vaginal delivery or neonatal resuscitation. Even family planning service is also not up the mark. Out of nine general referred hospitals only two had multiple family planning methods and out of those two only one had family planning information available to assist the counseling. Lack of trained staff for providing counseling to the client, inadequate supply of necessary equipment, policy issue, and religious beliefs were cited as the reason for this paucity of family planning service.

Women are particularly affected by this situation; they can't access the health service system at the time of medical emergencies which results in relying on the services of the traditional birth attendants. As pointed out by (Bosmans, Nasser, Khammash, Claeys, & Temmerman, 2008) , with the start of second *intifida* between Israeli forces and Palestine, access to reproductive and sexual health has become quite difficult for patient, health personals and humanitarian agencies working in that area. Women, many a times had to deliver at the military check points. As a result of this restriction on mobility women had to rely on traditional birth attendant (*Dayat*).Further as a result of this conflict reproductive and sexual health which earlier encompassed information, education, and sensitization about

family planning and sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS were reduced to mother and child health along with family planning.

Similarly, (Heymann, 2001) study in Kosovo shows that, an increase in the services of traditional birth attendant's at the time of conflict, these services lack pre natal and post natal care. During the war 30% of birth was not attended by trained health personals. About 50% of the birth were unattended and anti natal and pre natal care were not common. War time rape was a common practice by Serbian soldiers and abortion was the only way out.

As the health personals are unwilling to serve in conflict zone, delivery of essential services is mainly done by paramedical staffs and resulting in uncontrolled growth of unregistered medical shops and clinics as Sheikh (2006) shows that, people of Kashmir had to suffer a lot due the 18 years of conflict. But women are the worst sufferers of this prolonged conflict. The health service system has suffered badly. Unwillingness of the health personals to serve in the rural areas has not only deteriorated the health service system in the rural areas but also led to the mushrooming of private clinics in Srinagar city. The situation further resulted into uncontrolled growth of medical shops and clinic that are run by paramedical staffs in the absence of trained medical staffs; women had to rely on them for deliveries. Ban on family planning by militant resulted in unmet need for contraceptives. Thus resulting in unwanted and mistimed pregnancies. This ban on family planning has further forced Kashmiri women to rely on quacks for abortion or travel to Delhi or Jammu to undergo female sterilization.

Immunization is one of the services that get affected during conflict. It is of no doubt that immunization is the one of the most effective way of preventive health care. Immunization of both mother and child is one of the most essential aspects of maternal and child health. Timely immunization of mother and child prevent many maternal and child

death but displaced population are at increased risk of neonatal tetanus owing to factors like poor hygiene, home deliveries and disruption of immunization services.

As accessibility to services become difficult in conflict situation, information dissemination regarding reproductive health also becomes hard, this might eventually result in unwanted pregnancies and greater threat for sexually transmitted disease. In a study by (Benner et al., 2010) on reproductive health and quality of health among the Burmese refugees in Thailand found that, they have relatively low knowledge about reproductive health. For women their main source of knowledge is their mother, whereas boys rely on their peer group for information regarding adolescence health. Many unwanted pregnancies resulted due to this lack of knowledge.

From the above literature it shows that women are much more vulnerable than men. There are wide spread atrocities on women in armed conflict situation like rape, molestation, kidnapping and forced pregnancies. Narratives of women being raped by armed forces comes out quite often. Many times these women after being raped are abandoned or ill-treated by their husbands. Similar narratives from Sierra Leon, Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan have been captured by various authors. Conflict results in closing down of services, disruption of existing services. This closing down of health institutions along with absence of health personals directly affects the health of mother and children. This situation only magnifies the existing diseases. Reproductive health concerns of women which includes menstruation to pregnancies and delivery concern. Lack of family planning services, results in unwanted pregnancies and maternal mortality rates usually goes up, as in case of Afghanistan and Angola. Along with physical health, loss of the main bread winner adds on to their responsibilities of care giver. Loss of family, friends and property in conflict results in post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression. Women are not only at disadvantaged position owing to the above mentioned atrocities rather the already existing inequalities towards women comes out in a more consolidated way.

Clearly, the consequences of conflict cannot be restricted to one dimension only and as health is not merely absence of disease rather there are many factors that interplay to produce an effect on health and especially in conflict situation where the consequences of conflict in one facet show its repercussions on others. The study would therefore try to into all the above mentioned aspects of conflict.

Chapter 2

Research Methodology

2.1 Conceptualisation

Review of literature shows that ethnicity is any form of ascribed identity that is used to differentiate one group from another. The review of literature also shows that different aspects of culture have been the reason of ethnic conflict around the world. But the principle underlying reason for ethnic conflict is when a group refuses to accept the dominance of another group and desires to reclaim its rights. The present study would include two communities of Assam, the Bodo - which have claimed to be the indigenous community of Assam and the Bengali Muslim community-which has been labeled as “illegal immigrants” by other communities present in Assam. The hostile attitude between the Bodo and Bengali Muslim communities started with the claim of Bodo’s for their separate administrative territory from Assam government. Like in any other conflict, loss of life and property is inevitable in ethnic conflict. But in an ethnic conflict the vulnerability to loss of live and property and its extent is determined largely due to one’s ethnicity. The present research would focus on women of these two warring communities. The specificity of these women experiences arises from their affiliation to either of the ethnic group and the study strives to capture their differential experience.

Despite the cultural differences, domestic work is considered as women’s responsibilities. This domestic work involves cooking, cleaning, caring of the children and other dependent. Along with that they are also involved in production of food and various other economic activities to add to the family income. Household, according to Naila Kabeer, is the bundle of relationship in a society through which reproductive activities are organized. Reproduction doesn’t include only biological reproduction it also includes social

reproduction. Thus along with reproduction, it will include production of those activities which are considered as necessary for survival of the family'. Most of the societies expects women to be the care giver of the family and held them as responsible for the wellbeing of the family, many times at the cost of their own health. Interestingly these unpaid works are considered as 'normal' and doesn't call for any kind of scrutiny. For women who are into paid work, many studies show that they do not have control over their earning. Resources are never distributed according to the need. It is usually the men who control the resources and decision making power. Thus, their access to important component of health, like food, water, income, and access to medical care are restricted along with many non-palpable things like rest, sleep, investment in education. This affects their self-worth and their wellbeing. Discrimination in the resource allocation not only affects their physical well-being but also has far reaching psychological consequences. In societies where discrimination against women is institutionalized and normalized, women and girls are socialized to accept that discrimination. They derive a sense of worthlessness from the way others treat them.

Further, Conflict only makes this existing discrimination more pronounced. This makes the experiences of conflict different for men and women as both of them have different biological needs and socially determined role. Conflict in general results in destruction of lives, property, displacements and loss of livelihood. But women's suffering in conflict is very specific. As women constitute maximum number of refugees they are at higher risk of disease, hunger, insecurity and sexual violence. In situation of food scarcity women are expected to eat at last putting her at risk of malnutrition. Apart from injuries and wounds her biology makes her vulnerable to conflict specific crimes like molestation, rape, forced pregnancies. Conflict also creates situation where poor nutritional level, displacements, poor sanitation facilities and crowded conditions in camps makes them vulnerable to many communicable diseases like diarrhea and measles. Poor sanitation affects women in particular as religious and moral taboos prohibit women to be seen in defecation, so she had to wait till it is dark. These restrictions are more severe in case of menstruation. Women's physiology makes her prone to health problems like Urinary Tract Infections, menstruation problems, pregnancy related problems, HIV/AIDS. To understand the effect of

conflict on women in terms of health, it is important to recognize the general health needs of women along with specific needs of women caught up in conflict, like needs of pregnant and lactating mothers, menstruation needs, needs of women affected with STIs. The physical effect of conflict is always accompanied with psychological consequences of conflict. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and homicide are by product of conflict. The study would see how ethnic conflict affects the health of the Bodo and Bengali Muslim women. The study would focus on whether; women from these two communities faced any conditions due to their ethnicity, which affected their health in the context of violence. As Medical anthropologist have come up with a phenomenon called ‘Nervios’ characterized by headache, dizziness, fatigue, weakness and stomach problem as well as felling worry, anger and sadness. Although the meaning attached to it varies from culture to culture but it is mainly experienced by women of those society which are marginalized and has seen rapid transition in recent time. As women’s role is crucial in family, she finds it difficult to hold the family together economically, socially and emotionally .The inability to fulfill the role expectation is considered as the triggering factor for ‘Nervios’ .

In situation of conflict which is characterized by closing down of health facilities and refusal of health personals to serve in conflict zone and non-availability of medicines, makes access to even basic health care a remote possibility and for women who have specific biological needs, access to health care facilities become impossible. It is a known fact that women suffer significant physical problem after child birth. Her access to health services becomes unachievable party owing to her gendered roles as well, where she is not expected to go out alone without any male chaperone. Besides that, in a resource crunch time of conflict, resources are more likely to be spent on men rather than on women. Women’s need for protein, vitamin and minerals increases during menstruation, pregnancy and lactation and conflict not only marks restriction to the access to health service system but also curbs their aces to food which is a very important component of health. In case of an ethnic conflict where one community is blamed as “illegal migrants” and other claims to be the son of the soil, the ethnicity of the women influences their access to health service and their experience while accessing it. Studying this aspect would also come under the purview of the research

study. It has been conceptualized that the Bodo and Bengali Muslim women's gender role not only makes their access to health service system a difficult task rather it makes them vulnerable to marginalization, poverty and suffering engendered by ethnic conflict.

Conflict brings many changes to the society that may or may not be so visible initially and all these changes affect each other. But the reading on conflict and its effect on women shows that, apart from other consequences of conflict on women, it reinforces patriarchy in more stringent way. To add on to that, displacement, loss of livelihood and unequal social structure where women are seen as lower in position to men, puts them in worst situation of powerlessness. In normal times women are seen as the 'honour' of the community and this notion of prized self-respect and honor attached with them, that makes them more vulnerable to rape and abduction during turbulent times. The loss of the women of any community to the man of other community is considered as the loss of the honor of her original community. This results into a tug of war on women's body. So, it is a dual control excised on the women by patriarchy. Firstly, it is the male member of the 'other' community who tries to establish their own control over the women's body and secondly, the male of their 'own' community to tries to put various gendered control over her. All this control tries to rob her off her agency. Women have to assume the role of breadwinner of the family as men could no longer assume the role of bread earner owing to diminishing livelihood options. As women fulfill her new role expectation of breadwinner, her traditional role expectation of care giver doesn't relieve her, since wounds and injuries doesn't stop with the end of conflict. The inability to conform to the socially constructed role of masculinity causes men to enforced sanctions on women in name of culture and identities. Women become symbolic bearer of ethnic identity. Thus, violent aggression becomes symbol of masculinity. So, it is mainly women who has to cope with the consequences of poverty as by assuming the role of bread winner which results into exertion for them as they had to work for long hours along with their household responsibilities but they hardly have any control over their earning and to add on to that the skewed inter household food distribution. Dearth of food affects both the sexes but especially detrimental for women specially who are in their reproductive age group. As the present study involves two communities that are going

through violent confrontations to save their identity in a set geographical area therefore bringing out the experience of the women from these two communities is important. The similarity or dissimilarity of the experience of women from Bodo and Bengali Muslim community in terms of Physical health, displacement, loss of livelihood and their changing role expectation would be brought out in the study.

As displacement is one of the visible consequences of conflict, but what remains invisible are how, women refuse to succumb to the situation and rebuilt their shelter in a new place and new situation. She continues with her role of social reproduction in her daily life. The study would also try to see how women had started her family routine and continued with her daily procedures of subsistence. And in doing so what are the emotional penalties women had to pay.

The study thus conceptualise that women from Bodo and Bengali Muslim community of Chirang district of Assam faces conflict in a multi-faceted manner, they becomes susceptible to physical and psychological abuse, faces restriction while accessing health service system, have to bear heavy work burden. Therefore, the study would start with the assumption that consequences of conflict are more difficult for these women from both the community. Since these women belong to two different ethnic groups, it is assumed that their ethnicity would add on to make a difference to the above mentioned experience.

Even with in an ethnic group women are not a homogenous category so, the study would try to include women from different age . The study tried to see who among these women, is the most affected by the conflict. Discovering those dimensions that bring these differences would be one of the premises of the study. Exploring those factors would enable us to understand how Bodo and Bengali Muslim women live through ethnic conflict differently, in terms of physical health and emotional wellbeing and in accessing health

service system. The study would also try to show how despite the differential consequences of conflict on women how they negotiate their way out, to overcome those limitations.

Discussing women's experience of the conflict brings out the gendered aspects of conflict and diverts the attention from men's experience of conflict, which till now garnered the attention. Bringing the spotlight to women's experience gives a perspective to the structural inequalities embodied in the conflict.

But women go beyond victimhood and powerlessness to build their agency and mobilize resistance. As men retreat into private sphere owing to the conflict, women venture out into public sphere as they are considered as less threatening . This leads to blurring of the strict public private division. In fact women's private sphere extends to incorporate the public sphere. Infact her activism and her agency comes into play when she negotiate the way out in the conflict situation for the survival of her family and community.

2.2Rationalisation

The study is concern with the consequences of conflict on people in general and women in particular. In identifying the impact of conflict on women the present study is in agreement with the fact that women have needs in common with the rest of the society, which doesn't get fulfilled in conflict situation. So, it was thought that, to give a comprehensive picture of the effect of conflict on women it is necessary to bring out those commonalities in terms of effect of conflict. The similar outcome of conflict would serve as a basis to show women are affected by conflict in a specific way. This specificity rises out of their different gendered roles that are assigned to play in the society.

The study has been conducted in Chirang district, which comes under Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) of Assam. The district has witness conflict between

Bodo and Bengali Muslims in the year 2012 .However the conflict between these two communities in Chirang is not something new. In fact Chirang and Kokrajhar districts were the seat of Bodo movement in the nineties, which resulted in formation of BTAD. Therefore it was thought appropriate to conduct the present study in Chirang district.

2.3 Broad Objective

The broad objective of the study is to capture the experience of the Bodo and Bengali Muslim women in terms of displacement, livelihood, health and health access in the backdrop of ethnic conflict in Chirang district of Assam.

2.4 Specific objective

The specific objectives of the study are

To understand the meaning of conflict for the Bodo and the Bengali Muslim women.

To examine the changes brought in their lives by conflict, in terms of displacement and livelihood.

To understand how conflict affect their physical health and emotional wellbeing.

To explore the difficulties faced by the women to access the health care in terms of availability, affordability and accessibility of services.

To understand how ethnic identity, socio-economic status and age shapes their experience in conflict situation.

To understand how the women of both the communities overcome these hurdles in the time of emergency.

2.5 Research question

What are the reasons of conflict according to the women of both the communities?

What are the inferences of physical health on women of both the communities due to conflict? What are the emotional implications they faced due to the conflict? How do they link their ethnicity to their physical and emotional consequences of conflict?

What kind of experiences do they have while accessing the healthcare services owing to their ethnicity and gender?

What social and economic consequences these women faced due to their ethnicity and age?

What options does the women of both the communities resorts to cope with the medical emergencies during the time of emergency and why?

What are the economic and social consequences the women of both the communities have to face owing to the conflict?

2.6 Operational Definition

Below are some of the terms that are used in the synopsis or that might be used in the analysis of the present study.

Armed conflict:An armed conflict is a contested incompatibility which concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battlerelated deaths . (Bastick ,*et al* 2007)

Access :Access refers to factors influencing entry into or use of the health care system in terms of availability (resources and services),accessibility (location of supply and location of patient , transportation, cost, time to travel) , accommodation (arrangement of supply resources and ability of patient to use them), affordability (price of resources and services and patient's ability to pay them), acceptability (of the service provider by the patient and vice versa along with their personal attributes like sex, age religion, caste, class and financial background) . (Penchansky and Thomas 1981,pp 128)

Conflict: Competition and dispute over scare resources such as land, jobs, educational quotas, government services or natural resources. (Fearon and Laitin 2011)

Displacement: Shifting of people from the place of origin.

Ethnicity:In narrow sense ethnic groups are racial or linguistic group. In broad sense all ascribe (birth-based)group identities, real or imagined like race, language, religion, tribe,or caste—can be called ethnic group.(Horowitz cited in Varshney 2003)

Ethnic conflict:all conflicts based on ascriptive (birth-based)group identities, real or imagined—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste can be called ethnicconflict. (Horowitz cited in Varshney 2003)

Sexual Violence : Sexual violence incorporates non-consensual sexual contact and non-consensual non-contact acts of a sexual nature, such as voyeurism and sexual harassment.¹² Acts qualify as sexual violence if they are committed against someone who is unable to consent or refuse, for example because of age, disability, misuse of authority, violence or threats of violence.

Gender- Based Violence: Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It includes violence against women occurring within the family, geographically or culturally specific forms of abuse such as female genital mutilation, "honour killings" and dowry-related violence as well as various forms of sexual violence, including rape during warfare, trafficking of women and forced prostitution.

Domestic violence : Domestic violence can be better understood as a chronic syndrome characterized not only by episodes of physical violence but also by the emotional and psychological abuse the perpetrators use to maintain control over the partners. (Rutherford *et al* 2007)

Immigrants: People who are victims of livelihood threatening structural violence.

Refugee: People who are victims of life threatening structural violence.

Principal / Subsidiary occupation: For a person pursuing more than one occupation, principal occupation is the one in which maximum labour time is spent. The other occupations will be considered as subsidiary occupations. (NSSO, 2001)

Principal /Subsidiary household occupation : Out of all the occupation perused by the members of the household, one which fetched the maximum earnings to the household in the reference year will be considered as the principal household occupation. The occupation which comes next on the basis of the earning will be considered as the subsidiary household occupation. (NSSO,2001)

2.7 Area of Study

Spread across an area of 78,438 sq Km, the State of Assam is located between 90-96 degree East Longitude and 24-28 degree North Latitude. It is also known as land of blue hills and red rivers. Largest among all the Northeastern State, Assam shares its international border with Bhutan in the North and East and Bangladesh in West. Along with that, it is surrounded with Arunachal Pradesh in the East and North, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya in the South and West Bengal in the West. It has a total population of 31,169,272 (2011 census) with sex ratio of 1000:954. The state has a literacy rate of 73.81 (ibid). It has 27 districts along with the Four districts that come under Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District. Brahmaputra, the lifeline of Assam passes from the Northeast part of the state to West. Another major river is Barak that flows in the Southern part of Assam. Assam is divided in Brahmaputra valley and Barak Valley on the basis of the two rivers.

Assam has many ethnic groups like Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burmese, Indo-Aryan speakers and Tai-Kadai speakers. The most spoken language in Assam is Assamese, followed by Bengali, then Bodo. Assam is primarily an agrarian economy with maximum of its population dependent on agriculture. The economy of the state depends mainly on agriculture, Tea and Petroleum.

The Study was conducted in the Chirang District of Assam. It comes under Bodo Territorial Autonomous Districts and was one of the districts affected with the ethnic conflict in Assam in 2012. Two villages were selected for the study Pakhriguri (Sonai village) and Salguri (Bashbari village) -one, which has 100% Bodo population and another having cent percent Bengali Muslim population. For the Bengali Muslim village, **1no. Pakhriguri, (Sonai Village)** was selected and for Bodo village **Salguri (Bashbari village)** was selected. Both the villages are adjacent to each other. Both the villages were selected based on the ease of accessibility by the researcher.

2.8 Research Design

A research design can be considered as a blue print about conducting the research and the subsequent plan of data analysis. Research design is also important to assure quality in the research.

According to Holden and Lynch (2004 pp 398) Science ,involves either a subjective or objective approach to research and these two major philosophical approaches are delineated by several core assumptions concerning ontology (reality), (epistemology (knowledge) ,human nature (pre- determined or not) and methodology .whatever their sociological persuasion ,the researcher will find that these assumptions are consequential to each other ,that is , their view of ontology effects their epistemological persuasion which, in turn effect their view of human nature , consequently , choice of methodology logically follows the assumptions the researcher has already made.

The researcher used comparative research design. This research design studies two or more contrasting casing with some identical parameters. The design claims that social phenomena can be understood better when compared with contrasting cases. By comparing

two or more cases a researcher can explain whether a particular theory will or will not hold true.

The present research used qualitative research strategy. According to Brunskell 1998 Qualitative research allows for an exploration and understanding of the lives of the people as they are really lived. Qualitative research allows a closer degree of involvement with those who participate in the research, and consequently a greater sensitivity to the rights of participants as people, rather than as objectives of research. According to (Maynard 1998, pp128) qualitative studies maximize understanding of women's activities and beliefs and the process through which these are structured. Such research tends to be oriented towards the interior of women's lives, focusing on the meaning and interpretations of those being researched. According to Bryman (2012) Case study would help in locating the factors responsible for a particular observed pattern in a given context. By using case study the researcher would be in a better position to examine generative causal mechanism in contrasting or similar context.

As the present research would try to bring out the health consequences of women due to the present conflict, along with their perception of conflict so, it was thought that a qualitative research would be appropriate for that.

2.9 The Baseline survey and selection of village-

The first phase of the study was conducted in two camps. The two camps were had only people from two village, one was Bengali Muslim camp where as another one was a bodo village. The reason for visiting the camp and not at the village was that, people who were affected by conflict were still in the camps. One camp usually accommodated one entire village and it was initially thought that the study would be conducted in the camps only. The purpose of the visit was to see the feasibility of conducting the study in the field. However after few months the villagers were asked to return to their respective village. The Bengali

Muslim village returned to their village however the Bodo villagers were reluctant to go back to their village and despite repeated persuasion by the government official they didn't return to their original village instead some of them moved to other villages where they had relatives, some bought land in the nearby town of Bongaigaon. Their unwillingness was because their original village was an island and was always under threat and they would not be able to run in case of any attack. Because of this sudden change I was suggested by the local VCDC member to conduct the study in Basundhara VCDC, as the extent of destruction was more in that area along with that it will be easier to reach that place.

Out of all the villages under Basundhara VCDC (Mahua) two villages were selected based on conveniences of the research to commute to the village. These were **1 no. Pakhriguri (Bashbari)** which is a Bengali Muslim village and other one is **Salguri(Sonai)** which is a Bodo village. Both the village come under Pakhriguri revenue circle. The criteria for selection of village were ethnicity and then displacement during the time of conflict.

Both village Bashbari and village Sonai were affected during the conflict and people from both the villages had to stay in the camps .However, the extent of damage and the duration of stay in the refugee camp was more for the people of village Sonai.

2.10 Gaining familiarity with the village –

Since the topic of research is quite sensitive and ethnicity of the researcher is different from ethnicity of the people from both the village and question already being raised by different people for seeing an outsider frequenting VCDC office. So, it was thought that before selecting the respondent it would be necessary to gain some familiarity of the village and the people. To start with, the researcher started visiting VCDC office to talk to the chairperson and other members of the VCDC to talk about the village and the conflict of 2012. The VCDC members were from both the communities. While talking to the VCDC members the researcher got a general idea about the village and the relation people share across the

villages. It came out in the discussion about the power structure in the village. The role of VCDC during the time of conflict was also discussed there.

2.11 Selection of respondents –

The Bodo village has 78 household and the Bengali muslim village has a total of 50 household(VCDC data). So, women who were 15 years and above from both the communities and who were displaced due to the ethnic conflict in BTAD in the year 2012 were purposively selected for the study. The reason for selecting women of this age group is that it will not only include women of reproductive age group rather it will give us an opportunity to look into the suffering of women who are not in their reproductive age. Thus allowing us to focus on all the repercussions of ethnic conflict, women from these two communities faced due to ethnic conflict. The researcher conducted the interviews in Bengali, as the villagers in both the village can speak Bodo, Bengali, Assamease. Bengali is used as the medium of communication in the area.

2.12 Source of Data –

Both primary and secondary data was collected for the study. Primary data was the lived experience of the women from Bodo and Bengali Muslim community of Chirang district of Assam. The study tried to include women from both the community, who were displaced by the conflict. A semi structured interview schedule was administered on all household. This allowed the researcher to gather quantifiable data at the same time it gave the freedom to the researcher to assemble qualitative information.

Quantitative data like household profile, demographic profile, educational status, place of stay during the conflict, duration of stay, and loss of property and relief material got were covered by the quantitative part of the semi structured interview schedule.

The qualitative part of the semi structured interview schedule was administered on women who were willing to talk to the researcher regarding their experiences of the conflict. The in-depth interview helped the researcher to understand the meaning of conflict for the women of both the communities -meaning which streamed from their different experience of the conflict. It also facilitates to gather information regarding their experience during their stay in the various camps and how their emotional wellbeing was manifested. Specific questions were also probed regarding their physical health and access to health service system.

Specific questions were posed for women who were pregnant at that time and their experience during the conflict was also tried to capture by using the semi structured interview schedule. Their access to health service system and places of delivery was also inquired by the researcher.

Adolescent girls were asked regarding any kind of restriction regarding their movement. Normal age for marriage of girls was also asked and any change in the age of marriage for the girls, post- conflict was also noted down.

Interview guide was also developed and administered to the key informant to prepare the history about the village and to deep probe about their understanding of the conflict and how their relation with the other community has changed during and after the conflict.

Apart from the primary data the present study required a great deal of use of secondary literature .The literatures were specifically required to bring in the historicity of migration in Assam and the changing relation of these two communities over the time. Brining in the history of the conflict is crucial for the study as, the study also aimed to see whether the past conflicts between these communities have changed the relation of the people from these two communities, who have been staying here since ages. For these

purpose secondary data has been collected from the various journals, newspaper reports from local daily newspapers.

To construct the history of migration in Assam and capture the changing volatile relation of these two communities, several visits were made to many libraries including some libraries in Assam and Delhi like the Omiya kumar das institute of social change and Nehru memorial library. The books collected from these libraries helped in recreating the background of the study.

2.13 Tools of Data Collection –

To prepare the village profile **village information schedule** was used. Information was also gathered regarding the history of both the villages and any other incidents of displacement as a community in the past . **Semi structured interview schedule** was used because the researcher wanted to get certain kind of information which was required from each respondent, like socio-economic demographic indicator. But certain questions need to be rephrased to make it understandable for the respondent. Thus, allowing the researcher to interpret the question to elicit response. It allowed deep probing whenever it was required. Indepth interview with the women of both the communities were conducted to collect information regarding their understanding about conflict and their experience in terms of health and access to health service systems. It also gave the freedom to the researcher to omit or add some questions depending on the situation, as the study focused on relationship between conflict and women's lives, work (livelihood) and health. We needed thorough qualitative data to understand the change brought about by conflict in the lives of women in Bodo and Bengali Muslim women in Chirang district. The study focused on patriarchal forces that came out in newer forms during conflict times and interplay in women's lives. The study thus demanded a thorough qualitative data for an in-depth understanding of the situation.

2.14 Process of Data collection

After the selection of villages and getting a general idea about the villages, it was time to conduct the field work. Initial rapport was built with the people who frequented the VCDC office. The initial task was to get to know the villagers and explain them about the purpose of my visit. The reason being, the researcher was easily identified as an outsider and both the villages are neither multi ethnic nor frequently visited by people from other places. So, it was extremely essential for the researcher to explain the purpose of the visit. Making them understand about the study was actually very difficult because of the sensitive topic of the study. Since ethnicity is a major issue in the study, so it was thought to start the field work from Sonai village. With the ethnicity of the researcher it was easier to enter in the village and to get access to any kind of interview that was needed for the study.

So, to begin with, the researcher administered interview guide among the old people of the villages to get the history of the respective villages. Any kind of history of displacement as a community was also asked. Along with that present infrastructure and amenities present in the villages was also enquired.

For Sonai village the quantitative part of the semi structured interview schedule was administered. Talking to women regarding this was not difficult, so, collecting data on numbers of family members, educational level of each family members, source of earning, land holdings, type of land holdings, relief material and duration of stay outside the village during conflict were collected. However, the women didn't know much about their age, neither they are sure about the age of any family members. Only the age of the new born child or the children born during the time of conflict were remembered.

So, after getting the information on socio demographic issues, it was time to administer the part II of the semi- structured interview schedule on the women. So, the schedule was administered on all the women, who were above 15 years of age, were present

at the time of the field visit and were willing to talk to the researcher regarding their experience of the conflict were included in the study.

Women were asked questions regarding their displacement during the conflict and how they reached the refugee camp and how they came to know about the conflict. Their experience during their stay in the camp and experience of physical discomfort. Their journey from one camp to another and back to the village was documented. Their life after they were brought back to the village and their fear and anxiety during their entire journey was also captured. The women were also encouraged to speak about their hope and their preparedness for any such incident in the future.

Access to the health service system was also noted down. Women who were in need of specific services like pregnant women were also interviewed. Their access to the health service system and their child birth experience was focused. Adolescent girls were asked about any restriction in their movement. Age at marriage was also noted down and change in the age at marriage was noted down.

For Bashbari village the same process was adopted. However, to conduct the study in that village, the researcher had to take help from some local people. Primarily, because the researcher was considered an outsider and it was realized that without the help of some local villagers it will be difficult to establish rapport with the village people. So, to begin with, the researcher tried to get the history of the village from some of the old people of the village. After that, the quantitative part of the semi-structured interview schedule was run. The researcher had to face a great deal of difficulty while explaining them about the research topic. However, with the help of two local villagers, the task of collecting the quantitative data was done.

In the second phase of data collection the qualitative part of the semi-structured interview schedule was administered .For this phase the initial task was to establish the rapport with the women of the village. For this, the researcher had to make multiple trips to the village before some of the women willing to talk to the researcher. The researcher tried to administer it on all the household however considering the sensitive topic some of the women refused to talk. So, keeping the ethical consideration, only those women who were above 15 years of age and were willing to talk were included in the study.

Women were asked about their duration of stay in the camp .Since, their duration of stay at the camp was relatively small then the people of village A. Further probe was done on their pattern of stay in the camp. This lead us to enquire about their fear and any kind of tension during their stay in the camp, as some of the members of each family were staying back at the village. Expression of fear and tension was also noted down. Further, enquiry was also made regarding their physical health and any problem regarding access to health service system. Any woman with specific biological need during the time of conflict was also interviewed.

They were also asked about their relationship with their neighbouring villages and any change in the relationship after the conflict was also recorded. Their efforts to build the ties with their neighbouring village were also documented.

3.15 Technique of data collection

Apart from other methods of data collection **group discussion** was used to gather information regarding history of the villages and to understand the relation between the communities. Although this tool was initially not incorporated but later on it was realized that group discussion would be best to understand the inter community relationship as well as to recall the history of the village.

3.16 Experience in the field

Since the study required capturing the experience of the women of both the communities, so the researcher had to interact with the women. However, to be able to interact with the women the researcher had to face many problems. The first step in the process of data collection was to identify the village. Before finalizing the village the researcher thought that there should be a pre-pilot visit to some of the villages. After visiting some of the villages which were still at the refugee camp the researcher finalized two villages. Since the entire villages were still in the camp. The researcher was assured by the people of one village that they will be provided land by the government in that area, since their village was in some island and they would not be sent back because of security reasons. But after few months the researcher was informed that they were asked to go back to their villages. Despite repeated assurance of their safety the villagers refused to go back and at the end the entire village dispersed to different locations. Some of the people bought land at the neighbouring town of Bongaigaon; some went other villagers where they have some relatives. So, the researcher had to change the study village. From there , the researcher was suggested by the Bangtol VCDC members to conduct her study under Basundhara VCDC as the extent of damage was more in that part.

After identifying the village the researcher wanted to know about the village but it was realized that since both the villages are quite far off from the national highway and not frequented by outsiders .So it was realized that before entering the village it will be essential that the researcher make herself visible to the people in VCDC office. So, the researcher made many visits to the office to engage in some informal discussion about the village and get to know about the experience during the time of conflict. After gaining familiarity with the people at the VCDC .It was thought to enter the village. But ethnicity being a major issue, it was realized by the researcher that entering into the Bengali Muslim village would be easier for the researcher.

While entering the village, the rapport building with the women of that village was not that difficult. Conducting the interview in their mother tongue was an advantage. They were ready to talk. The rapport building process was started with case ...she is not only the VCDC member but also a well-known and respected lady of the village. With her help the women of the village accepted the researcher quite well. With repeated visit some of the school going girls of the village became friends with the researcher .They would often accompany the researcher to the household visits. They sometime even helped the researcher in data collection by interpreting the questions to the respondent.

As the number of visits increased, the familiarity with the village and the villagers also increased. Before the start of the field visit the researcher would hire an auto from Bongaigaon town to the village, because there was no public transport to the village. But this was turning out to be a costly affair. After the villagers came to know about the researcher's mode of communication they suggested her of an easier way of commutation which included 3 kilometers of walk to the village. Most of the women wanted to know what the purpose of the enquiry is and whether they would get any benefit from my study. The researcher had to explain to them that this study is not from the government and they won't get anything from this. The researcher clarified that she will get degree after submission of the report just like their own children.

With the researcher's repeated visits she gained familiarity with the village and villagers and subsequently the women started sharing not only about their experiences during conflict rather many aspects of their life like domestic responsibilities, problems in their family. As the field work progressed, the women's acquaintance with the researcher increased the researcher would get invitation from them on their special occasions like eid and marriage. The researcher's interest in their life and non-inhibition to have food with them really helped in striking the chord with them.

Since the data collection process was conducted in phases, after few visits, the women got bored of the researcher's visit. They wanted to know why the researcher is repeatedly asking the same question to everyone. But then the researcher had to explain them about the purpose of repeated visit. After, understanding the reason they were not only patiently cooperated some of them even offered to help and asked the researcher to call in case some information was left.

Nevertheless collecting data from the Bodo village was a different experience altogether. Entering the village. - Like in case of village A, the researcher here also tried to get the history of village from some of the old people of the village. Since before entering the village the researcher had spent some time in the VCDC office and have gained quite acquaintance in the office so, somebody from the VCDC office accompanied the researcher to village. The person introduced the researcher to few old people of the village, who spoke about the village. They spoke about the origin of the village, how did people come and settled here. While collecting the history of the village, the old people were quite cooperative.

The real problem began after the researcher started to collect demographic data. The villagers had many questions; they were quite suspicious of an outsider visiting their village. Some of them had many questions like why does an outsider is asking them about all this things. Although, the researcher had explained them about the purpose of the visit still some of them remained hostile. The researcher had even explained them that she had talked to the VCDC chairperson. But nothing seemed to work.

Finally the researcher met a respondent in the village who understood the researcher topic and also understood the purpose of the visit. The respondent had his education from Silchar and was quite aware of Phd. He suggested that I should get a girl from their ethnicity either from their village or from another village, who would be ready to go with me door to

door. He even helped the researcher in finding the girl who went with the researcher to the village. With the help of the girl the researcher was able to get some demographic information from the villagers. While collecting the data the people still had some questions regarding the researcher but now they would ask about the researcher to the girl accompanying her. While collecting the data one such inquisitive person asked about the purpose of the visit, upon explaining the purpose the person offered to help .The person was a local student leader and with his help the demographic data was collected .Although the one or two villagers were still resilient with an outsider visiting and asking about their information but majority of them cooperated.

The next phase of data collection involved indepth interview with the women and enquiring about their experience during the time of conflict. It was really very difficult to talk to women in this regard.

Since the actual part of data collection was still left and with the ethnicity of the researcher and sensitive topic of the research being the main hindrance in rapport building, it was thought that somebody from the village should be with the researcher to make her acceptable in the village. It was thought that since the ASHA worker is quite known to the villagers, she should be approached for the help. With the help of ASHA worker the in depth interview was conducted. Many times the ASHS worker even worked as an interpreter or she even made things understandable for the .There would be frequent interruption by the men during interview, but the same men gave some vital information regarding their relation with the neighboring village and .

As a whole it was also an unlearning experience about the researcher's own class background where frequent uses of certain English words are common and to interact with the respondents the researcher had to use those words in Bengali and Assamease.

2.18 Methodological challenges

The actual conflict happened in 2012 and the data was collected much later. Along with that there were breaks in between the field work owing to the employed status of the researcher. As a whole there might be an element of recall biasedness by the respondents while trying to respond to the researcher.

Since the conflict was an ethnic conflict and topic being quite sensitive, researcher's ethnicity made a huge difference in gaining access to a particular village. The ability to speak in one's own language is a huge advantage in data collection as, it helps in establishing rapport with the interviewee. After gaining familiarity with the villagers the researcher started to conduct the study, while conducting the interview the women expressed their feelings in some local terms that was impossible for the researcher to translate them in English as the words might loss its essence. The English translations provided in the chapters are the closes translation possible.

The work is of qualitative nature and the question of subjectivity remains there. But the main aim of the study was to capture the lived experience of the women during the time of conflict. Some of the questions regarding the physical health were direct and easy to interpret but it was the question of emotional wellbeing that runs the risk of subjectivity mainly, but this subjectivity could be from the part of researcher as well as from the respondent as well. Therefore the researcher tried to present the exact view of the respondent.

Lastly, While addressing the issue of generalization is a concern for qualitative research but the researcher has tried to draw a comparison with the available literature on conflict and various aspects of conflict to draw what is called as moderatum generalization (Williams, M 2000 cited in Bryman 2012)

2.19 Ethical Consideration

1) As the topic of the research is quite sensitive, utmost importance was taken to maintain the privacy of the respondent. All the name of the places or person used here are pseudo name.

2) Oral Informed consent was taken before conducting the interview for the research.

Chapter 3

History of Conflict in Assam

The chapter provides the historical context of migration and also tries to bring out the process of identity formation among the larger Assamese people.

The chapter further provides the historical and contextual background to Assam and conflict in Assam along with the gender culture and women's position in Assam. This will historicise and contextualize both the ethnic groups.

During the post-colonial era Assam has seen many socio-political movements. Some of them were peaceful in nature whereas others were violent in nature. Some of the conflicts in Assam has been presently chronologically in the below section.

The chapter is divided in three sections the first section tries to show how conflict has been a part of Assam and the second section tries to see how the present Assamese society was formed and the third section deals with status of women in Assamese society at large and bodo women in particular.

3.1 History of conflict in Assam

3.1 (a) Moamoria rebellion

The 18th century peasant struggle against the Ahom aristocrat popularly known as "Moamoria rebellion" is one of the first recorded account of armed struggle in pre-colonial Assam. The rebellion which extended for almost three decades shook the Ahom kingdom and prompting many changes in the state machinery. (Sharma, 1996) There were three Moamoria rebel in the recorded history, the first in the year 1769, followed by in the year 1782, then again in the year 1786-94. The rebels were mainly from tribal and non-tribal communities and were disciples of Moamoria Satra.

The Ahoms are from the family of Tai or Shan race and they entered Assam from Burma in the year 1228 A.D. (Gail 198:70 cited in Sharma 1996) The Ahoms defeated the local tribe which ruled the area. They entered into matrimonial ties with the local people and adopted their culture and tradition. As the Ahom kingdom expanded its base towards the western Assam, it came in contact with Hinduism. Beside this development another significant change was surplus generation, which came after the change in the agricultural pattern along with change in the forces of production. This change agricultural pattern initiated the transition of semi-tribal socio economic structure of Ahom kingdom towards feudal socio-economic structure. (Sharma, 1996)

With the movement of Ahoms towards the western Assam many significant changes also accompanied, like a shift from dry rice cultivation to wet rice cultivation, migration of priest, learned people, peasants, artisans from the places which were already under the fold of Hinduism. This migration of various people helped in transformation of Ahom kingdom from a tribal state to a feudal state. The change in agricultural pattern and use of plough led to accumulation of surplus, which further guided the class formation in the Ahom society. The migration of people from places which have relatively developed political system also fuelled the transformation of the political organs of the tribal society. (Guha, 1983)

The main reason of conflict was the exploitation of the half slaves half peasants known as *Paiks* , by the ruling Ahom aristocrats. However, the rebels composed of people other than peasants as well. The ethnicity of the rebels was also from diverse background. Although the exploitation of the Paiks ,being the main reason for the rebellion but the presence of many other factors were equally important like the neo-Vaishnavite movement. (Sharma, 1996)

A detail discussion on the social structure of Ahom society would help us to understand the *paik* system. All the abled body men between the age of 16-50 years , had to

render compulsory state service for three months . Each individual was called as *paik* and the system was called as *paik* system. A group of four *paik* would form a *got*. This *got* was the primary unit of production. Each *paik* from the *got* would have to give compulsory service to the state for a period of three months with out any wage and during his service to the state, the other two *paiks* of the *got* would look after his land and house. The compulsory service to the state would include construction of road, dam, tanks and ponds. Leveling of land for rice cultivation, construction of temple and dams before the onset of monsoon were also done by them. Further, their services were also important for defense of the kingdom so, erection of massive forts for defence purpose going to the battle field as soldiers since the Ahoms didn't have any regular army, were also counted as their duties. They were also expected to grow vegetable and crops for the royal family and nobilities. Thus, one fourth of the *paiks* were always for the state service. (Sharma, 1996)

The *paiks* didn't have the basic human rights at the time of their service. They had to do whatever was asked to do. There would be census for *paiks* and anybody trying to escape the process would be subjected to punishment. They were not provided of food or any remuneration during their service period. They would only get 2.66 acres of land for cultivation, in lieu of their service. The yield from the land would allow them for their subsistence level survival. However the ownership didn't belong to them, it belong to the *khel* . So, whenever a *paik* died the land went back to the *khel* . Since, the land ownership was not with the *paik*, so he can't sell or transfer to it to anybody. (Sharma, 1996)

The *khels* were organized on the basis of territories so that *paiks* belonging to specific territory can be identified. Some *khels* were also organized on the basis of occupational categories. So weaver, iron smiths, gold smiths, and other skilled people were under separate *khels* based on their skills. They were exempted from the compulsory physical labour of serving to the state. However, they had to give a portion of their product to the king. These *khels* were under different administrative officers and they had to send a certain number of *paiks* for the service to the state. Just like the *paiks*, the administrative official heading the

khel were not paid any salary; rather they were given estates and certain numbers of paiks for their personal services. And as soon as the officials were out of service all the estates and the paiks would go to the new officials. The *paiks* assigned for personal use to the officials were called the *kanri paik* and just like any commodity they could also be donated to anyone as per the wish of the official. (Sharma, 1996)

Thus, the social structure of the Ahom society was based on a very rigid hierarchical structure, where the Ahoms royalty and the religious leaders namely the Brahmins were at the top and the slaves (*bandha*) were at the bottom and the paiks were placed in between these two classes. The paiks were relatively better than the slaves as they had designated duties and had some basic human rights whereas the slaves had neither of them.

Along with the exploitation of the *paiks* the other potent cause of the revolution the neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam. The neo Vaishnavite movement in Assam was in accordance with the feudal ideology. It advocated the concept of *dasya* (servitude) as the form of devotion towards the guru. (Sharma, 1996). It is through this that a proselyte could attain god. Thus, the neo vaishnavite movement which started against the Brahminical dominance and propagated the ideology of monotheism and egalitarianism among the caste also promoted feudalism among its followers.

The neo-vaishnavite sect in Assam was based on *satras* or *xatras*, each of which is headed by a guru. Each of these satras have many *namgarh* or prayer halls under them. Every village has their *namgarh*. Thus, these *namgarh* or prayer halls also served as meeting place for village people. Later on as the ideological differences crept in, the satras also bifurcated; some accepted idol worshiping, brahminical superiority, vedic rites and some denied it. The *Kala Samhati* was the most radical among them in regards to the teaching of Sankardev. This satra gained popularity in the tribal belt of upper Assam especially among the Morans and the Chutias. Moamora satra belonged to this order and the followers of the

particular satra is known as Moamoria. (Sharma, 1996) The compositions of the rebel were mainly from the Moamora satra. The satra had a radical stand and rejected the brahminical supremacy. Whereas the royalist satra endorsed religious stand conducive to the ruling class in lieu of grants and *paiks* . Many of the non-conformist brahmins were persecuted. So, it was an antagonistic relation between the ruling class and the paiks along with the radical and royalist satra- with the royalist satra and the ruling class on one side and the radical kala samhati (which rejected the brahminical supremacy) and the ordinary paiks on the other side. Along with the central issues and sometimes it is the immediate cause that resulted in the outbreak of the revolt like the insult of Moran official by the Ahom king.

The neo-vaishnavism provided the organizational support for the movement. The practice of nocturnal worshipping among the cult was used by its followers to meet and discuss their strategies.

Although Moamoria revolt is recoded as a failure but it exposed the exploitation of the paiks by the ruling Ahom class. It forced the Ahom state to shift from barter economy to monetary economy. Further, it hung the growth of feudalism in Assam.

3.1 (b)Language movement

The British administration in the year 1836 decided Bengali as the official language of Assam. A reaction to this move was registered by Andaram Dhekial Phukan's petition to Moffat Mills in 1852. The petition was against the imparting of education in Bengali medium at vernacular schools. The petition aimed at making point that Assamese is a distinct culture and language as compared to Bengali. As a result of such organized effort Assamese became the official language of Assam from 1873. The era when Bengali was the official language of Assam is regarded as the 'Dark Age' of Assamese literature and culture.

After the official recognition, the next step is standardization of the language. By late nineteenth century, the Assamese language spoken in Upper Assam started getting recognition as accepted standard of modern Assamese language. However, accepting Assamese as standard language for whole of colonial Assam was never practically feasible. Firstly, the Bengali dominated district of Sylhet, which was attached with colonial Assam has always accepted Bengali language and culture as their way of life. Especially the Bengali Hindu's have always identified Bengali language as their primary language. The second concern was how far the hill tribes would accept Assamese as their language, considering the fact that historically, they the hill tribes have been disconnected with the plains of Assam. Even among the plain tribes the possibility of accepting Assamese as their language is quite dubious.

After independence the geographical boundary of Assam was restructured. The new restructuring of state boundaries was based on linguistic line. Given the role of Assamese elite in anti-colonial movement, a demand for Assamese as the official language for Assam was well anticipated. But the ethnic reality of Assam was quite different from other states. Assam despite its separation from Sylhet was quite multilingual. It comprised of people who claimed themselves as Assamese speakers along with Khasi, Garo and other Naga groups, even among the plain tribes, they asserted to speak different dialects.

But the major challenge to the idea of Assamese as the official language came from Barak valley, which was dominated by the Bengali speakers. The Cachar district in the Barak valley is dominated by Bengali speaking population. In the pre-independence era, Cachar was part of Bengal province. In the colonial times Cachar along with Sylhet was part of Surma Valley. The area was Bengali dominated as compared to Brahmaputra valley. During partition when Sylhet became a part of East Pakistan and then Bangladesh many of the Hindu majority areas were attached with the Cachar. In fact the origin of the name Cachar has its share of discrepancies. According to one theory Cachar got its name from Dimas Kachari—a subgroup of Tibeto-Burman family. The Dimas Kachari mainly resides in Dimas Hasong

district(earlier named as North Cachar hill district).However according to another theory , the name Cachar was given by the Bengalis of sylhet district. The name refers to kuccha in Sanskrit which means ‘a place near water’. So the terms ‘Kachari’ or ‘ Cachari’ then refers to people of Cachar, which includes people of both tribal origin as well as Bengali people of Cachar.

The idea of linguistically based nation state and the ethno political reality of Assam were realized by the State Reorganization Commission in 1955. The Commission recommended restructuring of the boundaries of Assam. It prescribed merging of two other northeaster states namely, Manipur and Tripura. Amid large scale controversy, the Assam Assembly passed the Official Language bill in 1960. What followed was large scale violence and further restructuring of the state boundary of Assam. The first state to be carved out was Nagaland in the year 1963, followed by Meghalaya in 1970. In the year 1972 Lusai hills became Mizoram. In the same year North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) became Arunachal Pradesh- a union territory, which later on in the year 1987 became a separate state. Thus, the creation of separate state out of Assam confirmed the fear of the Linguistic Provinces Commission 1948; the commission feared that creation of the province on the basis of the language would create fresh minorities.

The “Language riots” in Assam took place in the years 1960-61 and 1972 when the Gauhati University decided to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in colleges under them. In this case also the major challenge came from Barak valley. The first one was before and after passing of Official Language Bill. In both the cases there were multiple clashes between Assamese speakers and Bengalis Hindu’s. People killed in police firing were granted martyr status which further added fuel to people’s emotion.

The riot came to an end after the intervention of the then Home minister late Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri. Upon his intermediation the Assam Official Language Act was amended to

give local bodies the authorities to change the official language of the area with a two third majority. The amendment further states English along with Assamese at the state level to be used for communication.

Another language riot took place in the year 1972 when Gauhati University decided to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in the colleges under its jurisdiction. As expected the opposition came from the Bengali organizations in Cachar. After some violent outbreak the conflict came to an end after D.K Barooah, who was then serving as the Governor of Bihar , intervened. He suggested continuation of English as medium of instruction and revoke compulsion on college to use Assamese as their medium of teaching. (Baruah 1999)

3.1(c) Assam Movement

As independence was approaching, Indian states were grouped into certain categories to fit into constitution categories and introduce self-governance. Assam was clubbed with Bengal in group C. The idea of tagging Assam with Bengal was worrying for the leaders of Assam-primarily because the grouping would be on religious basis. That instilled a sense of fear among the mind of the people of Assam that their province might be put together with the Muslim dominated Bengal. If the idea is implemented, it would be difficult to bring back Assam. To oppose such attempt ,people of Assam started a mass movement under Gopinath Bordoloi .Under the pressure of the people of Assam , the Grouping system was abandoned.(Das, 2005)

The new Viceroy of India Lord Mountbatten devised a new formula .He divided the country on the basis of the religious lines, which was acceptable by both Congress and the Muslim League. Post the Sylhet referendum the political and demographic scenario of Assam changed .The Assamese speaking population raised to 56.7% in 1951 from 31% 1931, while the Bengali speaking population decline to 13% in 1951 from 23% in 1931. Hence at the

dawn of independence, Assamese speaking people was the largest group in the valley.(J. K. Das, 2005)

Change in the demography of Assam at the time of the independence resulted into change in the political scenario of Assam. The ethnic Assamese Population started controlling the power structure of Assam and by virtue of that they started imposing their language and culture. The demand to make Assamese as the state language was a manifestation of that. The Axom sangha, the Assam jatiya Maha sabha and Assam Sahitya sabha took a leading part in putting forth the demand for that. On the other hand the Bengali middle class also stake the claim of majority in Assam and demanded Bengali as accepted state language. The Assam Bengali Association was a frontrunner in this regard. (Goswami, 2001)

The claim by both the linguistic group was an attempt to claim political and social status along with the employment opportunities. In 1960 Assamese was made the official language of Assam and that instilled a sense of fear among the tribal population of Assam. The fear of their “Assamisation” led to many separatist movement and ultimately, creation of states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.(Goswami, 2001)

The major chunk of population in Assam were dissatisfied with the congress rule, because of the slow pace of the development and Muslim exclusiveness policy adopted by congress (I) for vote bank. The policy also helped Congress (I) to regain power in Assam. With the congress(I) coming to power there were talks of turning to Assam into small federation of small states, each with its own language .(Gohain, 1982) Coupled with that, the fear of being minority in their own state resulted in the one of the biggest movement in Assam known as “Assam Movement”. Lakhs of people flooded the streets of Branhamputa valley against the illegal immigrants of east Bengal origin.

The Assam movement went on for six years from 1979 to 1985. The demand of the leaders was that, immigrants from East Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 unless they have been granted genuine Indian citizenship, were to be termed as “foreigners” or “illegal immigrant”. These “foreigners” should be detected and deported. There was allegation that many of the illegal immigrants were enlisted in the voter lists and were given voting rights. This made the official voter list quite suspicious. (Baruah 1999)

During the six years of the movement, Assam saw violent confrontation of the people of Assam and the government forces. With the raise of United Liberation Front of Assam, the Assamese sub nationalism took a militant turn. Although the organization was formed with the objective to defend the rights of the ethnic Assamese against the backdrop of the demographic change owing to inflow of the “illegal immigrants” but its objective of obtaining “sovereign” Assam for the ethnic Assamese got a jolt, upon confrontation with the multi lingual and multi ethnic reality of the Assamese society. Hence, under such situation ULFA had to broaden its definition of ethnic Assamese to people of Assam.(Misra 2014)

There was a call to boycott the state Assembly election .The central government on the other hand was adamant on conducting the election. The election was to be conducted on the basis of the electoral roll prepared in 1979, which was one of the main reasons of Assam movement. The non-revision of the electoral roll was a direct contradiction of the point of agreement between the movement leaders and the central government. The point of agreement between the two parties was the removal of the name of the immigrants who came post 1971. At this point, holding an election was seen as a straight challenge to the movement and any kind of moderate to high turnout will be considered as blow to the movement.(Baruah, 1986)

As a result a series of violence was reported from different parts of Assam between the supporter and the opponent of the election. In Kokrajhar the Bodo’s attacked the Bengali

Muslim and Hindu's. In Gohpur the Bodo's attacked the Assamese. In Dhemaji the Mishing Tribes attacked the Bengali Muslim and Hindu. In Samaguri the Muslims attacked the Hindu's. But the most famous among them was the Nelli violence, where the Tiwa tribe attacked the Bengali Muslim and killed almost 1,600 people in one day. (Baruah, 1986) (Kimura 2008)

The main cause of violence was mentioned as the land alienation of the tribal at the hand of Bengali Muslims and caste hindu Assamese, as observed in the Gohpur incidence. But then the question arises why, the riot was timed at the time of election boycott by the AASU in 1983. (Kimura 2008) .However in her fieldwork Kamura(2008) found that both Tiwa and Muslim people stated that election and AASU movement was the reason of the incident. More specifically, the reason for attack varied among the villagers , from election to AASU led movement to harassment by the Muslim population to the news of a possible attack by them were cited as the main reason Whereas the academic work around the Nellie violence stated more of structural cause as a reason of the attack- namely land alienation by the tribal population.

The after myth of the violence raised question in the Assamese ethnic coalition , that was being projected by the pro-movement AASU leaders. In the Gohpur violence , the Bodo fought with the hindu Assamese. The difference became visible when, after the violence .some of the plane tribe emphasized their distinctiveness from the Assamese hindus. The most prominent among them is the demand by the Bodo tribe who claimed their separate identity from the Assamese identity. This distinctiveness was put forth by asking for separate autonomous districts, by demanding recognition of Bodo as an official language, by adopting Roman script for reading and writing Bodo instead of Assamese script. The second crack in this coalition came after the electoral violence where many Muslims were killed and a demand was raised by Assamese Muslim for a clear definition of "foreigner". (Baruah, 1986)

Never the less the election brought new Congress government headed by Hiteswar Saikia. The new government's strategy of dealing with the movement was political strategy along with force. The newly elected government played its part in magnifying this crack like encouraging the Bodo Sahitya Sabha which was pitted against the Assam Sahitya Sabha. The Assam Sahitya Sabha had its active involvement in the Assam movement. Along with that coercion was also a major part of the strategy. So, many of the journalist who has a pro-movement stand were arrested and tortured. All these efforts however couldn't deter the popular support that the movement enjoyed. The movement leaders didn't recognized the Saikia government and frequent bandhs and boycott measures were opted to decertify the government. (Baruah, 1986)

This non-recognition was considered an effective measure, when the central government decided to resume the negotiation in 1984 with out the state government. Thus, an accord was signed between the Prime Minister late Rajiv Gandhi and the movement leaders on 15 August 1985 , known as Assam Accord. According to the Accord , those who entered into the territory of Assam, illegally between January 1966 and March 1971 would be deprived of voting rights and those who came after 1970 would be deported. Following this, an amendment to Indian citizenship law was made by the parliament that allowed the non-citizens who entered between the above mentioned dates who enjoy all rights of the citizen except the right of adult franchise for a period of ten years. The 33 months old state Assembly was dissolved and fresh election was conducted on December 1985 based on revised electoral role. (Baruah, 1986)

After an all-party agreement, the parliament passed the Illegal Migration (Determination) Act or IM (DT) Act. Rising on the success of the Assam movement, the leaders of the movement launched a political party named Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), which won the election in the subsequent year. (Srikant, 2000)

According to some critic, the identification, deletion from the electoral roll and deportation of all foreigners, who entered India after 1951 (later on it was modified to 1961) is not practically possible. (Protectors & Weekly, 1988)

The birth of ULFA paved the way for other ethnic group to form their own militant outfit. The initial objective of these outfits was to safe guard the interest of their respective communities. However in due course of time the organization drifted from its initial objective and resorted to extortion and kidnapping of businessman, and other influential people for money.

3.1 (d) Bodo movement

The success of Assam movement set an example for the subsequent movements that followed. These movements followed the pattern of Assam movement and Bodo movement was the first one to follow that path.

The demand for separate homeland was first raised by Bodos under the British rule. Their organized attempt started as early as 1930. During the 1960's and 70's when the northeastern states were re organized following the demands for separate statehood from different sections, the Bodos, along with other tribes of Assam formed political party in the year 1967 called Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) . With the launch of political wing, they claimed their demand of separate state named "Udayachal". All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) was also launched in the same. Initially, ABSU worked with PTCA for upholding the demand for separate state for the plain tribes of Assam. (George, 2010)

The success of Assam movement in the 1980's raised the hopes among the Bodos about their demand for a separate state. However, they soon realized that the attitude of the then government was not much different from the earlier governments. The bone of contention for the Bodo leaders, were mainly two clause of Assam accord signed by the

government and the leaders of Assam movement. The clause 6 of Assam accord promises to protect the cultural identity of the “Assamese people”. But as the Bodo claimed a separate identity for them from the Assamese identity, the provisioning of this clause threaten the imposition of Assamese culture on the Bodos. It gave an impression that this clause would completely assimilate rather integrate the tribal population of Assam. The Clause 10 that promised eviction from the protected forest land also troubled the Bodo leadership .Although this clause was aimed at stopping illegal encroachment from protected forest land, but the history of the Bodo people showed that this, one time jhum cultivators has settled near the forest area, which were later defined as protected areas.(Baruah 1999)

Coupled with all these the progress made by the tribal population of neighbouring northeastern state also inflicted a sense of relative deprivation among the Bodo population. They felt that they have been ignored by the central as well as state government despite being the large tribe in the state. Since India’s parliamentary system based on majoritarian principles, makes it impossible for the Tribal representative to stake claim in the government. The faulty policies of the government along with signing of peace accord with the various insurgent groups in the north eastern state raised the hope of the Bodo’s for a separate Bodoland. (George, 2010)

The central theme of this rebellion is not only political in nature but also cultural in character. The claim of a separate homeland stands on a separate cultural identity of Bodo, different from the ethnic Assamese identity. This difference rests on different religious practices. The revival of Bathou god and worshipping of Xizu plant was an attempt to revitalize the old religious practices. The second criteria to claim difference was language. The Bodo language didn’t had its own scrip and was using Assamese scrip but their claim was differentiation from the Assamese identity, so it was against their pride to use Assamese script .In the year 1974-75 the Bodo Xahitya Xobha launched its demand to adopt Roman scrip for Bodo language. The agitation for the demand became violent and finally with the intervention of central government Devnageri scrip was adopted for the language. But the

demand was Roman scrip for the Bodo language kept coming up now and then. So, in the year 1998 the Assam government accepted the demand and recognized Roman scrip as the script for the Bodo language. Food and dress are other criteria for asserting their difference. Making their traditional dress namely, dokhna (for female) and *Arunai* more visible, by wearing them instead of traditional Assamese attire was one way of stating that difference. (Baruah 1999)

With the growing discontent from the leadership of the PTCA, who were unable to put forth their demand and inclination of the ABSU members towards militancy, they launched an armed struggle for full-fledged statehood of Bodoland separate from Assam. Two Bodo inhabited district namely, Kokrajhar and Darrang became the site of armed struggle. They initially had 92 pointers list which later on focused on 3 political demands (i) Formation of separate state on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. (ii) Formation of autonomous districts councils in the tribal dominated areas of south bank of Brahmaputra. (iii) To include the Bodo Kachari of Karbi Anglong in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. (George, 2010)

The ABSU led mass movement started on 2nd March 1987 with the slogan 'divide Assam 50-50'. The movement passed through many phases that include interrupting the vital connectivity of the state with the rest of the country. Since most of these connecting road and railway tracts passes through Bodo dominated areas, it was easier for them to interrupt. These interruption was not only restricted to frequent bandhs rather sometimes it became violent, with bomb explosion destroying government properties worth millions. The ABSU led movement was designed in the AASU led mass movement to gather public attention. But interestingly, the pioneer of this tactics- the then ABSU leaders, are now on the other side of the table as the ministers in the AGP government. They must have never thought that, the 'Assameseness' that they have fought for, itself is a contested category. (George, 2010)

The AGP government was accused of being insensitive towards the impact of their policies towards the “tribal” population. They fail to acknowledge and include the history and the cultural symbols of the indigenous people of the land.

The Bodoland issue was resolved with much effort by the Home Affairs ministry, the Prime Minister’s office and the local Bodo Congress (I) legislator Jaman Singh Brahma. This ultimately resulted into signing of Bodo Accord at Guwahati on February 20 1993. With the signing of the Accord the six long years Bodoland agitation came to an end.(George, 2010)

The signing of Bodo accord created Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) which was although not in accordance with the demand of separate Bodoland state. The northern boundary of BAC was between the Sankosh River and Mazbat Pasnoi River, which covers the eastern and western boundary of North bank of Brahmaputra River. The southern boundary was left unspecified because to maintain the territorial integrity some of the villages with less than 50% of the Bodo villages were included, that was again not accepted by the other communities residing in the BAC areas. The accord further mentioned that, all rights of the non-tribals residing in the BAC areas are to be protected and their language, culture, and land to be kept intact. (George, 2010)

Because of this adhoc approach of the state government to settle the boundary dispute the Bodo accords of 1993 failed. The All Bodo Students Union and Bodo People’s Action committee, both of which were party in signing accord the Bodo Accord in 1993 univocally rejected the demarcated boundary of BAC. Three take away points for the Bodo leadership from the fail Bodo Accord (i) They must prove their numerical majority in the BTC area, as in some areas they were not in majority and inclusion of those areas raised opposition from non Bodo communities in those areas. (ii) Since Assam movement was the reference point of the Bodo movement . ULFA- an extremist group fighting for the sovereignty of Assam also became the reference point of the various armed group fighting for Bodoland , as non-

violence was seen in the earlier movement to attract attention of political leaders both in New Delhi and Dispur. (iii) The target of the violence to be aimed at other ethnic groups residing in the proposed areas like the Rabha, the Koch –Rajbonshi, the Nepalis, and the Bengalis.(Mahanta, 2013)

With the rejection of the accord, violence erupted in the parts of lower Assam namely, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon District. In July 1994 horrific massacre took place in Barpeta district killing Muslim peasants of East Bengal origin. (Hussain, 1995) Around that same time ABSU re launched its campaign for separate Bodoland state. With the formation of two armed outfits - Bodo liberation Tiger (BLT) and National Democratic front of Bodoland, the demand took a violent turn. Ethnic cleansing became a common form of killing –women and children were killed and thousands were left homeless. (Nath, 2003)

Due to its organizational strength BLT became the main force behind the Bodoland movement. On July 1999, it declared a ceasefire in response to a call for talk from the central government. On February 10, 2003, BLT signed a tripartite new Bodoland Accord with the state and the central government. The old Accords were modified under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India. Four new districts were carved out from the existing ones. (Nath, 2003)

But this new Accords is also surrounded with new sets of controversies like during the signing of the Accord the earlier signatory of 1993 Accord- the ABSU was missing and the only representative from the Bodos was BLT Chairperson Hagrama Basumatary. The relation between ABSU and BLT were not cordial at all. Secondly, according to the non-Bodo leaders, all educational and administrative institutions are set in the Bodo dominated areas of BTAD, providing maximum opportunities to Bodo's. To counter such institutional discrimination the non Bodo communities have come together to form their own organization like the Non-Bodo Protection Forum(ABSS).The organization claims to have support of

various other organization with in the state. The Koch- Rajbanshis launched their separate claims for Kamtapur state. The proposed Kamtapur state contradicts the BTAD. Further, the tea tribe communities of Assam are claiming for ST status. Till now they have been assigned with OBC status in the central list. A considerable amount of them are settled in the BTAD and granting them ST status would means sharing the political space with them. Thus, the Bodos remain one of the staunch opponent of their claim.(Mahanta, 2013)

3.1 (e)Bodo Adivasi Conflict

The disparity regarding the geographical boundary of BAC and the subsequent denial of the state government and the Guwahati High court to include 515 more villages demanded by the leaders of the movement led to the ethnic cleansing of the people residing in the BAC

The Guwahati high court directed the state government to include villages having more than 50 percent of the Bodo population along with that the concern raised by the non Bodo population regarding their condition in those villages was also taken in to consideration. (Conference, 2009)

The ethnic cleaning was considered as a means to attend the majority status in those areas. The clash between Bodo's and Bengali Muslim has already been discussed .Following that, the clash between the Bodo and the Bengali Hindu's in 1995-96, around same time Adivasi villages in the western Assam BAC were also attacked .The Adivasi's also retaliated and the conflict intensified between the two ethnic communities. Thousands of people fled their home in the year 1998.(Conference, 2009)

After few months gap the violence again started with the killing of an Adivasi leader and his four year son. The revenge which followed was even bloodier with burning down of

homes and villages of the Bodo people by the Adivasis .The Bodos also attacked the Adivasi camps and killed some Adivasi's as well.(Conference, 2009)

Again in mid-1990's the conflict between the two ethnic groups erupted with the abduction and killing of fourteen Adivasis from Dhubri district in western Assam. In the subsequent years sporadic incidents of clashes were reported between the Bodos and the Adivasis in the proposed BAC.(Conference, 2009)

3.1 (f)Kamatapur Movement

The next movement is not confined to the geographical territory of Assam. The ancient Kamatapur kingdom was spread across the modern day Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh and just like the kingdom of Kamatapur, the historical distinctiveness of Kamatapur also disappeared to become part of Assamese, Bengali and Bangladesh history.(Das, 2011)

Kamatapur movement was based on the perceived historic identity of the Koch-Rajbonshi people of erstwhile Kamatapur kingdom. In a span of over 100 years the identity of the people of erstwhile Kamtapur went under enormous change. The need for reclaiming their own identity and history in case of Kamatapur movement goes beyond their sense of relative deprivation. Here, the “history” is created and recreated constantly in the context of the contemporary socio-economic situations.(Nandi, 2014)

The Kochs are widely scattered in Assam, north Bengal, parts of Bihar, Odisha, and Meghalaya, along with that they are also spread across the Nepal, Bangladesh and some parts of Bhutan. Al though the term ‘Koch’ and ‘Rajbonshi’ is now days used interchangeable but through the process of creating and recreating history these two terms were used to represent separate ethnic groups. (Saikia & Senapoti, 2019)

The Koch kingdom was known as “Pragjyotisha” kingdom in the hindu epic “Mahabharat”. The word literally means pre –astrology. Thus the existence of the kingdom is found in the ancient scriptures also. The region was first referred as Kamarupa in writings during Gupta age. In the Mughal documents the region is described as Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa, Kamtabehar and CoochBehar as well.(Gohain 2010 cited in nandi,2014)

Pragjyotisha was a frontier area where the boundaries of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Assam, West Bengal and Bihar meet. The area was considered inaccessible for the Sanskritized people. Some scholars describe it as a melting point of Brahminical and non-Brahminical culture and a meeting point of Mongoloid, Austric and Dravidian origin people. The area is resided by people of Koch, Mech, Tharu and other ethnic groups. The Kamatapur region was ruled by Palas ,Khen, Turks and Mughals for a short period of time.(Chatterji1974 cited in nandi,2014)

The end of Pala dynasty marked the end of Kamrupa kingdom and with the beginning of Khen dynasty or ‘Kamateswara’ a new ‘Kamata’ kingdom started. The capital of the erstwhile Kamatapur kingdom was at Gossanimari, near Dinhat subdivision of CoochBehar district which is now in West Bengal. They ruled the area between rivers Teesta till the west bank of Brahmaputra. It is stated that the Kamatapur Kindgom was ruled by many famous kings like Niladhvaj, Chakradhwaj and Nilambhar. After the defeat of King Nilambhar by the Sultan Hussain Shah of Bengal in the year 1498 the local landlord or Bhuyan Chiefs rose to power and among them the most powerful was Hariya Mandal, who was elected as the head or the mandal of the twelve leading families of the Koch. After his demise his son Bishu or Bishwa Singha took over the rein and establish the rule of Koch Dynasty . Although the Koch dynasty establish their rule but they chose not to rename their kingdom and continued with the old name of Kamatapur. The Koch kingdom reached its pinnacle under the rule of king Naranarayan . Following his death the Koch kingdom was divided into two parts namely- Koch Hajo(in Assam) and Koch Behar (in west Bengal).(Choudhury, 2015)

The Koch Hajo became firstly became part of Mughal empire and then Ahom kingdom where as Koch Behar (later became Cooch Behar) continued to be ruled by various Koch king till its merger with the Indian Union and finally became a district of West Bengal in the year 1950.

According to some scholars with the formation of Koch kingdom, the royal family and the common masses went under sankritization process as the “Koch” was looked down upon by the caste Hindus and King Vishwa Simha took the name “Rajbonshi” and denounced the term “Koch” .They declared themselves as “Bratya Kshatriya” or the fallen Kshatriya , however later on they claimed their status as pure Kshatriya and as a result of the Kshatriyaization they started donning the sacred thread .(Choudhury, 2015)

The Rajbanshi Kshatriyaization movement was not merely restricted to adoption of new customs and tradition leaving behind their old tradition, rather recreating their own history. Their claim to categorize them as Kshatriya and not as tribe (Koch) was first made during the census 1981. The census report of 1982 categorized Koch and Rajbanshis same “Tribe”. The Rajbanshi people vehemently protested against this categorization and demanded to be enlisted as Kshatriya. The British attempt to club Rajbanshi and Koch is a result of many ethnographic studies conducted during that time which claimed that Rajbanshi’s are more Hinduized Koches. The Kshatriyaization movement brought them under the Hindu-Brahminical fold. However Rajbanshi’s asserted a contrasting view claimed to be downtrodden or fallen Kshatriya as opposed to Koch who still practices profane rituals. Finally, in the 1911 census they were categorized as separate Rajbanshi status as compared to the Koch(tribal) category.(Nandi, 2014)

However the creation and re-creation of history never stopped and by 1990’s the Rajbanshi’s identity took a complete different turns when they claimed to be Koch-Rajbanshi .Their claim to this new identity is distinctively different from their earlier claim where they

specifically claimed a separate identity from the Koch(tribal) .The Rajbanshi are claimed that they and the Kochs are same culturally and trace a similar origin and they are not Kshatriya by birth but by deed. Their claim to their new identity was accompanied by their demand for Scheduled Tribe status. This creation of new identity was also aimed for greater economic and political rights.(Nandi, 2014)

During 1990's Koch-Rajbanshi movement was mainly focused on claiming their indigenous identity to the region. They further claim that post-independence, the modern state formation has result into gradual disappearance of their geographical area, their history, their language and their culture. Post-independence the geographical boundary of Kamatapur state divided into Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh. Their language, culture and history were absorbed by the history, culture and language of Bengal and Assam. Thus, the greater Cooch Behar movement started to bring back their lost culture and heritage and for greater political autonomy. A further dwelling into history brings out how the princely state of Cooch Behar became part of Indian Union and subsequently a district in West Bengal.(Saikia & Senapati, 2019)

The Coochbehar merger act of 1950 is seen as a main cause of their demand for separate Kamatapur state. On the eve of Independence an agreement was made that the princely state of CoochBehar would be declared a state .However, it was included as a union territory and after being a centrally administered territory for three months. It was incorporated as a district in West Bengal on condition that government would take necessary action to improve the economic condition of the people of CoochBehar.(Das,2013 cited in Choudhury2017)

Secondly, the denials of the long pending demand of Scheduled tribe status among the Koch Rajbanshi's. There are various communities in Assam like the tea-tribe

communities, the Ahoms, the Chutiya, the morans and the Matak. The demand for ST status is associated with the provisioning of the 6th schedule under the constitution of India.

Thirdly, with the signing of Bodo accord between the government of India, government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tiger Force many Koch-Rajbanshi dominated areas came under BTC. This transfer of areas was done without consulting other communities residing in those areas has further threatened their fear of losing their identity. (Choudhury, 2015)

All these factors led to the emergence of Kamatapur movement in the 19190's. Organizations like All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AAKRSU), Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) represents the more militant version of the movement whereas organizations like Koch Rajbanshi Sahitya Sabha, All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Sanmilani, and Greater Cooch behar People's Association stands for more non militant version of the movement.(Saikia & Senapoti, 2019)

The specific demand of the movement as submitted by these organizations under the banner Separate State Demand Committee to the government of India and government of Assam mentions- Firstly, formation of a separate Kamatapur State comprising six districts of West Bengal namely Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur and Malda and ten districts of Assam namely – Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Marigaon, Darrang, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur . Secondly, to include Kamatapuri or Koch Rajbongshi language under the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution and finally, recognition of the Koch Rajbanshi Community of Assam as Schedule Tribe (P)-a long pending demand. Fourthly, To propagate and promote the Kamatapuri or Koch-Rajbanshi Language and culture through state controlled radio as well as All India Radio and Television. Fifthly, establishment of 'Maharaja Naranarayan Cultural Complex and Research Centre in the undivided Goalpara District in order to

preserve, develop and spread their rich cultural and heritage. Sixthly, reservation of seats for the Koch-Rajbongshis in educational and technical institutions for their higher education and finally, Reorganization of Vishwa Mahavir Chilarai's birthday on Maghi Purnima as State holiday to Government of West Bengal and Assam and also to name a portion of national highway (Siliguri to Cooch Behar) in memory of this Hero of Kamatapur (Saikia & Senapoti, 2019)

To put forth their demand they resorted to many violent and non-violent ways like bandhs, dharnas. Kamatapur movement is not just movement of sub-nationalism or for economic package rather it was also to bring back the lost history of the Kingdom which was spread beyond the geographical boundary of India and whose history has been appropriated by the dominant narrative and a substantial part of creating this sub nationalism was the continuous creation and re-creation of their own glorious past.(Das, 2011)

Thus, Identity formation and the subsequent changes in the ethnic relations with their neighbors didn't result from faulty administrative policies alone creating two groups of dominant and subordinate as pointed out by (Barbora, 2002) official and administrative policies are not the only factors that generated the ethnic conflict rather mutual communal distrust and contested histories are also subjective factors that can be counted for the same. These conflicts sometimes resulted in political recognition of their demands and subsequent promise for legal protection of their culture and identity.

3.1(g) Karbi- Dimasa ethnic conflict

The Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar hill area of the province of Assam was outside the ambit of direct administration and taxation right from the colonial area. The reason being that the areas mentioned were inhabited by people classified as Schedule Tribe having distinct culture and institution. This administrative arrangement was done to protect their uniqueness from any outside intervention. Post-independence these areas were

demarcated and autonomy was given to these tribes within the territorial boundary of the Assam.

Dimasa's are the most dominant ethnic group of North Cachar Hill district which was carved out of United Mikir and north Cachar Hill. However the regions also had sizeable presence of Karbi , Kuki, Naga ,Jayantia, Hmar. Among the other non-tribal groups in the regions are Assamese, nepali ,Bihari and Bengali speaking populations. The claim on the proposed Dimarani (the proposed Dimasa home land) is based on the rule of ancient Cachari Dimasa kingdom in the region. (Barbora, 2002)

Dimasa belong to the Tibeto –Burman linguistic family. In the Ahom Burangi's they are mentioned as Cacharis, which continued till 1961. In 13th century they were spread over the area of south Bank of Brahmaputra River along with the banks of river Dhansiri. The Cacharis have two branches one settled around present day Sadia and other established their rule in the southern part with Diampur as their capital. The Cachari's involved in sporadic conflicts with the Ahoms, for which they had to shift their capital to Maibong and later on to Kahpur (Cachar) . Because of constant conflict with the neighbouring kingdom of Ahoms and Jaintias the boundaries of the Cachari kingdom was redrawn many times . (Barbora, 2002)

The Dimasa kingdom was annexed by the Britishers upon the death of its last king Govindra Chandra Barman; however his commander-in chief Senapati Tularam was allowed to retain the rule of North Cachar Hill sub-division. Upon his death, the Britishers annexed that portion and incorporated the entire North Cachar Hills into the Nagoan district in 1854. So, till 1961 the Dimasa were treated as a 'sub-tribe' of Cachari tribes However, in 1961 census they were classified as a separate tribe. (Barbora, 2002)

In contrast to the history of the Dimasas the Karbi's do not have a specific written history. Much of the history of Karbis are passed on as folklores. According to the folk lore the Karbi's resided in the banks of river Kolong and Kopili. During the rule of the Kachari kings some of the Karbi's enter into Jaintia hills. Some of them moved further north east to Rongkhang ranges and established their capital at place called Socheng. (Hazarika, 2015)

Some of the Karbi's entered into the Ahom kingdom and settled in and around Raha area. During the Burmese invasion some of them took refuge in the deep jungle at the foot hills. Thus the Karbi population was scattered in many place rather than being concentrated in one place. When one look into the present day Karbi Anglong area part of it came under British rule in 1838 while part of it, which was under the Dimasa chief was annexed in 1854. Karbi's are by far the most dominant group in the Karbi Anglong, the other tribal groups in the region are the Dimasa Kuki, Khasi, Tiwa, Bodo, Garo, Man-Tai along with a substantial number of nontribal groups like the Assamese speaking population, the Nepalis, the Biharis and Bengali. (Barbora, 2008)

Coming back to this history of Karbi- Dimasa, after the annexation of the Northeastern region it was of great dismay for the Britishers that the populations of the region are very different from the rest of India. This difference was not only in terms of looks but in terms of culture and social practices as well. While the dominant social system of the country was the caste system at that time, the hills were totally untouched by that. Even the language spoken in the hills of the Northeastern region were from different family –the Tibeto-Burman family. This also posed problem from administrative point of view. To counter this administrative problem the British government came up with the Government of India Act of 1915 which later on became the basis of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which is applicable in the tribal areas of Assam. The Government of India Act of 1915 allows the Governor –General –in Council to declare any territory as backward track. This will restrict the implementation of the Act of the Indian Legislature to the said area. These Backward tracks were divided into two categories- excluded areas and partially excluded

areas. The extremely backward areas were put under excluded category-to be administered by the Governor directly. The relatively better off areas were put under The Partially Excluded Categories, to be administered by provincial legislature however the Governor can also act on his discretion whenever it is thought necessary. The area of Karbi Anglong was put under Partially Excluded Area while the area of North Cachar hill track was put under Excluded Area. (Bathari, 2015)

Accommodating these diversely governed people posed a great deal of problem for the leaders post-independence. To deal with these problem a separate committee headed by the then premier of Assam Mr. Gopinath Bordoloi, was formed to report on the Northeastern Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded area. The committee was formed with the aim to suggest ways of integration and administration of these people and area in the newly formed states post- independence.

In the year 1947 a section of Dimasa leaders joined hands with other tribal leaders, who had similar demand of separate tribal land. The Tribal Council submitted their demands for fixing of North Cachar hills to the Bordoloi Committee along with other demands. The demand for fixing of the boundary of North Cachar hills was aimed at bringing all the Dimasas living in the adjacent area under one administrative unit. Further, they also demanded that only the bonafide residents of the hills would be allowed to participate in the politics of the Hills. Along with that the law passed by the Indian parliament and the state legislative Assembly would be applicable in the hills after the approval of the MLA of the Hills. The protection and preservation of the cultural lives of the Dimasa people was also listed in their demand. (Barbora, 2002)

After details discussion with various tribal group leaders and visiting the excluded and partially excluded places the committee submitted the report which captured the various concerns of the tribal populations. The report recognized the differences within the tribes and

with the rest of India and called for administration of the areas based on consideration of distinct customs, different social organization and religious beliefs. The report further reiterated the fear of the tribal people of exploitation by outsiders if they are allowed to settle there. The report rejected any possibility of forceful assimilation of the hill people. Further, it was agreed upon that the areas under sixth schedule would be under the state legislature rather than under the rule of the Governor as was practiced during pre-independence. (Bathari, 2015)

Based on the recommendation of Bordoloi committee the hill areas were divided into two autonomus districts - the karbi dominated Mikir hills became the Krabi Anglong Autonomous district in the year 1951 and the Dimasa dominated North Cachar Hill district in 1970. The Autonomous Council was empowered to take decision on land resources, *jhum* cultivation apart from traditional and customary traditions.(Bathari, 2015)

However, in due course of time more autonomy was given to these two Autonomous councils. The reason behind this was purely political as the Assam assembly passed Assamese Language Act in the year 1960 making Assamese as the medium of instruction for all official purpose in the province of Assam. This move was criticized by all hill people and was seen as a step to impose Assamese on them. This step brought all the hill people under the forum of All Party Hill Leader Conference to register their political protest. (Bathari, 2015)

Which followed was the reorganization of the state of Assam, with various hill tribes coming out of Assam to form Autonomous state at various point of time. The district of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill district had the option of joining the newly proposed state of Meghalaya. However, Assam, in fear of losing out further agreed upon granting more autonomy to these two Autonomous councils on the other hand the Karbi and Dimasa leadership had to decide from wider autonomy and the fear of dominance from the more

advanced Khasi, Jaintias and Garo tribes. Ultimately, the Karbi and Dimasa leadership decided to stay with Assam but with wider autonomy. However, the greater autonomy that was promised didn't meet the expectation of the people and the demand for autonomy soon started gaining momentum. (Bathari, 2015)

Soon, Autonomous State Demand Committee was formed in 1986 to put forth the autonomous movement of the hill people. The leadership of this new party is educated youths and the characteristic of the movement under the newly formed Autonomous State Demand Committee was completely different and they were able to gather mass support. After a decade long movement MoU was signed between the Autonomous State Demand Committee and Assam government and 30 more departments were transferred to the autonomous council. Even this was not able to subdue the demand of an autonomous state among the hill people. (Bathari, 2015)

The next wave of movement for autonomy saw, raise of armed rebellions to fulfill the aspiration of a separate state. Further, cracks started to appear in the joint movement as youth from both the ethnic groups wanting separate land for them. In the 90's several armed groups started raising demand for separate Karbi homeland. The Karbi National Volunteers and the Karbi People's Front came together to form United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) while the exclusive Dimasa homeland demand was also raised by another armed group named Dima Halim Daogah (DHD). Both the hill districts have witness many ethnic clashes among themselves as well as between the tribal and non-tribal groups residing in the hill districts. (Bathari, 2015)

The demand for the proposed Dimarani includes the Dimasa dominated North Cachar hills and the Karbi dominated Mikir hills. The area of the proposed Dimarani includes the present day Cachar, North Cachar hills, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon and Nagoan from the state of Assam and Dimapur from Nagaland. (Kolås, 2017)

The influx of nontribal population specially the east Pakistani refugee post 1947, followed by Biharis and Nepalīs changed the demographic profile of the region. However, migration was not restricted to only the non tribal population alone the Kuki population escaping the violence of Naga-Kuki and Kuki-Paite conflict from Nagaland and Manipur also have substantial presence in the region. This led to the alienation of land from the Karbi-dimasas to the outsiders , the sugarcane producing land was occupied by the Biharis and the ginger producing land went to the Kukis.(Bathari, 2015)

These development did alter the inter community relation and sharpen the identity politics among them but the Karbi- Dimasa autonomy movement was always inclusive as long as it was peaceful. With the raise of armed rebel group this inclusivity gave way to exclusive homeland, bringing a division not only among the various tribal and non-tribal groups residing in the region , but also between the Karbis and Dimasas .This created two categories of “us” and “them” between the Karbi and Dimasa, who till now were together in their demand for autonomy. (Bathari, 2015)

As a result of this crack in the coalition, what followed was series of ethnic cleansing in both the autonomous councils. Usually the attack is by the armed militia of one ethnic group on another ethnic group and in retaliation the armed rebels of that group would attack the other group to avenge the death and destruction. However, the bloodiest of them started in September 2005 and continued months after that .The clash between the Karbi and Dimasa armed group left thousands displaced as villages were raid and people were killed by armed group .(Barbora, 2008)

So, that brings us to the question why despite the implementation of Sixth Schedule why there is a persistent growth of autonomy within the union and subsequent tendency to exterminate other communities living within the proposed geographical area. The Sixth Schedule is used by the government as a tool against those ethnic groups demanding

autonomy. While it helps in conflict resolving between the group demanding autonomy and the Government of India but its implementation creates new conflict among the groups residing within the area. The autonomy awarded under Sixth Schedule doesn't address the control of resources and finances and places the autonomous council only at the managerial position as it has to seek permission from the governor or the state government for every decision that it makes. As a result the autonomy which came out is not on accordance with their expectation. (Barbora, 2008)

The Sixth Schedule on paper tries to promote the language, culture and institution of these traditional societies however in reality it tries to assimilate these communities to the larger communities. For example banning *jhum* cultivation , traditionally land are community owned rather individual property. However, the government considered jhum cultivation as threatening to the environment without considering the cultural and economic aspect of the practice. By banning jhum cultivation the government encouraged individual ownership of land in the name of developmental policies. This in turn allowed few to rip the benefit of these so called developmental policies and land resources remain concentration in the hand of those few, leaving large people in the state of impoverishment .(Barbora, 2008)

The government's attempt to assimilate these hill communities to the larger communities and the subsequent resistance by them is seen as a law and order problem by the government. Thus, the faulty Six Schedule is inadequate to suppress their demand for autonomy within the union of India. In the mean while the armed militia raised their demand for autonomy turning the once peaceful movement into violent one. In return the entire NC hills and Karbi Anglong region has been turned into highly militarized region. But even after all these questions of autonomy still remains unanswered by the central as well as state government. (Bathari, 2015)

Thus, the history of Assam is very much ripped with conflict. As the composition of Assamese society is an amalgamation of various ethnic groups similarly conflict between them, primarily for their identity is also a reality of Assamese society. However, the composition of Assamese society is not restricted to only indigenous tribal population rather it comprises of people who came to Assam from various part of the country and became part of this larger Assamese society.

The next section would deal with this aspect of larger Assamese society and how migration at various point of time in history is a unique reality of this society.

3.2History of migration in Assam

Apart from Bengali Muslims- who's history has been discussed at large in the later part of the chapter, Assam has always received immigrants. The coming of these immigrants at various points of time in the history has contributed in the changing demography of Assam. The response of indigenous people of Assam is not same for all groups of immigrants, it varied from indifference to stiff resistance. However, within the indigenous group there is considerable difference about the response as well. This response depends upon a number of factors like, demographic factors, economic factors, possibility of influencing the political scenario of the state and most importantly, ability to sync in the dominant Assamese culture.(Sharma, 2012)

Defining “indigenous” and “immigrant” in the context of Assam is quite a debated topic .Never the less the chapter would focus on arrival of immigrants right from the mediaeval age and formation of the Assamese society .The early recorded history of migration in Assam is by the upper caste Hindu's from Northern and Eastern India. These people were mainly priest, agriculturist and expert in monetary transaction. The arrival of these people was crucial for the history of Assam as they not only helped in sophistication of the administration but also initiated the process of de tribelisation and Hinduisation by

entering into marital ties with the local Mongoloid and Austro-mongoloid people. Thus, forming the broader Assamese identity. (Sharma, 2012)

Till the Britishers came to Assam it was still largely unpopulated covered in dense forest. With the arrival of the possibility of tea plantation, discovery of oil and coal field in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the economic boom hit the Assam. This economic transformation also brought immigrants to this land, which changed the demography of Assam. The refusal of the Assamese peasantry to work in the tea gardens brought the first batch of immigrants in Assam. They were recruited from the tribal group of the Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, and the Chota Nagpur region constituted mainly of Santhal, Khasis, Nagesias, Mundas, Gonds, Oraong, Khonds .(Baruah 1999) .Today, they are considered as one group and denoted as Chah janajati , Adivasi etc.(Sharma, 2012)

These people were initially brought to the tea gardens with a contract of five years after which they could return to their original place. However with difficult transportation system, most of the recruits settled in Assam after the end of their contracts.(Sharma, 2012) There are many villages inhabited by tea labour communities in and around the tea garden areas of upper Assam districts. These villages also act as a buffer for supply of labour during the pick seasons. However, most of the people of these communities hardly speaks their language and in turn communicate in a dialect called as *Sadani* and often registered as Assamese in the census. Their children are sent to Assamese medium school, as there is no school which teaches *Sadani*. However, the upper caste Assamese people are not very welcoming towards them and assigned a low status to them. (Baruah 1999)

Hindu Bengali's were brought to Assam by the colonial administration. After establishing their colonial rule, the Britishers wanted people who are trained in English medium school and could help them run the administration .As Bengal was colonized first, people were exposed to English medium education there and a newly emerging english

medium educated middle class came up. These people were then brought to Assam .For 1837 to 1873 Bengali was the official language of Assam. Schools were imparting education in Bengali, which soon became a bone of contention among the native population. Resentment towards Bengali dominance was the first step towards the emergence of Assamese sub nationalism and this could be registered as the first Assamese immigrant conflict in Assam. The colonial government had to heed the demand of the people of Assam after a number of petitions were filed against the appointment of Bengalis as Mouzadar neglecting the local people . So, in 1903 the colonial government had to come up with a policy where the appointment to the public service was restricted to native and residents of Assam .A native was defined as a person who had his/her permanent residence in Assam and would stay in Assam after retirement irrespective of ethnic origin.

Considering the fact that that geographical boundary of Assam has changed under British rule it will be erroneous to call all Bengali Hindu's as immigrants in Assam. From 1905 to 1912 Assam and Eastern Bengal were merged to form a single province with Dacca its capita. Portion of Sylhet became part of Assam and Bengalis of that region cannot be called as settlers. (Baruah1999)

Another immigrant community which has a major contribution towards shaping the market economy of Assam is the 'Marwaris'. Marwari are usually referred to those people belongs to Marwari region of Rajasthan. However, in Assam this is used to refer to shindhi community as well since both the communities are associated with trade and commerce in Assam. They came along with the Britishers in Assam and in the absence of any competition from the local population they monopolized the market. They traded in jute, paddy, pulse, mustard and opium. The Marwari traders gave credits to the villagers for the anticipated crops and would sell them back the crop, when the price would go up. In short, the Marwari traders played the key role in shifting Assam towards market economy.

Till 1960 there was no resentment against them, but with the Assam movement, rise of ULFA, and Bodo movement there was a series of extortion and anti-Marwari violence against them.

During Assam movement, there were talks of immigrants of foreign nations in Assam. Although it was mainly focused on people of Bangladesh origin but talks of people of Nepali origin staying in Assam also started doing round. But the case of people from Nepali origin is quite interesting, as the treaties between India and Nepal allow citizens of both the countries to own land and property along with the liberty to engage in economic activities. In fact, till 1980, the animal grazers from Nepali communities were given protected status among with the scheduled tribe of the tribal block. While the Nepali's living in Easter and northeaster part of India identifies them as one ethnic group. But many of them are from Newari community who are "tribal" group from Katmandu valley and claims a separate identity from the Bahun's in Nepal. The first wave of Nepali population was brought to the unpopulated Darjeeling and south Sikkim with the possibility of tea planation .They were brought to work in the newly established tea gardens of these areas. They were also brought to act as a counter to the pro-Tibet Buddhist policy of the Sikkim. The second wave of nepali immigrants were brought to northeaster part of India. According to the historians there were two main reason of their migration one was the celebrated Gorkha rifles under British army and many of them being the professional animal grazer and availability of grazing land in the region also lured them to come to the region with their cattle. (Baruah 1999)

3.3History of Muslims in Assam

In Assam there are four groups of Muslims –Assamese, Bengali, Muslims from north India and the neo assamese Muslims (some of the scholars have used the term immigrant Muslim) . With the invasion of Bakhtiyaruddin Khalji-a general of Sultan Iltutmish during 13th century, Assam came in contact with Muslims. They are referred as *goriya*, *khilonjia musulman*, *tholua Musalman* .According to Edward gait cited in hussain 1987, *Gauria* is an

indication of them coming from Gaur, which was a part of erstwhile Bengal. The Kamata ruler, Chakradhvaj (1455-1485) after his defeat in the battle against Sultan Barbak Shah, converted to Islam. Muslim general Masalanda Gazi ruled over western part of Assam. So, it is clear that from thirteenth century Muslim settlers started settling in area around Brahmaputra valley that were mainly part of the invading army. The trader groups followed specially areas bordering Bengal as that was the route of commerce and trade connecting Bengal and Assam. During the rule of Emperor Shah Jahan, Kamrup including present day Guwahati city became the undisputed possession of the Mughals. This caused a cultural exchange between the Ahoms and the Mughals. The group of Muslims in Western and Eastern Assam are speakers of Assamese. (Hussain, 1987)

Muslims from north India arrived in Assam during the colonial rule and in post-independence era as well, in search of livelihood option. They are mainly engaged in occupation like *dhobi*(washerman), barbers, tailors, *kasais*(butcher),carpenters etc. They have not linguistically assimilated with the greater Assamese community. (Hussain, 1987)

The Bengali speaking Muslim communities of Assam are spread across Barak valley, Gaolpara, Dhubri and Nowgaon district. They are referred as *mariyas* or Bhotia. The term is used for early settlers in Nowgong because they were working in metal ware production that required beating and hammering (*maar*). They are predominantly Bangla speaking community and migrated from Sylhet and Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.

The fourth group of Assamese Muslims known as Na-Axomia Musalman or the Neo-Assamese Muslims. They entered Assam with the plantation labour community in the late part of nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The colonial agricultural policy encouraged migration of people from the thickly populated Mymensingh and Rangpur district of Bangladesh to the thinly populated districts of Assam to increase cultivable land. These people were considered as excellent farmers. According to Hussain (1987) several factors

facilitated with migration, namely- (a) severe oppression by landlords and scarcity of land in East Bengal (b) colonial policy of increasing land revenue by bringing more land under agriculture , which was in abundance in Assam (c) Encouragement by Muslim league government led by Syed Mohammad Sadullah in the nineteen thirties.

3.4 Historical perspective of the Bodo – Bengali Muslim conflict

Historically, the Bodos have lived at the foot hills of Himalayan range closer to the forest area. They mainly practiced shifting cultivation between the hills and the valley and depended on the forest product for their survival. (Allen 1905) The Bodos like most of the tribes were constantly on move and didn't have any fixed geographical area for their settlements home. They practiced agriculture largely for subsistence rather than for the market. Slowly, as they opted for settled cultivation in the low lying areas of the river bed, paddy production was taken up. In complete contrast to the Bodo peasantries, the Muslims agriculturists' pattern and practice of agriculture was different. The Muslim farmers were always settled agriculturalist and practiced jute cultivation. High population density and an agricultural system which was connected with the state mechanism through taxes, forced them to produce surplus. Their practice of cash crop cultivation placed them highly dependent on market. Thus the fertile alluvial land of the riverine, which is favorable for jute cultivation became home for the Muslim cultivator. Till now although both the communities were using the riverine areas for their cultivation but were hardly interdependent on each other owing to different economic practice.(saikia, 2012)

However post 1930, as jute price started fluctuating they shifted to paddy cultivation along with this change in agriculture they had to shift their base towards upper part of the valley which was originally inhabited by the Bodos. As the government controlled the forest land the communal ownership of land among the Bodo's also slowly disappeared .Whereas the Muslim peasantries were settled cultivators even before they came to the valley. With the government reclaiming forest areas as protected and the Bodo's becoming settled agriculturalist and influx of Muslim peasantry for paddy cultivation the availability of land

for the Bodo's have reduced. Thus these two communities although practicing agriculture for two different purposes had to share same resources in terms of land.

Choudhary S (2007) states that high caste people, who settled in the fertile land along with river Brahmaputra, pushed the Bodo tribal people towards jungle thus the Bodos were prohibited them from cultivation. The Bodos in turn resorted to Jhoom cultivation as a means of livelihood. Thus the land alienation of the Bodos might have started much before Bengali Muslims from erstwhile East Pakistan have settled under state patronage by British government.

Land alienation was further aggravated when settlers from neighboring Muslim dominated east Bengal were settled by British government. Bengali Peasants were first brought by British government from 1905-1933. They were mainly settled on the "Westland". Maximum of these settlers were Muslims. As Roy states,

*"After due consideration of the voluminous report of A.L Moffatt Mills in 1853, the British Government took up for implantation a definite policy of waste- land settlement on the liberal terms with all those who were willing to undertake development and cultivation of wastelands and at the same time officially encourage immigration of landless peasants from the densely populated bordering districts of Bengal to the sparsely populated districts of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam."*Roy1995 (pp 85)

Their proficiency in Jute cultivation and their relatively easy way of migration facilitated their migration towards the western part of Brahmaputra valley. The migration was encouraged with an aim to create supply zone for the jute mills of Bengal. Along with that it also facilitated credits from the Assamese and Marwari traders. Thus, it was a profitable step for the Britishers to encourage migration to these fertile but thinly populated areas. (Saikia 2012)

During the World War II the British government directed the state government of Assam to grow more food, which is popularly known as 'grow more food campaign'. Thus mass immigration of landless Muslim peasants was arranged and they were mainly settled in the Bodo dominated districts of Assam.

One of the reasons why immigrants were settled in the Westland could be, because of their ability for cultivation. Immigrants from erstwhile East Bengal were accomplished cultivator, whereas the indigenous people at that point of time were still not into settled cultivation. Along with that, these people were also inclined towards monetary transaction unlike the indigenous people. The indigenous people were still using barter system although the Britishers have already introduced money economy.

As pointed out by Dasgupta (2000), one factors separated the Muslim settlers from the others who came to populate Assam: unlike the Hindu and the tribal from afar, the Muslims migrants were abjectly poor. Whole villages were led northward into the Brahmaputra Valley by tout- like rural Bengal Muslim strongmen called *diwanis*, who bought the land in their own names and settled the migrants as *adhiras*, agricultural labour and ryot. There is no question that this migration changed the demographic make- up of the Valley forever, even while providing the Assam economy with the labour to realize its productive potential.

The new farmers filled the valley's western frontier as well as the *char* lands- low – lying, flood- prone island in the midstream of the flow of the Brahmapurta. Energetic as migrants everywhere are, the Muslims arrivals led the way in rice- farming and multiple cropping; for the first time, jute became an important item of export. By the 1930s, the East Bengal peasants had turned their new homeland into the rice –bowl of the Indian Northeast. In their land – abundant province, the Asamiyas were initially willing to make the most of this new and incredibly cheap supply of labour. But as row of little thatched huts began to

appear along the riverbank, the local politicians began to demand regulation and containment of the influx in order to, as one government report of 1938 put it, “ save the forest and to reserve sufficient uncultivated land for the future generations of asamiys.” The response of the British was to enact the Line System, whereby native settlements were separated from the crowded migrant *bustee*. Small enclaves or ghettos of East Bengal Muslims emerged along the riverine district of Assam, where no native wished to set up home. These lands, connected to the mainland only by the country –boat, hosted the speakers of various dialects of East Bengal countryside. (Roy 1995)

Along with increase in influx, the post-independence Assam saw the Assamese speaking people assuming the role of “mainstream”. This made the other ethnic group insecure about their existence. This condition of insecurity has brought many ethnic groups in Assam in confrontation with the Assamese community. This condition of insecurity was further consolidated with the passing of Assam Official Language Act in 1961, which made Assamese the official language of Assam .This step of Assam government brought various tribes specially hill tribes in confrontation with the Assam government. In fact language has been one of the bases for the Bodos to claim separate identity from the Assamese. This condition of insecurity brought Bodos and Bengali Muslims together. Thus the fear of being marginalized gave raise to the movement for separate Bodo homeland. After violent agitation by the Bodo people, the Bodoland Accord was signed between government of India and ABSU (All Bodo Student’s Union) ,however the main bone of contention was raised while determining the number of villages in Bodoland area. While the ABSU / BPAC(Bodo People’s Action Committee) demanded inclusion of all the villages having 50% of the population, but the Assam government offered much less than that. Thus Bodo Territorial Autonomous District was formed where Bodos are not in majority in comparison to other ethnic group residing in the area. (Goswami 2008)

It is a fact that Assam has always being confronted with identity movements .The example of Tripura, where the local Tripuri tribe has been outnumbered by the Bengali

population from the neighboring country, added to the fear of losing the identity of the local tribe. Along with losing the identity and land alienation, the consequences of controlling the economy by outsiders were detrimental. As mentioned earlier, Bodos are not in majority in the Bodo territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) and as commented by Goswami (2008), “The only way to create majority then was to exterminate some of the settlers, and the first victims of a massive ethnic cleansing drive after the signing of Bodo accord of 1993 were Muslims of the East Bengal Origin.” It is in this context that violent confrontations have erupted from time to time among the local Bodo tribes and Bengali muslim population.(Fernandes 2005:3237-3240)

In October 1993 an estimate of 50 people were killed in Bongaigaon district in clash between Bodo tribe and Bengali Muslim and thousands of families were in the relief camps. Next year July again witnessed violence between these two communities in Barpeta districts. An estimate of 100 people died in the violence and many people were displaced. An estimate of 70 people were killed between August to October 2008 in clash between Bodo and Bengali Muslims in Udalguri and Darrang districts along with more than 10,000 people of both the communities being displaced. (Goswami 2008 pp76)

A substantial fraction of ethnic civil wars since 1945, many of which continue today, follow a common pattern and have a common set of escalatory dynamics. Conflict emerges between members of a minority ethnic group that considers itself to be the sons of the soil and recent migrants from other parts of the country .The migrants are typically members of the dominant ethnic group who have come in search of land or jobs in local bureaucracies, sometimes encouraged by economic incentives provided by the state. The violence often begins as communal conflict (riots, pogroms, gang attacks), but escalates to civil war levels if state forces intervene on the side of migrants. Because migration tends to proceed slowly and continuously and because the sons of the soil are usually a small, weak group compared to the center, these conflicts tend to be very long-running but of low intensity.(Fearon and Laitin 2009: pp209)

The present conflict in BTAD area of Assam is very much following the common pattern prevailing in the rest of the world. It involves an ethnic group that claims itself to be the son of the soil and the other group that has been labeled as immigrant came to this part of the country in search of land encouraged by the government. But there can't be any denying that government policies even today are not strict enough to curve this problem.

2012 situation in Assam

According to The Assam Tribune (21/7/2012 – 15/8/2012) report the present clash began when four youths were killed by unidentified men, on 20th July night in Kokrajhar. Armed Bodos people attacked on Bengali Muslims suspecting that they were behind this attack. Soon after both Bodo groups and Bengali Muslim groups attacked each other's villages setting houses on fire and destroying property and killing people. The violence spread to other district of Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) .Their after the death toll continued to rise with both the group attacking each other. Till now thousands of people have fled their home in the BTAD region and are staying in refugee camp provided by the government.

Bengali Muslims in Assam are known as miya, Bangladeshi, or sorsapori musalman but in this study they are referred as Bengali Muslim .Their origin is much debated therefore the present study would refrain from making any comment about their origin and therefore the study would not use such words as Bengali Muslims from erstwhile east Pakistan, erstwhile east Bengal, or Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh.

3.3 Status of women in Bodo society.

The Bodo society is patrilineal and patriarchal society where male authority is the supreme. However readings on the status of women in Bodo society reveal multiple interpretations of certain facts. These interpretations were mainly drawn from three things-

Bodo women as weaver, their participation in Bodo movement and politics vis-à-vis customary law and the marriage rituals. Weaving in Assam is considered as social as well as economic skill. Social skill because it is considered essential quality for a girl to get married and an expertise in the art of weaving makes Bodo girls the most eligible. (Deka.2013) According to Islam (2012) most of the family requirement is met by the family looms. Some of these products are also sold in the market. Thus, women do contribute in the family's earning. However, who controls the money earned by her is not clear. Thus, we can clearly say that weaving is also an indicator of the gender role fulfillment among the Bodo women.

Their political participation can be seen from two aspects – one, their participation in the voting process, which they are enjoying since 1952 and another is their participation in the Bodo movement. The participation of Bodo's in various movements are not new, they have participated in Moamoria rebellion, Sarania movement etc but Bodo movement is a watershed moment for them specially for Bodo women's political participation. The demand for separate homeland initially started by the All Assam Bodo Student's (AABSU) Leader and the formation of All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) is significant step towards women's participation in the political sphere. The ABWWF supported the movement and ABSU took the support of the ABWWF to motivate people in support for the movement, owing to its large reach among the people. The ABWWF made people aware about the demand of the ABSU and gathered support for it. However once the movement is over, the role ABWWF was sidelined. They were neither the part of formal peace process nor the part of the decision making body. (Hazarika 2017)

According to the Bordoloi 1987 cited in Deka 2013 the customary law among the Bodos varied from area to area and are not homogenous although patrilineal inheritance and punishment charges are common throughout. But the customary law never included women in the decision-making body. Thus lack of Bodo women political leadership should be seen in this context, where they were never considered as the primary decision maker in any

matter, whether it is economic or domestic sphere .Women's political potential was never accepted traditionally. (Hazarika 2017)

Marriage rituals

There are six types of marriages among the Bodos and one of the forms of marriage known as *Gwrjia Lakhini* in which the groom is adopted by the bride's family in case the bride's family doesn't have a son. The groom is expected to stay with his in-laws and take care of them during old age. In this type of marriage the groom will inherit the property and not the daughter.(Islam, 2012)

Bride price is also prevalent among them and in case the groom is unable to pay the bride price demanded by the bride's side, he has to render equal amount of service to the bride's house. (Boro 2018)

Thus, we can claim that Bodo's are patrilineal and patriarchal society, where women are traditionally kept out of decision making whether in political arena or in economic sphere .However, women do participate in the political and economic activities but that is more to fulfill the role expected by the society and to suffice the family income. The absence of dowry system and prevalence of bride price can be seen as an indicator of relative better position of women in the said society but how much women has a say in the selection of partners in the marriage also remains unclear.

This chapter dealt with the history of conflict and society formation in Assam. The position of women in the Bodo society is also discussed. This chapter provided a context to look into the present study where ethnic conflict forms the back ground of the study .Further, the traditional position of women in the said society also gave the setting to see how the present conflict affected them.

Chapter 4

Village Profile

The chapter aims at providing the profile of the study area. This chapter further, attempts at proving the inter community relation between the two communities and how the relationship changed during and after the conflict. Thus, focusing on how the meaning of conflict is drawn by these two communities from their respective experiences of conflict.

The chapter is divided into two broad sections. The first section deals with profile of the state of Assam followed by a brief history of the state, then introducing Bodo Territorial Autonomous District. A walk through both the village is comes next. Discussion on family types, educational level and occupation succeed the earlier sub-section.

The second section brings out the interaction among the villagers before and after the conflict. It also draws attention to the fact that how the villages have witness change post conflict. Eventually, drawing different understanding of the same conflict.

4.1 Profile of the study area

4.1 (a)Profile of the Assam

The Indian state of Assam is situated at the northeastern part of the country. It shares its international boundary with Bhutan at one side and on other sides it is surrounded with other Indian states like West Bengal, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur. The state capital was shifted from Shillong to Dispur in the year 1972. Assam is a multiethnic place with people speaking Assamese, Bodo, Mising, Karbi, Manipuri, Garo ,Rabha,Bengali, Hindi, Nepali,Oriya or Santhali residing in the state.(Baruah1999) .Assam has two major rivers namely, Barak and Brahmaputra .The entire Assam is divided into Barak and Brahmaputra valley.

4.1 (b) A brief history of Assam

Present day Assam was mainly ruled by two mighty kingdoms namely, the Ahom kingdom and the Koch kingdom. The Ahom kingdom was located at the extreme northeast of the region. It became a part of British India after the treaty of Yandabo. With the weakening of Ahom kingdom towards the end of 18th century, the repeated Burmese invasion started. In 1822 the Ahom kingdom was ruled by a Burmese commander. The Ahom rulers escaped to the British India and sought their help. The East India Company on the other hand realized the possible threat from Burmese army to their territory. Thus, the East India Company joined hands with the Ahom rulers against the Burmese. The Yandabo treaty came at the end of the Anglo-Burmese war, which forced the king of Ava (Burma) to surrender its claim over Assam along with ceasing its interference in Cachar and Jaintia. (Baruah 1999)

The Koch Kingdom included, the present day eastern Assam, north Bengal and some part of present day Bangladesh with its capital at Koch Bihar in West Bengal. In the year 1581 the kingdom was divided into Koch Bihar and Kamrup. Koch Bihar comprised of the present district of Koch Bihar, parts of the district of North Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri district and Rangpur –in present day Bangladesh. On the other hand Kamrup or Koch Hajo included almost these districts of Assam- Barpeta, Kamrup, Nalbari, Darrang, and part of Sonitpur.

The colonial province of Assam included undivided Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgaon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, the hill districts of Cachar, Garo Hills, Naga hills, the eastern Duars. The East Bengal district of Sylhet was formally incorporated in colonial Assam on 12 September 1874. (Baruah 1999)

4.1 (c) Bodo Territorial Autonomous District

Bodo Territorial autonomous District (BTAD) was formed under the sixth schedule of the constitution of India in the year 2003. BTAD consists of four districts of Assam namely

Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri and Kokrajhar. These districts are carved out of Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup Sonitpur and Darrang . The current capital of BTAD is Kokrajhar. The Bodoland is home to many ethnic groups like the caste hindus, Adivasis, Koch-Rajbonshi, Bengali Muslim. The BTC Accord was signed in the year 1993 on the basis of census 1991. The total area of those eight districts is 27,100 square kilometer about 35% of the total area of Assam. The total Bodo population in those eight districts at the time of formation of BTAD was approximately 11% of the total population.(Mahanta, 2019) The Bodoland autonomous district council has 38 department in it , like health, education, forest, land and revenue. However, law and order still remains with the state but the general council of the autonomous district is to be consulted before implementation of any law with in the autonomous district which is based on religious and social practices of the Bodos, customary laws and owner and transfer of land within the autonomous district. Along with that, the state retains the right to dismiss any elected council under exceptional circumstances. (George, 2010)

The Bodo Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) has been renamed as Bodo Territorial Region (BTR) and was approved by the governor of Assam via order No TAD/BC/227/2020/52-A ON 28th September 2020. This is in accordance with the tripartite agreement signed between Bodo organizations and the center on January 27, 2020.(The Sentinel 28/09/2020)

4.1 (d)History of 1.Pakhriguri village (Sonai Village)

The villagers came and settled here from the neighboring village Kathalpara before independence. Since villages here are based on the line of ethnicity and their original village being predominantly a Bengali hindu village, so they left their original village and settled here. The elders in the village saw a marked difference in the interaction with the bodo people in the neighboring village.

4.2 Profile of the village

The study is being conducted in two villages, one, which has 100% Bodo population and another having cent percent Bengali Muslim population. For the Bengali Muslim village, **Ino. Pakhriguri, (Sonai Village)** was selected and for Bodo village **Salguri (Bashbari village)** was selected. Both the villages are adjacent to each other. The village was burnt down during the conflict. Sonai which comes under Sonai revenue circle spread across 1km area the village, has 100% Bengali muslim population. According to some of the old residents of the village, their ancestors came and settled in the village before independence. The village is situated at a distance of 6km from the national highway 31, the village has electricity and is connected to the nearest town by concrete road but it doesn't have any public transport. Bus or any public transport from the nearest town Bongaigaon will take us to **Sundori on NH31 (pseudo name Mahua)** from there, shared auto would take us to **Bangaldhoba VCDC (pseudo name Basundhara VCDC)**. The frequency of auto rickshaw plying from highway to VCDC office is quite low. It's only during the time of weekly Sunday market at **Kajalgaon (pseudo name Dimara)** that the frequencies of the auto rickshaw increase. From there it's a 2 kilometer walk to the village. The concrete road passes from the middle of the village and joints the road from the next village and leads to **Basugaon (pseudo name Natungaon–** a small town under Chirang district.). Both the villages fall under **Chirang district (pseudo name Taru district)**. On the north of the village is bordering a river. The village doesn't have any health facilities as such. The next Bodo village has a Sub-center which serves the population of this village. The nearest government civil hospital is at Kajalgaon (Dimara), but the villagers usually prefer to see private doctor at Basugaon (natungaon) market as first level of contact and the second level of contact is usually Bongaigaon town (Pseudo name Nishitola town) as it has many private as well as government hospitals. The local market next to the VCDC office is frequented by people of all the neighboring villages. However, the villagers prefer to go to Basugaon (**pseudo name natungaon**) market for shopping during festivals and special occasions, as it is bigger than the local market and nearer than the nearest town market. All the houses have toilet and every house have either well or deep bore tubewell for water source. Some of the houses even have water pump but that's very rare. The roads don't have street lights. None of the houses have fencing or boundary walls and people move around each other's house quite

often. The village road is covered by jackfruit trees on both the sides. These trees don't belong to any specific individual and anybody can pluck fruits from there and eat. The village has a small mosque. During festivals, the men of the village go there for praying, while the women pray at home. During the conflict the people of Sonai first stayed at Gelaguri (pseudo name Bamunguri) after that they were taken to Chapar (Pseudo name Babupatti).From that place some of them were taken to Kasutala (Pseudo name Aambari) .

Total population of the village-

Sl.no	Female	Male	Total
1.	54	51	105

Family types

Family structure in the present village consists of both nuclear and joint family. Nuclear family here implies parents with their unmarried children. The usual practice in the village is that, once the son gets married he builds a separate house within the same premises with same courtyard and same water source. Since the villages are sparsely populated it's easier to build house as there is availability of land. Along with that as the land holding among the villagers is not enough for their survival, so breaking up into small nuclear family helps them to take up more *Adi* . So, if a family has 2 sons, after marriage they take up their own *Adi* and with processes like ploughing, de –husking being done by machines, transportation of the it's easier to conduct the entire process. Total 21 households

Nuclear family	Joint family
14	7

Nuclear family = father, mother and unmarried children

Joint family type 1= Both the parents or either of the parents along with one married son/s with their family and any other unmarried children (son's sibling).

Joint family type 2= Both the parents or either of the parents along with married son/s with their families.

Joint family type 1	Joint family type 2
6	1

Education level

Keeping the profile of the village and the economic condition of the villagers, it would be interesting to look at the education level of the people.

From the entire village only 19 people are educated .All of them are first generation learner and are either college or school student.

Sl.no	Education level	No. people
1.	Illiterate	86
2.	Primary level	14
3.	Secondary level	3
4.	Senior secondary level	2
5.	Graduation	2

A further split of this reveals the male female ratio of education among the villagers

Sl.no	Education level	Male	Female
1.	Primary	9	5
2.	Secondary	2	1
3.	Graduation	1	1

Education	Illiterate	Primary level	Secondary level	Senior secondary level	Graduation	Total Population
Age group						
0-5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	5
6-10	7	9(8.57%)	0	0	0	16

11-15	5	3(2.85%)	3(2.85%)	0	0	11
16-20	10	0	0	2(1.90%)	2(1.90%)	16
21-25	10	2	0	0	0	12
26-30	10	0	0	0	0	10
31-35	4	0	0	0	0	4
36-40	7	0	0	0	0	7
41-45	5	0	0	0	0	5
46-50	4	0	0	0	0	4
51-55	6	0	0	0	0	6
56-60	3	0	0	0	0	3
61-65	3	0	0	0	0	3
66-70	3	0	0	0	0	3
	77	14	3	2	2	105

The village has a primary school but it doesn't have any secondary or senior secondary school and the children had to go to Notungaon for perusing higher education. The boys goes by cycle while girls walk to their school .Since the school is a bit far off, many parents don't sent their daughters beyond primary level. Secondly , child marriage still being practiced at the village can be held responsible for drop out of girls after primary level. Infact, the village has only two graduate male. An interaction with one of the families reveled that , the son was instrumental for his sister's education. As his mother discloses

“My son graduated from U.N.Brahma college in kajalgaon. He was always very interested in studies. We also thought that since we are not educated we should educate our children. We don't have much resource to educate them, but my son was adamant that we shouldn't stop our daughters education. And for that he even helped us in agriculture and now he is learning computers as he wishes to do a job after this. He said he will sponsor both his sisters education and for that he needs to get a job.”

Occupation

The main occupations of the people are -.

Sl.no	Occupation	Principal occupation	Subsidiary occupation	No. of households
1.	Agriculturist	3	17	20
2.	Works at private sector (security guard Kerala, driver tempo)	2	2	4
3.	Business	2	4	6
4.	Works as agricultural laborer	10	1	11
5.	Family labour	21		21

As the table above shows that maximum of the household considers agriculture as their main occupation. All the 20 households have their own agricultural land .However there are three/TWO households who doesn't have any agricultural land and that's why they are either working at tea stalls or took up work in Kerala as security guard. But along with that all of them also substantiate their earning by working on other's field as agricultural laborer during the sowing and harvesting season. If we look at the landholding among the villages –

Sl.no	Landholdings	Number of households
1.	Marginal	17
2.	Small	3

We can divide the entire landholding in the village, into small and marginal according to the Agricultural census of Assam. The maximum households have landholding which falls under marginal category. With maximum land falling under marginal category the earning is not

sufficient to survive entire year. Along with agriculture, almost all of the households claimed had chicken as pet .But which they say was lost at the time of conflict.

As the maximum land holding falls under marginal land holding, They take up *Adi* or do small business to make ends meet. It is difficult to distinguish between principle and subsidiary occupation as marginal land holders also works as agricultural laborer and there is no clear demarcation between the earnings from principal and subsidiary occupation.

“Our land holding is very small so we take Adi , after the plantation in our own field , we go to work on other’s field. After harvesting when we take the crops, it’s almost same. We get the crops from both the fields and then take it together to the mill in Bongaigaon.”

For people who are working in private sector,they are pretty sure about their principal and subsidiary earning. As one of the villager who drives an auto hired from the neighbouring village narrates,

“I worked as agricultural laborer also that’s seasonal, for six months I again have to look for something else. So, I thought of driving an auto, I hired an auto from someone from the neighbouring village. He is also a Muslim person like me , so he gave me the auto to drive .I have to give the owner a fixed amount at the end of the day and whatever I could earn above that is mine. That’s a good arrangement for me. I could ply more during Durga Puja and earn well during that time. I prefer this over agricultural laborer.”

He considers driving as his main source of earning as he has only .08 hector of land whereas another person who took up tractor driving to support his earning claims farming as his main source of earning.

“I have very small land, so after the plantation of saplings. I drive a tractor because we usually use tractor for ploughing and then for transportation of crops. I hire it from a Bodo person from that village (Bashbari). Whenever someone hire the tractor the money goes to the owner and the owner pays me. But this is also seasonal; I drive it only during agriculture season. Rest, I don’t have anything to do. Sometimes people hire tractor from other people also .So that’s my loss.”

None of the female in the village work independently. They only work as part of *Adi* system. Where the family takes the *Adi* and the end product is shared fifty- fifty between the owner and the cultivator. In *Adi* system, everything would be divided fifty-fifty between the leasee and the leasor. So at the beginning of the season, the leasee and the leasor are supposed to

provide one bull each for ploughing, since now a days ploughing is done by tractor, people hire tractor during the season for ploughing and the cost is shared by both the parties. Further, the leasor in this system is supposed to provide manures, fertilizer and, saplings. Harvesting would be done by the leasee and the paddy would be divided fifty –fifty between both the parties. De-husking of their share of paddy would be done by the respective parties at their own, either at the mill or at home by *dheki* (A heavy wooden pestle used by foot to de husk rice from the grains).Hey that would come out as a by product would also be shared fifty-fifty between the leasee and the leasor. This is either used to feed domestic animal or to sell off, sometimes to the leasor to get some extra money. The main cultivation is of rice which is a six month cycle. For the rest of year some have vegetable shops in the local market and some goes to Bongaigaon market to sell vegetables. .

People in the region have two types of land holding- Registered land known as Medi patta and Kash known as unregistered land. This land holding is very significant as people were divided and listed according to the land holding .Their experience was also according to that. This land holding was a markers to show the intra village difference of experience of conflict.

	Medi (Registered land)			Kash (Unregistered)	
Sl.no	Occupation	Principal occupation	Subsidiary occupation	Principal occupation	Subsidiary occupation
1.	Agriculturist (10)	5	5	3	5
2.	Works at private sector (security guard Kerala, driver tempo, tea stall) (4)		1	4	1
3.	Business	2	1	2	0
4.	Works as	3	3	3	0

	agricultural laborer (6)				

Principal occupation →	Agriculturist	Works at Private Sector(security guard Kerala, driver tempo, tea stall)	Business	Works as agricultural laborer
Subsidiary occupation ↓				
Agriculturist		2	3	5
Works at private sector(security guard Kerala, driver tempo, tea stall)	2			
Business	1			
Works as agricultural laborer	2	2	1	

Housing patter

A discussion on the housing pattern is important because all the houses were burnt down at the time of the conflict, except two house. Before that, as claimed by them, few had mud houses, while others had pukka houses with tin roof. Jamat-e-Islami hind built cemented houses with tin roof for most of them. So at the time of the researcher's visit all the houses were cemented except two of them.

4.3 Salguri (Bashbari)

History of Salguri (Bashbari) Village

People came and settled here even before independence. The villagers are original habitant of the nearby Dangtol village. They came here after their original village was affected with diarrhea and people started to die. People fled from the village, cleared the jungle and settled

here. Slowly, more people started coming in from the village. Malaria, Jaundice and typhoid are still the main problems in the area.

Profile of the village

Spread in an area of 1 km. The village is situated at a distance of 4km from the National Highway No. 31. From the VCDC office it’s a one and half kilometer walk to the village. As we enter the village we reach a cross road. One of the roads led to the next village, while the other two roads will lead to the village. Unlike the neighboring village, the houses are only one side of the road. On the other side of the road is the field, which also connects the villages. The field serves as meeting point for the women and the old people of the village. The road doesn’t have street light and unlike the next village, the roads doesn’t have much tree on either sides. However, people have huge kitchen gardens and have planted trees, starting from bamboo to jack fruit to sal tree. Houses which are next to the road have bamboo fencing, while other houses don’t have any fencing. Only two houses have boundary wall. For water source, they rely on well which every household have and some of the houses have water pumps as well. Every household have electricity and toilet at their home. The village has a small creek which passing by and a culvert covering that. Next to the culvert is the Brahma mandir- a traditional place of worship among the Bodo’s. It has 78 household. On the north side of the village is bordering a river. There are total 85 male and 79 female. The nearest PHC is at a distance of 2 km form the village, the village has a sub center but it doesn’t have any building .The village is fully electrified. During the conflict the people of the Bashbari village stayed at Bodosa high school (Pseudo name Bidya mandir high school)

Family type

Nuclear family	Joint Family (type 1)	Type 2
17	5	5

Nuclear family = father, mother and unmarried children

Joint family type 1= Both the parents or either of the parents along with married son/s with their family and any other unmarried children (son’s sibling)

Joint family type 2= Both the parents or either of the parents along with married son/s with their family.

Education

Sl.no	Education level	No. people
1	Illiterate	2
2	Primary level	21
3	Secondary level	73
4	Senior secondary level	25
5	Graduation	6
6	Diploma in Engineering	2

A further split of education into male and female reveal that, till the primary level, there is no difference between the education level of male and female. However, as the level of education progresses, a skewed picture comes out, where more number of males are seen as compared to females.

Sl.no	Education level	Male	Female
1.	Primary	11	10
2.	Secondary	39	34
3.	Senior Secondary level	18	7
4.	Graduation	5	1
5.	Diploma in Engineering	2	
6.	Illiterate	2	2

Education	Illiterate	Primary level	Secondary level	Senior secondary level	Graduation	Total population
Age group						
0-5						4

6-10		10				10
11-15		4	15			19
16-20		2	10	4	2	20
21-25		10	2	1	4	17
26-30		11	1	1		13
31-35		7	2	1		10
36-40	4	7	2	2		14
41-45		10	2	4		11
46-50	2	5	4			11
51-55	2	1	1			4
56-60	4					4
61-65	2	1				3
66-70	5					5
Total						145

*Children between the age group of 0-5 were not included as illiterate as they were still to be enrolled in school.

The village has Bodosia high school next to the village. The school is government run Bodo medium school .Students from neighbouring village goes to the school. Having a school at the neighborhood helped the student and that explains the high number of students at the secondary level both in male and female category as compared to Sonai village. Few families sent their kids to private English medium school at Basugaon. For senior secondary and Graduation they go to Basugaon usually on bicycle .The two Diplomas in Engineer obtained their degrees from Silchar polytechnic collage.

Land ownership

Sl.no	Land holding	No.Household
1.	Large	1
2.	Semi-medium	6
3.	Small	12

4.	Marginal	8
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The village has one land holding which falls under the large category .Maximum proportion of households has land which falls under the category of Small landholding according to agricultural census of India. Households which has agricultural land falling under large category, hires agricultural laborer. These agricultural laborers are either landless people or who have marginal land and are from their won village or from the neighbouring Bengali Muslim village. For semi-medium land holders who are agriculturist themselves, they rely on the family labour .But people who have other fulltime engagements apart from agriculture depends upon *Adi* . The other partners in this system are a person from the neighboring village who doesn't have that much land holding.

- (1) Marginal - below 0.50 hectare. 0.50 hectare to 1.00 hectare.
- (2) Small - 1.00 hectare to 2.00 hectares.
- (3) Semi-medium - 2.00 hectares to 3.00 hectares 3.00 hectares to 4.00 hectares
- (4) Medium - 4.00 hectares to 5.00 hectares. 5.00 hectares to 7.50 hectares. 7.50 hectares to 10.00 hectares.
- (5) Large - 10.00 hectares to 20.00 hectares. 20.00 hectares and above.

Occupation

Occupation	Landless		Marginal		Small		Semi-medium		Medium		Large	
	P.O	SO	PO	SO	PO	SO	PO	SO	PO	SO	PO	SO
Agriculturist			4	4	6	2	2	2		1	1	
Government employee (permanent/contractual)	3		3		1		1		1			
Agricultural labourer	6		2	1								
Business					1	2	1					
Private employee		1										

PO -Principle occupation, SO- Subsidiary occupation

Principal occupation → Subsidiary occupation ↓	Agriculturist	Government employee (permanent/contractual)	Agricultural labourer	Business	Private employee
Agriculturist		7		3	
Government employee (permanent/contractual)					
Agricultural labourer					1
Business	1				
Private employee					

Agriculturalist: people who owns land and work in that land

Agricultural labourer: A person is treated as agricultural labour if he/ she follows one or more of the following agricultural operations in the capacity of labourer on hire or in exchange, whether paid wholly in cash or kind or partly in cash and partly in kind.(NSSO ROUND 55, 50, 43, 38, 32, 29, 20, 19, 12 & 11)

Family labour: A category of working persons who keep themselves engaged in household enterprises working full or part-time but do not receive any cash payment or any share of the family earnings in lieu of the work performed is considered as helper in household enterprise. They are household members, a large number of them being related to the household head and dependent on the household head. They work for the household enterprise and get food and shelter as members of the household. (NSSO ROUND 43,38,32 AND 27)

The villagers are into business, cultivation, government and PSU employee. The village has both cemented and Kuchha house. Maximum of the villagers have land, many villagers give their land on rents to either landless villagers or who have marginal land, this system is known as *Adi* system. However, a new system of leasing out of land is coming up, where the leasor is supposed to give a fixed amount of product at the end of agricultural season, which is mutually decided by the leasor and the lessee. In this system the lessee is not supposed to provide anything apart from the land. This system is being preferred by the some of the leasor because according to some of them, they can keep the excess amount of product at the end. Along, with that they don't have to share the husk and hey which comes out as a byproduct. They can either use the entire byproduct or even sell it off for some extra income. However, peasants from the neighbouring Bengali Muslim village still prefers *Adi* system as, in case they couldn't produce the required amount of product at the end of the season, it will be a great loss for them. Since, this is their main source of earning; they are reluctant to do any sort of experiment as of now.

The occupation pattern is quite overlapping because, some of the villagers who have government jobs lease out their land, while some of them prefer to work on their land. This however depends upon the amount of landholdings and number of family members. In case, the government job holders works in his/her own land, agriculture is considered as subsidiary occupation. Whereas other family members who are working on that land are considered as family labour and incase they don't have any other occupation, family labour is considered as principal occupation. Similarly, in a joint family where land is still undivided , the person who owns the land is considered as agriculturalist whereas other family members are falls under family labour. In case the family members have other occupation and they only works in the field during the time of sowing and harvesting, family labour would be regarded as subsidiary occupation. Thus , following this, people in the village have more than one occupation. Maximum of the people who called family labour as their principal occupation are women.

The maximum land holding in the village is 80 Bigha. In contrast to the village 1 most of the people are educated.

Housing pattern

Except two houses in the village all houses are cemented with tin roof, while those two houses are mud houses and thatch roof. Only two houses in the entire village have boundary walls. Having a boundary wall in the village signifies wealth and status. One of them has the highest landholding in the village having 12.48 hectares of land and another one has semi medium land holding but his son is a junior engineer with central government.

Clearly, the socio-economic condition of the people of Salguri(Bashbari) is much better than the people of Pakhriguri(sonai)

Chapter 5

Encountering the Conflict

The most visible part of conflict is death and physical injury. As the previous chapter shows the village has existed here since long times therefore capturing the life before conflict is one of the aim of the chapter. This chapter is divided into few sections. (i) Their source of knowledge about the conflict (ii) Reaching the camp

Before discussing about conflict it becomes imperative to talk about the daily life of the people of both the communities before the conflict. This will help in capturing the changes that were brought in during the conflict and even during post conflict period. Further, it will help in understanding the long term changes that were brought in their lives post the conflict.

5.1 Life Before the conflict

As a community, the Bodo and the Bengali Muslim people of both the villages are staying together since long time and they had a very cordial relation .As a community, they have never been displaced and they haven't seen conflict in their lifetime. Although they have heard about the conflict in BTAD and never thought that it might spread to their village. All of the people from Sonai and Banshbari village have seen conflict for the first time. People from both the villages claim that they grew up together, playing together in the field. Describing about this Kalicharan Brahma (*psedo name*) said that

“I and Murtaza sheikh (psedoname) grew up together, playing in the field. We used to go to the field to take our animals for gazing. Sometime we went to the river to take bath. Now we have grown old. So, we meet in the field every day. ”

Expressing the same feeling Tarini Brahma (80 years), one of the oldest ladies of the village says that

“I have never seen it myself but heard of conflict at Udalguri when my daughter was a new born baby. Didn't bother to think that time, never realized I will have to see it myself and run for life.”

Even people from younger generations from both the villages also have echoed the same sentiments. They also claimed to share a very good camaraderie among themselves. People from Bodo villages are invited to the Bengali Muslims house during wedding and festivals and they even share vegetables from kitchen garden. However, they don't eat at each other's place. But they do share a cup of tea at the Village Council Development Committee (VCDC) office or in market place. As Griten Goyari(*pseudo name*) narrates -

“We invite each other during festivals but we don't go at each other's houses .So whenever we have festivals or weddings at our houses we treat each other with tea and sweets at VCDC office. The office is a place where everyone comes. The women from their village come to our houses to collect herbs and sometimes even vegetables.”

The biggest festival of the region is Bihu and among the Bodos they celebrate Baisagu at that time. The festival usually includes feasting; visiting each other's house and merry making. So during the festivals they celebrate it in the VCDC office. As Jodhu ram Mushahari (*pseudo name*) explained-

“Our Bodo people would come with tekli pitha and we would get black tea from the near by market .So all the office bearer of VCDC along with regular people would get that . This would continue for some days. Every day someone would get some edible homemade items and we would have regular tea party in the office. We do the same thing during eid. We don't go to their houses but our VCDC member Rohima bibi would treat us with sweets from the local markets. ”

The communities are so much inter mingled that Bodo as language is also known to the Bengali Muslim people of the village. However, the common link language is Bengali.

Men from both the villages would meet with each other at the local market or at VCDC office. The local market has sellers and buyers from all the neighbouring villages. Usually men go to the local market for daily shopping .The local market is not just a place for commercial activities rather it serves as a place for common meeting ground. Some people go there to meet up over a cup a tea. Dimara town have weekly market on Sunday and people from both the villages usually go there to buy and sell home grown products. Older

women from Bansbari village go there to sell their home grown products. They usually go alone using local transport.

For women and the old people the common meeting place is at the field ,which is at the middle of the two villages and separate the villages. Old people and women would often assemble there either to bring their domestic animals for grazing or just to spend their afternoon relaxing from their daily chores. Women from Sonai would sometime visit the Bodo village to collect home grown herbs but the women from Bashbari would never visit Sonai and whatever communication they had it would be only in the field when women from both the villages would come to chat after their day's work. As Farzana bibi(*Pseudo name*) says-

“It is our daily routine to come to the field. The old men would come in the morning to take out animal or to chit chat after the first meal in the morning. But we would come after finishing the day's work in the afternoon. Our children would play in the field with each other's. We would talk about the village .There only we would come to know what is going on in each other's lives, what is growing in each other's garden, we would also get all the news from outside.”

Most of the people in the Sonai village either have their own land or are working at the land owned by the Bodo people. Some of the people have small amount of land and to substantiate their earning they also work on Bodo people's land as rentee. Maximum of the people from Bashbari on the other hand have either large amount of agricultural land or are government employees. As a result they can't tilt their own land by family labour only and would need labour outside their family. So, they rent out their land to the Bengali Muslim people who would tilt the land and the product would be divided equally among the owner and the rentee. As Muhasin Ali stated –

“my son works as security guard and we don't own any land ,so we have to take up Adi. We have been doing this since ages .Our renter is fixed, usually the system of rentee and renter is fixed .Before the beginning of the agricultural season we sit and talk about when to begin the process and in case there is any change in the terms and conditions and that's all ; we begin our work then, we usually employ our family members for this .”

Since both the villages are next to each other it is easier for both the parties to work. Clearly, the relations between the people of both the villages are very much interdependent. But this inter dependency is not restricted during the agricultural season only.

Apart from the inter dependency they also had a very cordial relationship. Some of the Bengali Muslim people are elected members of VCDC and are also members of Bodo people's Front (BPF) the largest party in the BTAD. Even Muslim women are also part of the political party and are members of BPF.

There is a Bodo medium secondary school next to the Bashbari. Students from the neighbouring Bodo villages go there. For college they usually go to Dimara College. The children usually walk to their school as it is next to their village. The boys play football with their friends from neighbouring village. The girls usually don't go out once they are at home. They help their mothers at household chores. In the afternoon also either they usually go to their acquaintance's house and talk, but rarely do they roam around in the village. They also don't go to the creek for bathing as it is considered inappropriate by their parents. As 15 year old Monimala Narzary(pseudonym) says-

“We usually help our mothers after coming from school. We don't cook but do other things like washing the utensils or drying clothes. In the afternoon, my brother would go out to play football in the field. He has a team, they sometimes go to other villages to play. I go to my friend's house and chat. We don't go to play. We don't to the river to take bath. Mother scolds me if i ask for permission to go there. None of my friends go there. We usually work on the field specially during sowing season I help my parents in the field. My father has a shop in the local market and during sowing and harvesting season we all work in the field. I along with my brother don't go to school during the sowing time. Harvesting is usually during winter breaks so we don't have to remain absent from school. ”

The Bodo's usually rent out their land to the people of the neighbouring village .They hardly gets involve in the process, so most of the adolescent girls and boys don't have to miss out on school during that time. Whereas those families who are dependent on agriculture as principal occupation and are dependent on family labour , ask their children to work on the field during sowing season.

There is no instance of child marriage in the village and girls in the village usually study till graduation for which they go to Dimara College. But they don't pursue any carrier. They usually get married once their education is completed. None of the girls have studied beyond graduation as this would require them to stay outside their home, usually in a hostel. Although adolescent girls are not allowed to venture out of the village without any companion, however their mothers and grandmothers can do so. Women from Bashbari go to the weekly market with other women. They also visit their relatives and local health center without any companion.

Whereas for Sonai village a primary school within the village cater to the educational need of the local students. After that they have to go to Natungaon for secondary and higher secondary education. The boys usually form group and go by cycle to their school where as girls form their own group and walk to the school. For this the girls take more time to reach school. As the secondary and senior secondary schools are a bit far off from the school many parents don't send their daughters to school after primary level. Instead, they help their parents by taking care of their younger siblings or by playing with their friends for the entire day. However during the sowing season they work as family labour in the field. This holds true for all the children whose families take up farming under Adi system. So all the children would miss out on their school during the sowing season, as each family member is expected to lend their hand in the field during that time. After coming from the school the boys usually play in the field with their friends from other villages, whereas the girls would go out and roam with their friends. They would pluck fruits from the trees lined up beside the road passing through the village. Sometimes they would go to the creek next to the village to take bath along with their friends. As Nasima (*pseudo name*) says-

“We play and roam around the village with our friends after the school but we don't go out of the village on our own except for taking bath at the river. For going to school we form group and then walk. Our parents doesn't allow us to ride a cycle to school because they say if we fall down and hurt ourselves nobody would marry us . But it's fun as we talk throughout the way. Sometime while coming back we plucks fiddle head fern and if we have money we buy ice creams also.”

This explains why girls are not allowed to ride cycle and why they don't study further. As child marriage is prevalent in the village, so they are only allowed to study till they get married and things that would contradict their marriage prospect is also heavily discouraged. A very strict notion of gender governs their parent's behavior towards their daughters. Even married women usually don't go out of their village without any companion especially any male companion.

Most of the girls in Sonai village get married at the age of 15-16 and subsequently gets pregnant immediately after that.

Clearly, the inter community relation among the people are very cordial. Interaction among the people of various villages of that is a daily routine that they have been following since ages. People of both the villages' exercises gendered control over their daughters but in case of married women of Bansbar they seemed to enjoy a lot more freedom as compared to their counter parts in Sonai village.

It is clear that of BTR has seen many conflicts but these villages have never witnessed one. According to them, the conflict started in Kokrajhar but they don't know the exact reason for the start of it. As these villages have never seen conflict the situation in other parts of BTR has never impacted their inter community relationships or anything. Lives went as usual. From these past experiences nobody thought they need to pay attention to these types of news.

5.2 How did they come to know about the conflict?

The local market, being the common meeting place for people of different villages, especially for the men; people in general came to know about the conflict from there only. VCDC office is another place where people from different villages meet, the office also acted as a source of information for all walks of people. The women from both the communities

came to know about the conflict from the men folk of their village. The villages have never witnessed any ethnic conflict earlier. So, this time again when the news of conflict started coming in, most of the people in both the villages thought that it will never reach their villages. Owing to this, the Bodo people and many of the Sonai people didn't pay much heed to them. As in case of Taslima who's house is the last one in the village and is next to the Bodo village. She never thought that it would be unsafe for her; in fact her house being next to the Bodo village was considered as an assurance of protection. Even the Bodo people at the VCDC office has asked them not to panic as in case of any "problem" they would protect them.

"We have heard about the conflict but never thought it would grasp our village. The VCDC members came to our village and told us that they will protect us and we shouldn't be afraid. We saw people from other villages going to camp but we prefer to stay at the village because VCDC people told us and we believed them."

The above statement shows their trust on the Bodo people. But despite the assurance some of the women already moved to the Bamunguri or to their relative's place, as soon as they came to know about the conflict, either because they have a dependent family member or because of their medical condition. Anowara bibi took the decision to shift to the relief camp much before the other members of her village. It is definitely a departure from the conventional role that she is supposed to play. She exercised her agency and took a decision for herself and her husband. As she narrates

"I saw people leaving for the camp from the neighbouring village. I enquired about the camp they informed me that many people from their villages have already shifted there. I immediately thought about my husband who is mentally challenged. He might wonder out of the village and in this situation this might be very dangerous for him. I discussed this with my in laws, they live in the same campus and decided that it will be better if I move to the camp. So I packed our belongings and took him with me and went to the camp with the people from other villages who were going to the camp."

.As women in the village hardly have any decision making power it was a big deal for them to take any independent decision that would affect their life chances. However, she doesn't think she has done anything extraordinary.

“Bhoi to lagchilo aka aka jachilam. Arkom kono din aka aka jai nai age. Swami amake dekhbo na ami swamik dekhbo . Gram er kew songhe chilona. Onno grm er lok der songhe gachilam. Okhane gia o ki hobe kothai khakbo kichu janina .Gramer kew songhe gele bhalo lagto,aktu bhoi kom lagto. Kichu hole bolte partam. Kichu dorkar hole bolte partam.”

“Anybody in my place would have done the same think. I had to take the decision to leave for the camp even when nobody from the village was going. I was scared while leaving the village . I was thinking if anybody from the village would have accompanied me I would have solace that somebody is with me.”

Or in case of Rohima(*Pseudo name*) She was pregnant at that time and as soon as she saw people from other villages moving towards Bamunguri , she along with other women of her family went to Bamunguri at her parent’s place while her husband was at Dimara, working as agricultural laborer unaware of development at his village. Bamunguri is a Bengali Muslim dominated place. However in both the cases the women took the decision that saved her and her family members from the horror that was witnessed by many of her fellow villagers who waited till the last to leave the village.

“When I heard of conflict in other parts of BTAD I was scared; more so because I was pregnant and my husband is not here. I won’t be able to run in case of any emergency situation. So, I discussed this with my in-laws and my husband and decided to my maternal home. I packed my bags and went to my natal home. Some of the people from the neighbouring villages were already going to that village as a relief camp was set up there. I accompanied them . Since there was no means of transport we all walked till there.”

As mentioned before women usually don’t take any decision in the both the villages. So while the decision regarding leaving the village and shifting to the relief camp was taken by the men , women simply followed the instruction.

But as the conflict intensified, the same VCDC office people asked them to move to safer place as in case of any attack they won’t be able to save them. Following this, there was a meeting by all the male members of the village where it was decided that all the women would leave for Bamunguri as a relief camp was opened there and all the male members would stay at the village to take care of their house and property. This non-inclusion of

women in the meeting reflects how women are categorically left out from decision making process. This argument is further consolidated with case Mamoni Begum of the event.

“When my husband and sons decided to stay at home to take care of their house, I tried to convince them to come with me. I told them many times to come with me so that we can take some belongings and pets along with us. We had 5 hen and 2 cows. But my husband and other family members did not listen to me and once the male members came to the camp. I was quite anxious about the pets, as the pet was a source of daily supply of food.”

Interestingly, with this sudden turn of events and the expression of inability on the part of Bodo people to protect them acted as a shocker for many in the Sonai village. Like in case of Taslima, the proximity to Bodo village was earlier considered as a guarantee to their safety whereas now, the same immediacy was considered as dangerous for them. So, they thought it would be safe to move to Bamunguri as soon as possible. As Taslima bibi expresses-

“My house is next to the Bodo village, so when we heard of conflict we were told by the Bodo people of the VCDC that they would protect us incase of any untoward incident. We were assured of protection by them. Our house was next to their village. We were so assured that we would sleep at peace in the night. Once they told us to leave to a safer place we got so scared especially at night. We would feel as if someone is going to attack us and our house not even at the middle of the village that we can expect our people to come and protect us. We were scared because now we know that they (Bodo’s) would not come to save us. ”

The narrative also reflects creation of a sense of us versus them. The repeated use of ‘our people’ and ‘their people’ in various narratives is more visible after both the communities encountered conflict.

Along with women, children are also considered as another vulnerable group. As the violence already spread in other parts of BTAD and the people in the village were asked to leave to safer place, it was also thought that children should be left at their relative’s place till the situation normalizes. Their relatives at other places also suggested them to do so. So, those people in the Sonai village having relatives in other districts of Assam outside BTAD

send their children to those relative's place. So when Nahira bibi got a call from her sister who stays in Nishitala town enquiring about their situation, she promptly sent her three children at her place.

“My sister stays at the Nishitala town, she called me one morning to check on us and I asked her if she could keep my children at her place till we come back to the village, she agreed. We packed their belongings in a bag and gave some money to the eldest one. We had one biscuit packet in the kitchen, I gave it to them. My husband immediately took our three children to her place on his bicycle. Since we were hearing about curfew being imposed from evening, he had to return before evening and I also had to leave for Bamunguri, so he left immediately for Nishitala town.”

By interviewing people, it came out that large number of people said that they had not witnessed an act of violence, but had fled because of rumors that a mob was coming their way or that the next village had been set ablaze. Fear is sometimes less derived from actual act of violence than from the perception of violence. This phenomenon was again evident in this case where people from the Sonai village left their village for the fear of being killed or by seeing their neighbours leaving. The actual act of violence was not witness by maximum.

5.3 Reaching the camp

Maximum people from the Sonai village moved to Bamunguri next day itself forming groups. They had to cross a river and walk for 3-4 hours to reach Bamunguri. Although there was a bridge but the road to that, passes through Bodo village and it was thought safe to avoid that road and cross the river by walking. While leaving for the camp all of them thought that this conflict would stop soon and they would come back within a day or so. That's why they didn't take many belongings with them and the men folk being there at the village also provided a reason for their self – assurance. And those who were left behind or were unaware of the movement of their fellow villagers had a very horrifying experience while leaving the village. In case of Nasreen (Pseudo name), her son and her daughter were already sent off to their maternal uncle's place when they heard about the conflict in different villages of Taru district. She and her husband stayed at their house to protect their property.

She didn't realize that the conflict has started in her village as well and all the people have left the village. Narrating the incident, she said

“I was taking bath near the well when suddenly I heard some people screaming. I came out and saw people running away , I asked one of them about the incident ,they told me that some people are coming from the south (south of Chirang district) to set their village on fire. I immediately ran inside the house told my husband about the situation, we manage to take some clothes and money along with us. I took two sarees and lungi for my husband. My husband grabbed a bed sheet they put our clothes in the bed sheet and ran for our live. We didn't have the courage to look back and see what's happening in the village. We walked for 3-4 hours and reached the relief camp at Bamunguri.”

They had a constant fear and felt a threat for their life till they reach Bamunguri. For going to the camp, they had to cross the river and there is a bridge over it but to reach the bridge they had to cross a Bodo village and during that time it was not considered safe to cross the river by bridge so they had to walk through the river. It was very difficult for them to cross the river especially for women who had small babies. Women who left early and with the group were fortunate enough by not encountering with any of life threatening experiences. However women who were left alone at the village because of the various reasons like , they didn't get to know when everybody left or the male members of their family might have gone to another village to leave their children at their relative's place , had such terrorizing experiences .Like in case of Asifa

“ Amar shami Bhadrangaon gesilo chele r mey take amader gusti r ghore rakhte. Kintu asar somoy curfew lagaidiyeche aye jonno amar sami firte pare nai. Ami aye dike kono khabar pai nai oder. Ratre sob ondhokar , current o chilo na . Ami gota gharm e aka . Bhoi e jaan ber hoye jachilo. Ami akta daw r ata saree niye sara raat akta ghare boshe chilam j kichu Jodi hoi akta k mere morbo ba palabo. Bhoi e kichu khete ba ranna korte parini. Sara raat boshe chilam r kokhon sokal hobe bhabchilam. Aktu jokhon sokal hoyeche ami paliye giavhi. Kothai jabo jani na. Paser Bangali gram e gia handai chi. Paser gram er Muslim manush ra Bamunguri jachilo amake dekhe ora agai ashlo r oder songhe jete bollo.Bamunguri jawar jonno nodi par korte hoi . Nodi upar bridge ache kintu kinu bridge diye gele Bodo gram par korte hobe. Tai sobai nodir modhe diye giache. Amra sob aksonghe nodhi par korchilam.oi pare koto guli Bodo manush amader k daw dekhachilo. Amra sobai palai dhan kheter maje diye rail line er puro giye dow rai par korechi. Kintu ora amader k okane o dhawa koreche. Ami r dowrate parchilam na r hapiye nodir pare pore giachi. Ami bhabchi aaj k mara jabo. Tokhoni Bamunguri masjid theke allah r dhoni diye onek log hate daw, tarwal, r lathi niye ay diye dowrai ashche. Mota moti 50-60 lok hobe. Oder k dekhe Bodo manush gulo palai gaiche.Ora e amake camp e niye ashche. Tokhon obdi amar sami

baa mar chele mey er kono khabar nai. Ami khali bhabchi j Bamunguri camp e hoi to ami oder e khekte pari. Kintu okhane gia o oder k khuje paini.okhane kew bollo j amar shami mara giache. Khabar ta sune ami khali bhitor baire korchilam. Tokhon kew ase bollo j amar shami asheche.Ami dowrai baire giachilam ok dekhete. Ok dekhe ami kende diachi. O bollo curfew lege giachilo tai ashte pare nai. Pore din o gram e ashchilo tokhon rashtai kew bollo j gram e kew nai ,gram e aagun lagia diache r sobai Bamunguri te chole giache.”

“Since curfew was imposed at night so, my husband, who went to leave the children at Bhadragaon could not return and I had to stay alone at night taking care of the house. I was quite scared as there was no electricity and I was alone. I kept a daw and a saree beside me and was awake whole night. I did not know anything about any of the family members. I was so frighten that I could not eat anything, fear for my life, fear of the where about of my family members. I could neither sleep nor eat anything. Next morning, I ran away from the village without knowing where to go, I took shelter in a Hindu Bengali family in the next village .Many Sonai families from the nearby villages were shifting to relief camp at Bamunguri. Upon seeing me some of them came forward and asked me to join them. To reach Bamunguri we had to cross the river and we crossed the rivers together, however when we reached there, we saw some Bodo people with daw on the other side of the river. We had to ran away from there and took a different path , I had to crawl through paddy field to reach Bamunguri. But the Bodo people chased us there as well . I was so tiered that I couldn’t run anymore and fell down.I got bruises all over my hands and legs. I thought I will die today here only. Suddenly, people at the Bamunguri masjid raised azaan and some 50-60 people came out of the masjid with daw, sword and sticks. The masjid is near the river. When these Bodo people saw them running towards that side, they fled and I was rescued by those people who took me and other people along with me, to the Bamunguri camp. Till then I had no information of my family members. I did not know anything about my husband or my children. The only thought that came to my mind is to reach Bamunguri with a hope that I might see my family members there, as the camp was set up for the Sonai families of the nearby area . But once I reached there I could not find my son and husband and somebody informed me that my husband has been killed by the Bodo people. I kept wandering between camp and the road. Suddenly someone informed me that my husband has return and I ran to see him. Upon seeing him I could not stop crying. My husband was on his way to the village when someone informed him that everybody has shifted to the Bamunguri School and the village has been set on fire.” (Asifa)

Her act reflects that women are not just the victims of conflict they can be protector as well.

As they were the last group of people to leave the village and while running away, some of them fell down, they had to crawl through the paddy field. While saving themselves they got injured they got bruises. As Nasreen(pseudo name) states

“While running away from the village I fall down at many places, sometimes on gravels besides the road, I got cuts and bruises on my hands and legs. I walked through the river and couldn’t walk more; I fell down on the river side, grasping for air. My legs were

hurting badly; I have never run so much in my life. I reached the camp at around evening and there was no doctor at that time. I washed my wound. Next morning when the doctor came, he gave medicines to me ”

Although there were doctors at Bamunguri camp but they could only provide medicines for ailments like fever and diarrhea and dysentery. The Bamunguri camp was opened for people from the neighbouring villages. There were no major cases of any ailment reported during their stay at the Bamunguri camp. The maximum reported cases were of injuries sustained while running away from the village and those were treated at the camp. In case of any serious ailments they had to be taken to either Dimara civil hospital or Nishitala Civil hospital.

The men couldn't stay at the village for long. They had to leave the village next day itself as news of a possible attack reached them, so all of them had to run for their life. Some were cooking at home when the news came and they left it like that. One of them Rehman bi's husband even forgot to put off the gas oven and those who didn't get any news beforehand had actually saw their village being set on fire like Kulsum's husband somehow got his cycle and ran away from the village .He was so terrified that he actually forgot to ride the cycle its after someone actually reminded him that he rode the cycle and reached Bamunguri.

For the menfolk of the village, the path to reach the relief camp was equally difficult. As they stayed back to guard their village and only left when there was attack on the village they didn't had the chance to form group and then go to the camp. They got hold of whatever they could and ran for their life. Some of them even chased, as they were the last one to leave the village .One of them was Kulsum's husband, who's family has already left for Bamunguri one day before and he stayed back with other male members of the village.

“My husband was in the village when the village was attacked. He took his bicycle and forgot to rod it. He entered into Bengali village (Hindu) .Some women were sitting in

front of a house, he entered there. The women realized that he was running to save his life, as he was not able to speak anything. They asked him to enter inside the house as they were sitting and kept chatting at the corridor to make it look normal. After half an hour, they asked him to come out as nobody came chasing him to their village. He came out and started walking, forgetting that he had a cycle , till someone reminded him about it.”

At Bamunguri the neighbouring people were of their ethnicity, they gave them food and thatch that they spread on the floor to sleep .Along with that they also gave them assurance for protection.

So, when the men folk of the village also reached the camp and gave the news of the village being set on fire, the women, who were initially thinking of going back to the village within one or two days realized that this conflict is going to last long. These realization made some of them cry. As the news of the village being set on fire started coming in they broke down. A sense of losing their livelihood, property and a place that they claimed as home started looming large.

“I was still optimistic of returning to the village. In fact all the elderly people were talking about this. This is just a matter of time. Police will take control of the situation and we will return with in one or two days. It was only when the menfolk came and reported about the fire , we broke down. I could not understand initially what they were saying. I was in shock I was in disbelieving. It took some time for me to believe the news. After I realized what they were saying my head started spinning, I almost felt unconscious .My everything was lost. Our future was in dark .I couldn’t think of anything. So many questions were looming, what would happen to us? Where would we go? Will we be refugee for the rest of the life? i felt lost”

This concern of losing their village was more among the women of older generation who have spent more time in the village. This was reflected when they spoke of not leaving their village (*bhita mati*) and would retaliate in case of any further conflict situation. However with the women of younger generation they are more worried about their safety, children’s future and livelihood options. Their point was reflected in Khadija’s words-

“If next time something happens I would never come back to this place. We would stay at Bamunguri at my parent’s place. He would do something there and we would stay there. At least our children could get educated.”

Whereas Khadija's mother in law has something else to say-

"I will never leave my house, next time if something of this sort happens I will also fight with them. Even if I die I will kill few of them. At least I won't have to leave my village; i will die in my village."

The denial to leave their home was basically drawn from their reluctance to leave their homeland (*bhita mati*). Their agency was also visible when the older Bengali Muslim women talked of retaliation in case of any future attack whereas for the younger women they spoke of moving to safer place in case of any attack in future. Talk of retaliation is something that is not expected from women. However, the act of attacking and their talks of armed revenge by the elderly women may not be is an act of departure from their traditional role expectation. This talk of armed retaliation or taking up arms to protect their homeland is also an extension of the women's role as care giver. No doubt its men who are supposed to be the protector and women as protected. It is expected of women to be the caregiver of her family and she is supposed to do everything that is required to protect her family, so the talk of taking up arms to protect her family and more essentially her homeland also comes from that role expectation. This becomes more evident when all the elderly women stayed at home at night, while the men guarded the village- a return to their traditional role. So, all the elderly women returned to their domestic sphere once the men assumed their traditional role of protector.

The people of Bashbari didn't leaving their home and village even when the entire neighbouring Sonai villages were vacated. Some of the Bodo people got scared specially those whose houses are bordering the Sonai village but they still continued staying in their house. Instead they choose to stay in the village and guard their village. Availability of arms was also subtly mentioned by some of the respondents. So, some of the men had fire arms, while others had sticks for patrolling at night. They were divided in to 6 groups and each group comprised of 10 members and they used to carry stick, cutlass, bow and arrow along with them.

“Some of us had ‘that’ but most of us had sticks. Some people had made bow and arrow for this as well. We also carried torch while patrolling and in case of any emergency we would simple scream and everybody was instructed to come out of their house holding whatever they could lay their hands on, to be used as weapon. We would patrol whole night and would sleep at night.” (Sopna Basumatari)

But after the neighbouring village has been set on fire, the respondent and other people in the village also got scared for a possible retaliation from the Muslim people. According to some of the respondents, the Sonai people have bow and arrow. They have heard that the Sonai people have collected bow and arrow, so it was thought to move in to a safer place within the village. Along with that same time, one morning the villagers heard a loud sound from the neighbouring Sonai village, which they initially thought was a bomb blast however later on it came out that somebody’s LPG cylinder blasted in the neighboring village. Clearly, rumors played a big part in creating a sense of suspicion among both the communities about each other.

.Nevertheless, their patrolling of the village and subsequent run to the relief camp after the blast of an LPG cylinder are self-contradictory act. The Bodo people seemed to both accept the presence of fear and violence in their life and at the same time refused to get bog down by it.

After the blast in the neighbouring village everybody came out of their houses and ran for safer place .They perceived it as a bomb blast. Although later on they came to know that it was LPG cylinder burst at the adjacent village. Everybody immediately came out of their houses and it was decided that they would assemble at somebody’s house. There were only two houses in the village which has boundary wall and were considered safe. So, women from neighborhood stayed at their house during night while the men patrolled the place. While going to those houses they didn’t take the main road rather, they reached there by crossing other people’s backyards

“We were preparing lunch when we heard a loud sound from the next village. We all ran out of our house and assembled at the road. We thought there was a bomb explosion at the next village. There were two houses in the village which has boundary wall. One is a bit

far off at the beginning of the village another was nearby. We decided to stay at the second house. We went back fed our families ate whatever was cooked and went and assembled at the second house. We didn't take the road .We all went through the back yard. I took the jungle path.(pointing towards the jungle next to her backyard). We stayed there till the afternoon and then went to the Bidyamandir high school to stay at night. ” (Nijwum – Pseudo name)

Women in their day to day speech and action find innovative way to assert their agency in different forms. These acts may be or may not be subversive. For Bodo women the refusal to speak to the researcher as an outsider was also a moment where they were exercising their agency. Their sense of guilt of not being able to save their neighbors property more so from people of their own ethnicity was the main factor that stopped them to talk about the conflict with the researcher.

However, women from Bengali Muslim village exercised that same agency when they talk spontaneously with the researcher as one of them said -

“Nobody came to talk to us about the conflict.”

It was relatively easy to collect the data from the Bengali Muslim village as the women were willing to talk. For them it was like a vent when someone from outside village is listening to their plight. They were using their autonomy to talk about how they have experienced the conflict and how they survived it and managed their family.

Ethnicity was clearly a deciding factor in assessing the effect of conflict. The chapter shows that mutual friendship and trust between these two villages has been for over generations. That was reflected when they got assurance of protection from the VCDC members. However, their subsequent inability to protect the people of Sonai was considered detrimental for collective wellbeing for the group of people. Conflict was successful in putting a dent in the inter community ties. Bashbari people also became suspicious of their Sonai neighbours , when they ran away from their village. Since the people in both the

villages have been staying there for many generations, both the groups of people were reluctant to leave their houses.

Rumors played a big part in spreading that mistrust among the people of both the village. Firstly, it was rumor of Bodo people coming to attack Sonai village and secondly, it was rumors of Sonai people having bow and arrow and a possible retaliation.

The chapter shows that women in both the villages are not allowed to take decision however, one of the woman from Sonai village exercised their agency took charge of the situation and took the decision to leave early for the relief camp when entire village was still wary of it. Similarly, Asifa's agency came into play when she took up arms to protect her.

Adolescent girls are considered as vulnerable more so during the time of conflict. So, the people of Sonai village shifted their daughters to their relatives place but the choice of place was multi ethnic village/town which has lesser chance of getting attacked. However, adolescent girls from Bashbari village were never sent off. They stayed with their parents because there was no perceived threat to them initially.

Since, the people of Sonai village had to run away from their village to save their lives, their physical health in terms of injuries and bruises were more as compared to their Bodo counterparts. Similarly, their stay in the camps was more than the Bodo and their physical health was more vulnerable in those situations and consequently deteriorated more as compared to their Bodo neighbours. Further, they had to face the problem of accessibility.

As the resident of Sonai had to rush to the camp they couldn't carry their belongings .Moreover they were quite hopeful of returning to the village within few days and everything

was burnt down consequently. For the residents of Bashbari they took their bedding with them and left their belongings at home as men folks were guarding their village.

The fear of live that the people of Sonai had when they had to run for their lives was never experienced by the villagers of Bashbari. They never had to witness their village being set on fire.

Uncertainty in terms of returning to their village (*Bhita Mati*) started after the men of the village came to the camp and gave the news of village being set on fire. Whereas the locals of Bashbari neither had to leave their village nor had their feeling of leaving their *Bhita Mati*. This was a distinctive difference between people of both the villages regarding their experience about the conflict. This was the starting point of two distinctive experience of the people of both the villages which was pre dominantly based on their ethnicity.

Among the Bengali Muslim women there was a clear division regarding their idea of future life, where the elderly Bengali Muslim women were in favour of a possible retaliation and were completely against the idea of leaving their *bhita mati*(homeland) but for the younger generation of women it is the safety of their family members that paramount their concern and would not mind leaving this place if faced with similar situation.

However there was some similarity of their experience regarding women are categorically left out from decision making process but they both assert their agency at various points sometimes in aggressive mode and sometimes in a subtle way.

As both the communities' encountered conflict together their experiencing of encountering conflict was completely different. One of the communities was driven out of their village leaving their home and their belongings, forcing to live in the camp. The next chapter would focus on their lives in the camp.

Chapter 6

Life in the Camps: Women's health and well being

After the people of both the communities encounter conflict the people of Sonai had to leave their village and stay in camp. The people of Bashbari also stayed in the camp but for a shorter period of time. Their experiences of conflict are predominantly shaped by their stay in the camps. Thus this chapter focuses on capturing their lives in the camp. The chapter is divided into four sections the first section tries to bring out the experience of staying in the camp for women of both the villages. The second section emphasizes predominantly women of Sonai who were shifted to Aambari- an island. The third section concentrates on bringing out the experience of adolescent girls of both the villages. The fourth and final section tries to bring our attention towards shift in their livelihood options owing to conflict.

6.1 Life in the camp

After the women from both the communities had to leave their village owing to conflict, they had to take shelter in the camp. Separate camps were opened for the Bodo and Bengali Muslim population. For the women of Sonai, their stay was much longer than the residents of Bashbari. Their total stay in the camp was from 3 – 6 months depending upon whether their land is registered (*medi*) or unregistered (*khash*). For those whose lands were not registered, had to stay another 3 months in the camp. Whereas for the Bodo women of Bashbari, they shifted to the camp only when the situation worsens. Most of them stayed at the camp for 2-3 days only and that too only at night. After that they were asked by the local All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) people to go back to their home as people from far off villages were going to come.

During their stay as refugees, the Sonai peoples were shifted to many camps from time to time. They first stayed at the Bamunguri camp, their stay at the camp ranged from one night to seven days depending upon when they arrived at the camp. The camp was

opened at Bamunguri high school and the camp was closed after the re-opening of the school after the summer holidays. The people in the camp were mainly from their and the neighboring villages. The people in Bamunguri provided them with food, water and floor mat to sleep. They felt secure at that place as it was pre dominantly a Bengali Muslim area. Clearly, more than acquaintance it was ethnicity that was the binding factors for them. That was the month of Ramzan and most of them didn't had food when they reached the camp, so the local people not only provided them with all the necessary amenities, they also assured them of protection. This assurance of protection from any attack made them feel safe at Bamunguri.

“I remember when I reached the camp I was among the last batch of people who people reached the camp. I got bruises as I had to crawl between paddy field to save myself. When I reached the camp t was already 4-5 and there was no doctor in the camp. It was locals who came out and helped me .They gave me water to drink also. I cleaned the wound and someone came up with a torn peace of saree to tie around the wound. Next day when the doctor came to the camp I received medical treatment.”

People in the camp didn't have any serious ailment and whatever minor ailment they had, got treated in the camp itself as the doctors and nurses visited the camp regularly. They mainly got treated for the bruises that they get while running away from their village .

From the next day onwards people the government provided them food. At the camp they only got food items in relief material as rice, beaten rice, pulse, salt, sugar or sometimes they got cooked food as in *kichuri* which, most of the time was half cooked. Apart from that, all other things were provided by local people of Bamunguri. So the food items were both dry ration and cooked food as well. All the men at the camp stayed at the corridor of the school building whereas the women and the children stay inside the room. So, many of the men slept on the floor.

“Some of us reached early at the camp. The local people at Bamunguri came to us asking about the situation of our village. I told them that before the start of any conflict we came here. They also told us that the situation would become normal within one or two days .On the first day when we reached there we didn't get any food. The local people asked us whether we had food or not. Upon enquiring, they gave us food and water.

After one day more people from the village came to the camp and they told that the situation at the village is very tense and they had to run to save themselves. The men followed the next day. The local people also came to the camp for discussion and they told us not to worry and assured us that the entire area is Sonai area and they would provide us security. Since these people were not carrying anything belonging to them, the locals came forward and gave bed sheets and thatch to be spread on the floor. They also let us use their bathroom. They even guarded the area. Although we were worried in the camp, but we knew that we were surrounded by our people and we won't be attacked. We got full support from them.” (Rehman Bi)

The camp at the Bamunguri was mainly opened for people of Sonai village and all the Muslim people of the neighbouring villages. They mostly knew each other. The fear from unknown was also reduced when they are surrounded by known faces. It also gives them an assurance of co-operation even when they are out of their village. They didn't feel left alone as everybody was known to each other.

“Every morning we would talk amongst us, about our future, what would we do. Nobody had any idea about anything. How would we re start again? We had so many questions. The local people would always come to enquire about us. They would always console us. Whenever they would see us crying they would send their ladies to talk to us. Sometimes they would also come with food items like puffed rice or flat rice . I remember when the last batch of people came from the village the local people came asking us whether they have any clothes or not. They really helped us. ” (Rehman bi)

The local people came up to support them by various means. They regularly distributed dates and water to them at the time iftar. As the local people are also not very financially sound but they made sure that their religious practices are not interrupted. As the conflict happened during the monsoon/ summer season these people would sometimes go to the local people's place to relief themselves from the heat and humidity.

“We regularly went to the local people's house at the afternoon. As the fans in the school were not working properly plus there were so many people. So we would go the neighboring people's house and sit under the fan. Our husbands charged their mobile phones at their place as there were no sockets for mobile charging in the classrooms.”

As the summer break of the Bamunguri School was nearing over the camp at the school was closed and the people was informed accordingly. The Bamunguri camp was nearer to their village whereas the new camp that were to be shifted was quite far and staying at Bamunguri camp still made them feel nearer to their home.

“There was murmuring in the camp that the camp might be closed down. The government’s people who came to distribute food told us that the camp will be closed. Along with that the local people also told us that the school will reopen, so we will be taken to somewhere else. But nobody was sure when and where we would be shifted. So after few days they told us that we would be sifted to Bapupatti but that was not the official announcement. So official announcement came after few days when the government official came and told us about the shifting and timing of that shifting.” (Rehman Bi)

The information of being shifted to another camp brought another set of worries and another set of uncertainty. Returning to home looked like a distant dream. As Salima Akhtar (pseudo name) narrates

“Sitting on the truck we were moving away from our home, literally and virtually”

From there, they were shifted to Bapupatti for a period of one month. The Bapupatti camp was also opened in a higher secondary school. They were shifted to the camp on a truck. The camp at Bapupatti was bigger one and was already crowded by people from different villages under BTAD. People from this village had a tough time adjusting at the camp. As the camp was already filled with people from other villages, people who came later on couldn’t find proper place. They had to sleep on the floor. The male members slept on the corridor whereas the women and children were adjusted in the class rooms. Some of the people who carried bed sheet spread that on the floor. As the people around the camp were of same ethnicity familiarity grew among them within a short time. So, after few days they got some thatch from the neighboring people which they spread on the floor to sleep.

“The neighboring people didn’t come to meet us initially as they came in Bamunguri camp. There were already people in the camp. All the spaces were occupied; they were not ready to give up any space. A quarrel broke out between the us and them. Finally some people intervened and made us understand that we all have to live here together. So, it’s better if we all adjust a little bit. After few days men from the neighbouring houses asked our men about our village and where did we come from. ” (Nafisa khatun)

The camp was very dirty and chaotic especially when they would get food. Since there were many people from different villages, sometimes they would push each other to get the food first. However people from same village were lot more cooperative. Though this was for initial few days but once the acquaintance grew, people became cooperative. People tried to get as much food items as possible because the more they get the more they could save. Everybody in the camp would eat half meal so that they could save it for future use. They would use that ration afterwards, as their source of livelihood was destroyed. Since its women's are entrusted with social reproductions so, she would be the one to eat at last and the least. Recalling that sahida said-

“I was so worried about how we would survive. So like everybody tried to store the food (dry ration) as much as possible. But we(women) have to ensure that there is food in the kitchen. We will tell the men what we need in the kitchen and they will get it. Men don't know anything about kitchen. They are not supposed to know as well. So as women as a mother I had to eat at last after everybody in my family has eaten. So if we have one piece of biscuit I gave it to my children or husband .Sometimes I just had one palm full of puffed rice and water.”

These incidences represent the desperation of the Sonai people about destruction of livelihood option and how they were forced to eat less in order to subsist till they get an alternative source of livelihood. A narration given below exemplifies how difficult it was for these women to get confronted with the reality-

“amar nijer dhaner jomi ache r akane ami line er dariye achi bhaat er jonno. Ami ki chilam r ki hoye gelam. Ghar chara ta bhul chilo. Er pore Jodi abar arkom kichu hoi ghar charbo na. morle akane morbo kintu koi ak ta k mere morbo.”

“While standing in the queue for relief material I felt disgusted about myself I had rice field and here I am standing as a beggar. My biggest mistake was leaving my home. Next time, if something like this happens I won't leave my home. I will also give it back and will die here if I had to die.”. (Aliana Bibi)

This non-availability of food had an obvious effect on women who were specifically in need of nutritious food. There were two pregnant women in the Bengali Muslim village. They were in the camp at the time of their pregnancy. They had to rely on the food provide at

the camp. Usually during the time of pregnancy, women are supposed to eat nutritious and sufficient amount of food. However, in the camp, they only got *kichuri* without any vegetables and sometimes that would be half cooked. Sometimes they would be provided with dry food like beaten rice and puffed rice. They would eat less so that they can save more for future. So neither their daily requirement of food nor their nutritional requirement for those days were full filled. This tends to have serious consequences on pregnant women. So, they kept the dry food along with them and whenever they would feel hungry they would take one palm portion of that and gulp down with water. Their intake of food was not to fulfill their daily requirement of nutrition rather it was just sufficient to satiate the hunger. So as case Monuara Begum (*Pseudo name*) narrates

“I only knew that I don’t have to remain hungry otherwise it will affect my child. Whenever I would feel hungry I would take out one handful portion of puffed rice and eat it with some water.”

The women had problem specially using the bathroom, which was shared by all the people staying in the camp. The bathrooms were *pukka* but it was used by all the people in the camp .So initial few days it was clean but after that it became very dirty and nobody came to clean it. Narrating about the problem of the bathroom Kulsum states that -

“We went to neighboring people’s bathroom to relief ourselves. The neighbouring people were from our community and they understood our problem. They offered us to use their bathroom or else how could the daughter’s and daughter-in-law use those dirty toilets. They kept us like cattle there should have been someone to clean the toilets. It was so embarrassing to use the toilet of unknown people. I lived in my village for more than 40 years; I came here as a bride before that I was at my parent’s place. Never ever have I used a stranger’s bathroom to relief myself”.

The overcrowding at the camp especially at the *Babupatti* camp and the water supply would be twice daily and with many people using the same bathroom there would be shortage of water. This would make the bathroom very dirty. This condition made the absolutely non usable for women especially for menstruating women.

“The bathrooms were so dirty. We sometimes went to use people’s bathroom, those who were staying near to the camp. They were our people. So they helped us. We normally use clothes but in the camp there was no place to dry the clothes so we won’t change cloth for the entire day. And we would dry them under our sarees, so that no one can see. Usually at home we have a separate place at the backyard where we dry those clothes. But in that crowded camp this was impossible. The water supply was also not sufficient.”
(Monoara Begum)

Sanitary napkins were provided to them in the relief package but those were not enough as only one packet was provided to each of them. Disposing those used napkins was another problem in those crowded camps .As the notion of shame is very much associated with that. It is usually regarded that used pad should be disposed of separately from other garbage. They usually stuck using the clothes which they got by tearing their old saris.

The cases of diarrhea and dysentery were very common there. On top of that there were no medical facilities in the camp .In the absence of any appropriate medical facilities, people resorted to self-medication and sometimes took help from quack. For self-medication, they bought medicine from the local medical shops. Money for availing the services of quack was either their own money which they carried at the time of leaving their village or borrowed from relatives specially the natal relatives of the women. As has mentioned by Rahima bano -

“My husband had jaundice at Babupatti camp and there were no medical facilities. They did not have money to take him to doctors. My mother sent some money for me and I bought some medicines from the local medical shop for her husband.”

Rest in the camp was also very difficult, since rest is very important for a patient to recover along with medicine, so it took long for them to recover in the absence of proper rest. As in case of case Ruksana (*Pseudo name*)

“ I had fever at the Babupatti camp. I think I got fever because of tension about the future . I was tense about what would happen next. I went to see a local private doctor, but I couldn’t get proper rest during that time as she had to sleep on the floor with no proper food .I ate whatever was given at the camp and most of the time I didn’t feel like eating. I got well after 3- 4 days but the weakness continued, on top of that I could not sleep at night because

of tension about our future. Along with that the camp was overcrowded and it was very hot during that time.”

For the men in the camp, they had to sleep outside the room .Most of the time they didn't have anything to spread on the floor. The situation aggravates in case of someone who is ill. As case Rehman bi narrates -

“As the Babupatti camp was over crowded, and only women were staying inside the room .My husband had to stay outside the room even during jaundice. No one was there to take care of him and I could only take care of him in the morning, at night he would be on his own.

People had to sleep on the floor, some of them did carry bed sheet which they could spread on the floor whereas some of them got thatch collected from people around the camp. In this condition since it was impossible to get proper rest and some of them went to their relatives' place in case that is accessible. For instance case Rukhsar had fever and she took medicine from the local shop but her condition started deteriorating with no proper rest and food.

“I was sent off to my relative's place in Babupatti we consulted a private doctor there, primarily there was no government doctor and secondly the availability of government doctor is quite far off and it was not considered safe to travel via road for long distance. My husband had some money, which he got working in the agricultural field in Kajalgaon. My doctor's fee and medicines were bought by that money. My husband stayed at the camp whereas I stayed at the relative's place. We can't miss out on the food items.”

Although maximum of them didn't have any resort other than staying at the dirty camp but those who had, also couldn't use that option. As all of them had lost their livelihood option and staying at some other places would means losing out on the relief material that would help them to survive for some months till someone of the family gets an employment opportunity. As ration was distributed on the basis of numbers of member in the family so unless and until there is some serious health issues, all the members stayed at the camp, like in case of Manoara she was pregnant at the time of conflict and had to stay at the Bamunguri camp for three days but she got fever there. So from there she went to her relative's place at Babupatti because it was thought that she will be better taken care of at a

relative's place then at the camp. Here again the decision to send her back was taken by her husband. After she got well, she went to stay at Babupatti camp for 1 ½ months. She was called back by her husband to Babupatti camp. Her husband went to her relative's place and fetched her.

“We consulted a government doctor there. I got proper food I ate full meal. I took proper rest. But I was also worried about my husband. What he might be doing. Although I was sent to my parent's place but I was called back as soon as I got well. My husband called me he said we are missing on the food item. So I had to come back. We didn't know when my husband would get a job again and we don't have any family fortune also. We already lost everything in the conflict. ”

Similarly, many women who were either sent off or went to their relative's place by choice had to come back to the camp for the ration and the relief material. As their source of livelihood was destroyed so it was thought that the ration might help them to survive till they get their alternative source of livelihood. In total they stayed in the camp for 3 months. Even though this arrangement was extremely difficult for women who had specific medical condition like pregnancy or for those who have small children but they didn't had any other option to ensure their food for their uncertain future.

But for Rohima, she had to come back to the Bamunguri camp after staying at her sister-in-law's place for one day despite having a mentally challenged husband. She was informed about the relief material by her sister-in-laws who were staying in the camp and were asked to come to the camp as she was losing out on that, moreover the camp was about to close down and people were about to be shifted to Babupatti camp. Although it was very difficult for her to take care of her husband in the camp because both would not be staying together at the camp and her husband had the habit of wondering away. In her case, her brother-in-law would always keep a track of her husband in her absence. As in the Babupatti camp men and women were staying separately, the women couldn't be with the men to take care of them. The women could only come to see them for a brief period of time as there would be other men in the veranda and the men could not go inside as the rooms are shared by females. This arrangement created a situation where other men had to step in as the care

giver of their fellow male members and women got partially relieved from their role of care giver, as long as the sick member is a an adult male. As Rehman bi's husband was not well

"...I requested other people from our villages to take care of him at night although I wasn't with him and I was worried for him but I would doze off at night. Had it been at home I would have to be at his side for entire day."

Safety of the family was most important for them, followed by the livelihood options and children's education never came to their mind. Most of them couldn't sleep at night at the camp. Nobody was sure about their future. As illustrated by Fatima, she had a baby of few months at the time of conflict.

"At the end of the day I would often feel emotionally drained. At night sometimes I would sit with my child in my arms as it was very hot and humid and the child would not sleep. I would simply stare at the sky through the window and would cry. If other inmates are awake they would console me but nobody knew if we would ever be able to come back to their village."

The conflict not only interrupted people's day to day life. It also disturbed their religious practices and that also paved a way for dissatisfaction among the women towards the conflict. As Aliana Bibi narrates

"Although we were given food in the camp but I could not keep roza during my stay at the camp. So far as I remember this is first time I have not kept roza. I really felt very bad I am doing a gunah by not keeping roza. During those days I only asked for forgiveness to allah for not keeping roza and pray for our safety. "

From the Babupatti camp people were divided according to their land holdings. So, two lists were prepared, those who have registered land were brought back to the village under CRPF security and there was a CRPF camp set up in the village. Those who don't have registered land were shifted to *Aambari* which is an island or *char* .They had to stay at *Aambari* for almost six months.

The pain of leaving their home (*bhita mati*) is reflected in all their narratives along with that an uncertainty about their future, their place of stay and their livelihood options was also visible. The idea of retaliations also stream from these and this was displayed when the same people who were very confident that they won't have to leave their home, were ready with packed bags during the 2014 electoral violence. Thus all these factors were considered as having negative affect on their well-being.

Meanwhile the Sonai people who were staying in the camp were divided according to their land –*Medhi* land (Registered land) and *kash* land (unregistered land) .Those people having *Medhi* land were brought in first. People who had *kash* land were initially settled in *Aambari char* (Island) -. They stayed there for six month. They were given ten bamboos and plastic sheet to build their own tents and were also provided with rice oil and salt. So, everybody would be staying in the same tent and cooking would be also under the same tent. They had to sleep on the sand with thatch spread over the sand; they didn't have any bed sheet.

Thus, economic consideration and loss of their livelihood with assurance of future livelihood was one of the core issues to define their well-being. This was further exaggerated by the type of landholding. As there was news that people with registered land would be taken to the village first. This means that those who would be left out had to loom in two uncertainties- one about their return and second about their livelihood. This entire struggle for survival and forced leaving home had also affected the women emotionally specially those who had unregistered land. For most of them returning to home started appearing a far dream.

Since the entire village stayed in the same camp for so many months, they knew that they have a support from their neighbours . In case of any emergency 'their people' would help them. But when the list was made on the basis of types of land holding, there was an uncertainty about "what would happen now ?" That uncertainty was from both the groups of people-people who were to be shifted to the island didn't know what to expect

In a clear contrast to the experience of the Sonai women, the Bodo Women never had to leave their homeland. Whereas the women of Badhbari village only stayed at night in the camp while in the morning they stayed at home. After an early dinner at around 3:30 P.M all the female would assemble at one place and would go to the camp. A camp for the Bodo people were opened in Bidyamandir higher secondary School situated in Salguri village, which is next to their village. A concrete road connects the village to the school.

Absence of rest was more visible in case of Bodo women as they only stayed in the camp at night. They didn't left for the camp at the beginning of the conflict or even after everyone from the neighbouring Bengali Muslim village have left. It was only after the neighbouring village was attack and set on fire that they left for the camp. The camp for the Bodo people was set at Bidyamandir High school, which is next to their village. So, before going to the camp they had to do all the household choruses and in the camp they couldn't sleep, out of fear and discomfort in the camp.

“We were the first people to go and stay in the camp. All the women of our village went there together. But it was so hot and humid and we had to sleep on the floor and everybody can't sleep under the fan. It was so uncomfortable nobody could sleep properly. ”
(Mira Brahma- Pseudo name)

Back at home in the morning they had to do their household chorus- their household works are considered as necessary for their normal functioning of the family. They stayed there for two –three nights and all those nights none of them could sleep. Even after coming back to the home in the morning the women had to cook, clean, fed everybody before they could eat. Consequently, they felt very weak. They would hardly get any time for themselves and before it become dark; they had to leave for the camp. Before they leave they had to prepare the dinner and fed everybody before they could have food. This condition was more difficult for women who don't have any female members to share the household chorus. As explained by *Phirmi* -

“I stay with my husband and a small girl child. My husband was at village guarding it along with other members of the village. We would come from the camp at early morning

at 4 A.M. I would be very hungry at that time. My husband would also come home at that time only. So, I would prepare tea for both of us. The child would be also hungry, because we would eat our dinner at 3-3:30 PM. She would be nagging. I have to give her food. I would feel so sleepy after that, but I had to clean the house. Sweep the courtyard. Then I had to prepare breakfast, but I would be so tired that I would not prepare rice for the breakfast, we had puffed rice with tea .Then I had to prepare lunch, since the market was closed down, so I had to collect something from the kitchen garden and then prepare the food. After all this I had to take care of the child also. Bath her and feed her as well. Then me and my husband would have lunch. After these entire household choruses, I would be exhausted. I would fall asleep while sitting. But, if I fall sleep who would prepare the dinner? Then I had to prepare dinner as well. Then I would again feed all of them. At the end i would not be able to walk to the camp. All exhausted.”

Whereas for women who have other female family members to share the work, they did get some respite from their daily duties and got some time to take a nap. As Nijwum narrates-

“I and my daughter –in-law both stayed in the camp. After coming from the camp, she would do the household chorus whereas I would do the cooking. Both my sons were guarding the village. So they also need to take rest. They would have food and would go to take rest. Whereas I and my daughter-in-law would finish off everything and then would take some nap after lunch. Then we would get up and she would prepare the dinner. After that we would go to the camp.”

Through the narratives of the women of both the communities it became clear that staying at the camp was a matter of great discomfort for everybody but the fact that the people of Bashbari didn't have to stay at the camp for long owing to their proximity to the camp. Along with that, their village was never attacked, also made their stay at the camp quite less. These factors clearly show that the women of Sonai had to suffer more in terms of physical health as compared to the women of Bashbari. With the longer duration of stay in the camp the associated physical discomfort was also more for the women of Sonai. Another absolute difference between the women of both the ethnic group is that, the women of Bashbari didn't have to sleep on the floor. Since they didn't have to leave the village at a hurry, they had the time to pack the essential items needed at the camp, which, includes bed sheets and bundle of *dokhna* to be used as pillow.

As explained in the profile chapter, most of the Bodo people have landholding much greater than their Sonai neighbors, along with that some of them had government jobs and consequently, their uncertainty of future and loss of livelihood is also not that visible in their cases. Although while staying in the camp, they did face a lot of problems but those problems were mainly because of crowded rooms in the camp and their fear of a possible strike back. Their fears were more for their family members who were guarding the village.

For the Bodo women even though they didn't have to rely on the food provided in the camp. But with the closer of the local market, their access to any kind of edible items was restricted and they had to solely rely on the home grown food items and poultries. So, availability of less food affects intra- household food distribution, with the women eating at last and least.

“As the market was closed .No buyers or sellers from other villages could come to the market whatever was available at our kitchen garden we cooked. We collected herbs from each other's garden and cooked that. We would cook rice, dal and just saag.”(Sopna Basumatari-Pseudo name)

There was a similarity in the narratives of Bodo women who were in need of nutritious food owing to their biological conditions and were running between their villages to camp, didn't get any food from the camp. As the nearest market was closed down owing to conflict they ate whatever is available in their kitchen garden. As Benu Brahma narrates her condition during that time, she had a baby on June 2012, so when the conflict started her baby was one month old.

“Since i was lactating i needed nutritious food and the market was closed and whatever available was very expensive, i could not get proper food. Sometimes i would eat rice with boil vegetables, sometimes it would be kichuri or rice with just salt and some mustard oil.”

The Bodo women couldn't sleep at night in the camp because it was very hot and humid during that time and there was no fan inside the rooms, neither can they use mosquito

net there. There were 30-35 people in one classroom. Since it was impossible to carry food in the camp so, they would only eat once they are back at home next day.

During their stay at the camp, neither they would eat anything nor would they use bath room because everybody was scared about a possible attack. Somebody from the camp would suddenly start screaming about loud cheer of people and everybody would run towards the adjacent field expecting of a strike. So as Sahila Brahma describes

I was not able to sleep properly at that time. I would wake up after every few minutes because it was hot and humid and also because every now and then somebody would start screaming and we would be running to the field.

The conflict not only disrupted their daily supply of food and rests rather the overcrowded camps, with hot and humid weather made many people fall sick. As there was new born child in the village who was just one week old and according to the mother, she and her child both had to suffer a lot owing to the conflict.

“My new born child got rashes all over the body after i came back from the camp but I am not sure why the child had those rashes. It took two years for the child to get well. For two years i had vegetarian food as prescribed by the doctor. According to her she got quite weak during that time, as she delivered just one week ago and was bleeding along with that, owing to the conflict, many days I only ate once in a day as I didn’t feel like eating.” (Riju Daimari)

The female members were not only worried about their own safety rather they were also concerned about their male family members. When the female members were staying in the camps the men were guarding the village, and the females would constantly call them to know about their safety. As Mamoni Boro narrates-

“I was also worried about my husband who was at the village patrolling. I would quite often call him and enquire about him. He would also call me to keep me informed. I mainly enquired about his well- being and whether houses in the village have been set on fire or not. I advised him not to stay alone in case they want to rest for a while.”

While leaving for camp, they left their belongings at her home only and didn't think much about them. Since, they returned on the next morning, they had enough time to move their belonging to safer places before they again move to the camp in the evening. So, those people whose houses were bordering the village shifted their belongings to other places, including sofa, bed and other expensive items. Whereas those people who stays inside the village left their belongings at home because the men were patrolling at night.

“When we were leaving our houses we knew that we would come back in the morning Moreover, the men were there guarding the village.”

After three nights staying in the camp, they were asked by the local ABSU volunteers to leave, as there were people from far off villages who needs to be accommodated. After they came back from the relief camp, those who had relatives in different villages and had access to move out (money and vehicle) went there and before doing that they had enough time to move their belongings to a safer place. As Sopna Basumatary describes:

“Even after coming back from the camp i was not able to stay at my home owing to the proximity of the house to the Sonai village. I stayed at my daughter's house for one month. My elder son went to Udalguri in the morning and the conflict started in the afternoon. My elder daughter-in-law was sent back to her mother's house in Kashigotra and my younger son dropped her at her mother's house. Since there was no fear in the morning so, she had enough time to pack her belongings and money before leaving for Kasigotra. They went to Kasigotra on a car and all the Sonai villages were empty as the residents of the villages have already left for the camp. He then took his wife and family to his in- laws house he stayed there for two days. The road to his in-laws house passes by Sonai village but the villagers had already fled to the relief camp at Notungaon , so he was not afraid to pass by that village. After two days he came back as all the men in the village decided to guard the village. My elder son who went to Udalguri (another district in BTR) was stuck there and couldn't return to the village for 20 days. After 20 days he hired a car and went to Kasigotra at his sister's place. While my mother-in-law who is almost 95 years old shifted at my sister-in-law's place .They left their domestic animals mainly pigs and hen at the house and no body stayed at home during night to take care of house.”

Kaveri Mushahari who shifted her belongings at a safer place elaborate on how they manage to shift .

“Since one the first day we all had to rush and we couldn’t move anything. After we came back from the camp on the first morning, we decided to move our belongings to somewhere else. My eldest son got Sofa, TV and Bed on his wedding .Both my sons shifted those to water station (pump station) quarter. One of our relative got the quarter but he doesn’t stays there. So we shifted everything there. One of the neighbor had a tractor, we put everything on that and took it there. After that we took our daughter-in-laws to their natal home on that tractor. They were brought back only when the situation improved. ” (Kaveri Mushahari)

Both Sopna Basumatari and Kaveri Mushahari were able to shift their family members and possessions to other places because they had access to money and vehicle along with that relative at places which were untouched by the conflict. Sopna Basumatari’s belong to the family which has the highest land holding in the village which falls under large category according to the agricultural census whereas Kaveri Mushahari’s family has a central government employee and medium land holding. Belonging to the families which can have access to move out of the village has spared them from the fear of life and the sleepless night that the rest of the villagers had to follow. Rest of the villagers had to stay in the village and experienced the life under fear of being attacked.

After three nights they started staying at their own village at night as they were they had to make way for people coming from other villages. The men continued with their patrolling duties where as women stayed together at night, So as case Riju Brahma narrates...

“After the dinner we would go to our nearby houses. We picked some big houses, where all of us could assemble. So we made some groups and few of us would assemble at one us whichever is nearer to our place. The other group would assemble at somebody else’s house, which was nearer to them.”

But everybody couldn’t go and stay at people’s place as Rukmini Brahma whose baby was few days old, point out, she went to the camp for the initial three nights but when they had to shift to their village, she couldn’t go to anybody’s house for the night stay. So, in

this case while the ritualistic restriction stopped her from staying at other's places at night. This also brings out how these taboos are so strong that it even at the moment of crisis these taboos needed to be maintain.

“I just returned from Nishitala civil hospital after delivering my second child when the conflict started. I came to know about the conflict from my maternal family. My maternal family also resides in BTAD but in a different district. After I came back from the camp, I stayed alone in the house at night because according to Bodo hindu rituals, I had to perform a puja after the birth of the child and I and my child are considered impure until the puja is performed . I could only perform that puja once i stop bleeding. Without conducting the puja people may not like me visiting their house when I am still considered impure. It is believed that I might pollute their house as well. That is one of the reasons why I did not go to stay at anybody's place during night although I was quite scared to stay alone at night. Even while going to the camp during night time, I avoided going through somebody's house. I was scared to stay alone at night, as my husband was out with the patrolling group. I would cling my youngest child with me and my elder daughter would be sleeping next to me, while I would stay awake all night. I thought if I had to die I would die at my own house. (Rukmini Brahma)

The Bodo hindus have two sect Bathou and Brahma. The Bathou worship a cactus shrub called as Shiju. According to Bathou rituals, after the child is born, the father of the child should perform a small puja before the child could be taken inside the house. The notion behind this puja is to purify the child .The child might be a Bodo in this birth but he/she might be a muslim or a santhal in his previous birth, so before entering into the house, the child need to be purified. The puja is conducted for that.

Although Rukmini didn't go to anybody's house at night but she did visit the camp and stayed there for three nights like others. She broke the taboo of impurity associated with the process of birthing and went to the camp, when she is not supposed to move out of her room.

Interestingly everybody didn't follow the order of ABSU volunteers who asked them to leave the camp. As narrates-

“My mother –in-law is a septuagenarian. She went to the camp with us for the first few nights but after that we stopped going to the camp, as we were asked to do so. But she

refused to go to stay at home at the night. Ultimately my husband had to take her to the camp but people from other villages who came to the camp after we left refused to share space with her. My husband was called by the Volunteers as my mother-in-law also refused to give up her previous space in the camp. My husband went and convinced the people in the camp and eventually she got her spot. She continued going to the camp , as long as the camp was functional.”(Phirmi Brahma).

As people in the Bashbari returned to their village a section of the people of neighbouring village still had a long way to go before they could come back to their village. The people from Sonai village who didn't have registered land were taken to an island named Aambari for three more months.

6.2 Staying at Aambari (pseudo name)

“Amra jokhon prothom jante pari amader k onno jaiga niye jabe. Kichu e bhujte parchilam na , kothai sai jaiga. Kew kew daikha ashche age oi char ta kintu amra kono din char e thaki nai .kemon kore thake char e kichu e jani na. Amra bhujte parchi na , amara ki r kono din amader gram e jete parbo na naki. Amader ki sob somai akane thakte hobe. Ki korbo , ki khabo. Koto din thakbo okhane. Beta beti kemon kore boro kormu. Kichu e bhujte partachilam na. Ami amar swami k ato jigailam o kichu jane na. jokhon amader truck e kore niye jai ami mone hoche amader bhobishor pura ondhokar. Truck e abar uthe niye k akdom sobji r bosta moton mone hoisile, akjaiga theke r ak jaiga khali paikari bazar e niye jai moton mone hoitachilo.”

“...tar por amader k niye namalo Aambari. Samne dekhchi nodir char. Ebar nodir char e kemon kore thakbo. Bhabchi amra ki sara jibon akhan e thakbo. Amar gram er kotha bhibha choke jol aya porchilo. Chan er ghar hole o nijer ghor r nijer gram e chilam akhan e ki kore thakbo. Kichu bhujte partachilam na. Char e haita jawa jai, haita gelam, sobai nijer nijer akta jaiga nilam . oi plastic r bash diya tent banailam. R truck to amader k namai chola geche...kew bolar o nai kowa r o nai ki kemon kore thakbo .tokhon khali akta kotha bhabchilam ki chilam r ki hoya gelam.”

“We don't know where we were being taken. We were told that we would be taken to an island to Aambari and that's all. How long are we going to stay there? How are we going to stay there? Some of us have seen that place, so they knew that it was an island. But we have never stayed in an island. How we will come to the mainland? When we were transported to the island , we had one tension whether we would ever be able to come back to our village. Along with that how we are going to survive there. We worked in agriculture there. What we will do. We had so many questions. I asked my husband, what are we going to do. My husband said he has no answer. We had small children. How are we going to raise them? I felt like a sack of vegetable being transported from one place to another.”

“...The truck brought us to the island and left. There was no one to tell us how to live ,what to do. We were standing in front of the island. Staring at it we were thinking what we had lost. We had thatch roof over our head at our own village and now we don't have anything. We walked to the island; occupied some space in the island built our tents with the plastic sheet and bamboo”. (Amina Begum)

After they were shifted to Aambari, they had to build their own tent by the plastic sheet provided to them. The women had to do all the household chores. In all their daily chores fetching water was a task. Although it was a river island but the river water was not considered fit for drinking. There was only one hand pump in the island. For those who had put up tent at a distance, they had to walk far to get water. The other most difficult part of their stay was using the bathroom. There were no bathrooms in the char. The women had to wake up early, before the menfolk, to freshen up. They would go together at a distant to relieve themselves. They also had to take bath before everybody else wakes up. In case a woman is not well, she had to walk far off to fetch water and as the day progresses the sand would get heated and walking on the sand during day become very hard.

During their stay at the camp collecting fire wood was the most difficult task in Aambari as there was no tree near their camp. They had made a makeshift oven with bricks for cooking. So, during thundershower when everything would be drenched they even had to sleep hungry. There was no bathroom and the women had to walk long to get water from tube well. But according to them fear of life was most at that place among all the camps that they have stayed. since that place was an island and in case of an attack they won't be able to run away. And that was the reason of tension for them. In the early morning they would go out alone since all the men would be sleeping. So all the women would assemble and then would go to the river side to relieve themselves.

“We would wake up before everybody else. We would also call each other if somebody is late and then would go together towards one side of the island to relieve ourselves. We didn't had any torch .Since the day breaks quite early here .So we would wake up at around 4-4:30. We can't go for the entire day. We would drink less water to control. We would go again in the evening and would ask some ladies to accompany us. We had to look around so that nobody is watching along with that shame; we had fear of any attack

also. We were very vigilant and careful. We would walk slowly, wont' make much noise at night." (Ruksana)

Once the men wake up, women won't go to the river side. In the afternoon they would again go together to take bath and the men would not go that side. At night they would not go out at all. It was particularly difficult for them during the menstruation. There was no option of changing clothes and sanitary napkins were out of question. Inability to change clothe for long hours sometimes would stain their clothes. They had to wash and dry clothes in front of men. This was a very big deal for them as the notion of shame and taboo associated with menstruation in our society puts server restriction on women during her menstruation period. But at the same time this difficult situation has helped women to negotiate some of the taboo related to mensuration. As Rehana describes -

"Although my tent was next to the tube well but it was very difficult for me during menstruation. I had to wash and dry clothes in front of men. I was ashamed initially but can't do anything about it. Anyways they are also married they also know about menstruation their wives also have menstruation."

Conflict also creates situation where women challenges many established taboo. Like the way they challenged the taboo associated with menstruation in Aamguri village. Like the women residing in the Aamguri broke the menstruation taboo .During menstruation they are supposed to follow certain traditions, the notion of seclusion is also associated with it. The menstruating women are not supposed to touch anything that is considered as sacred. They are not supposed to sit on the chairs that used by others along with restriction on cooking and entering the kitchen. However when they were in camps especially at Aamguri they didn't have any proper bathroom and since the notion of shame was associated with it. It was difficult for them to use bathroom in general and during menstruation especially as they had to go for bath before the crack of dawn as the men would be fast asleep then .But women need to use bathroom more frequently during menstruation period, so they rejected the notion of shame associated with that and would wash the clothes in the afternoon itself after the days works. So as Khadija (*pseudo name*) mentions

"...when we were staying at Bamunguri camp we didn't had much problem although we had to share the bathroom but the neighbouring people were also good they allowed us to

use the bathroom .However when we moved to Bapupatti camp it was a struggle for us to use the bathroom but at least it had a bathroom . But once we were shifted to Ambaris there was no bathroom. Initially we would go to one side of the island before the men would wake up. But it was really problematic during our menstruation. How would we wash our used clothes where would we dry them? We need to change it also. We can't keep it for the entire day. Initially it was difficult for us. Our saree would get stained, then we decided we would wash our clothes there was a makeshift bathroom we would change our clothes there and would wash in the river. Even if the men are watching, let them watch. We don't care."

They said they know that washing clothes in public or in front of men is a matter of shame but they also think keeping the cloth for long without changing might be harmful for their health. This breaking the taboo and the notion of shame shows how women took charge of things and changed it in the present situation . They would have never thought of challenging the age old taboo associate with menstruation if there wouldn't have been a conflict induced displacement . The new situation demanded them to give up some of their age old traditions and women responded to the new situation by exactly doing so.

Life clearly was very difficult for them in the island as they had to start from a scratch along with that some unexpected problems like rain, thunderstorm and heat during the sunny afternoons. They had to devise innovative ways to solve those problems.

Whenever there would be thunder shower in the region, their tent would be blown off and everything would get drenched, they had to run under the bridge to take shelter. Once the rain stops they had to build the tent again and that will be repeated every time there is thunderstorm. If the thunder storm starts at night they would spent the night under the bridge because everything including the sand and the thatch inside the tent would be wet. As Kulsum narrates her ordeal

"tufan hole amara sobai bridge er tolai douratam .Tufan er pore abar tent banate hoto.. brishti dile chula tula sob bhije jeto. Onek din amara rate kichu na khaeye ghumai porchi. Amar may ta tokhon choto ,o bhoi e amar dhore thakto. Tokhon mone hoto Jodi pakha thakto ,amon kono jaigai ure jeteam jekhane shanti ache.

“My daughter would cling to me out of fear and after the thunderstorm we had to again build our tent. Sometimes my daughter had to sleep hungry at night because everything was drenched inside the tent. I wish I had wings, I could fly to a place which has peace”.

Fever was reported quite common in the camp. Whenever there would be rain, they would get drenched in the rain, so to save themselves from the rain they had to run to the take shelter under the bridge. The men would run fast while the women would be lagging behind. Children would be carried by both men and women, the women would try to protect their children by covering their head exposing themselves to the rain. According to the respondents, mostly women had fallen sick because of that.

After they fall sick there is no medical assistance for them to recover. Along with that condition, they had to do all the household chores. The household chores include fetching water, cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes. Firewood would be usually collected from the twigs .Mostly, men would collect that. So, whenever, a woman got drenched and got fever, rest was something which was a distant dream. Neither her gender role allowed her to take rest nor she had the means to take rest.

At the *char* , they had to spread thatch on the sand to sleep and if they have bed sheet, that would be spread over the thatch. In case of rain everything would get thoroughly wet. Along with that during the hot summer afternoon the sand would become really hot, making it almost impossible to sleep or even walk on it. This condition was amply described by case Amina Begum (*Pseudo name*)

“There was thunderstorm one night and we all had to run to take shelter under the bridge. While running, I got completely wet. I can’t run fast like the men. Once the rain stopped, we came back. Erected our tent, but everything was washed out. We couldn’t cook anything. I had kept some puffed rice, which we got at the camp . We ate that and slept on the wet thatch. I spread a sari of mine on the wet thatch. The sari also got wet eventually. Next morning I got fever. But I had to do the normal household chorus. It was sunny; My husband spread the wet bed sheet on the tent to get it dry. I had to cook, everybody was hungry. So, I woke up and cooked some rice and dal. We had made a makeshift cook stove by bricks .I had to walk a little bit to fetch drinking water. I had fever, body pain. If I don’t do it , who else would do all these? Even after cooking, cleaning utensils I can’t take rest. The thatch was

wet yet. My husband had put it under the sun to dry but it takes time to dry. I had to sit on the sand even in that fever.”

So after every bout of thunderstorm some of their belongings would be blown away. They had to search for those belongings and then recreate their tents. Sometimes they would find them sometimes they would get it next day. They had to do this exercise every time there is a thunder storm.

With no medical facilities provided to them, accessibility was a big issue at Aambari. It was an island, so even if the conditions are considered serious enough by the family members to consult doctors, neither they had money nor they could arrange any vehicle to take the patient to the nearest hospital. Even if they could arrange money from their relatives staying in some villages arranging a vehicle is absolutely impossible and the gravity of the situation can be understood when a women had to deliver a child in the island without any medical help.

Along with all these they also had a constant threat of attack as there was no security in the Island and in the initial few days they would wake at the slightest of the noise at night. That was an island area and in case of any possible attack they would not have been able to save them .They didn't have anything to protect them as well and there was no patrolling by anybody at night as well.

While going through all these difficult times, they would have a constant comparison with their past life in the village and their neighbours who had been shifted to their village. As some point out that they wanted to register their land once they go back to their village but they don't have money. They bought these unregistered land as they are cheaper as compared to the registered land and now again because to that they are here in the island. A narration by kulsum brings out the vicious circle of poverty that they are in-

“amader biyar somoy ora bolchilo oder kash mati aache .amar baba raji hoye giachilo.kokhono arkom kichu asubhida hoi nai. Ora bhabta parenai j arkom kuno din o hobe ato din kono karo asubidha hoi nai. R kash matir daam kom amader teha nai jonno kash mati kinechi. Aye pora por somoy jante parlam j medi patta r kash jomor modhe ki parthoko. Amader list banalo oi camp e r jader medhe patta ache oder age niye aylo geram e amara poire thaklam. Tar por kosutala niye gelo. Jokhon tufan hoto bridge er niche palaitam. Akdom kanda beir hoye jeto. Amarder teha nai tai medhi patta mati nai teha thakle amara o geram e thaktam ajke. Aikhane koto din thakte lagbo ki koire khamu kichu jantam na. jara geram e aache odra amader theke bhalo ache. Arkom tufam hole bare bare palaite lage na. amra phone kore khabar nitam okhane duida ghar thig chilo sobai okhane thakto rate r, songhe CRPF pahara o chilo. R nijer geram e thakle akta shanti lage. Nijer bhita maati teha na thaleo .”

“At the time of our wedding my in-laws family told us that they don't have registered, as everybody knows that the price of the unregistered land is less than the registered land. So many people in so many places have unregistered land but they never had any problem. So, my father didn't consider it as a problem. Even after my marriage till now we never had any problem its only now that we are facing such problem. We first realized the difference when we were segregated in the chaper camp according to our land and then when we were first brought here. It was an island with sand only. Every time we had to rebuild our tent after the storms, we would cry thinking what have we done, why we are paying price for all these. If we had money we would have registered our land and because of this we are here and we don't know when we will be able to go back to our village when we will be able to earn something. Staying at your own village is always better than staying somewhere else even though you don't have money or you are not earning anything.”

Thus this clearly shows that daily lives of the people at Ambari were a struggle merged with uncertainty of future and total diminished livelihood. The people of Amguri had not only given up hopes on returning to their village there was a general uncertainty about everything- about life, about livelihood , about their children's future . As women are entrusted with the task of recreating their daily lives, here also women recreated their daily lives in a completely changed environment. Thus it was clearly the women who had to bear the brunt for the normal functioning of the family.

For the people of Sonai daily struggle for survival was a reality specially for those shifted to Ambari. This struggle took a toll on their mental health as well

“Protek din sokale chok khulle erkom mone hoto kew jano dhuwar gola mukhe marche. Sokale uthe bhabtam ato lomba din karte hobe r aye gota dine ki jani ki hobe. Raate ghumate jwara somoy mone hoto akta din sesh holo. Koto din rate bhoi peye uthe jetam.”

“I would open my eyes and feel as if a smoke ball has hit my face .Every day I would wake up and there would be a general sadness. I have to spend such long day. Before going to bed I would thank god if nothing untoward happened that day. Many times I woke up at the middle of the night felling sacred.” (Salma Bibi-pseudo name)

Fear of unknown was so real and persistent for them. This fear of unknown became more prominent at night.

The village had two pregnant women at the time the villagers left the village for the relief camp. Their experience of their stay at different camps specially the Ambari Island was deemed to be very different from other women. The next section would try to narrate their experiences of their stay at the island.

6.2.1 Reproductive health

Women who were pregnant at the time of conflict had to undergo a lot, due to conflict. Firstly they had to run away from their villages to save themselves. Secondly, they were under nourish because those who were staying in the camp had to rely on the food provided in the camp, which was anything but nutritious and the diets were often devoid of any kind of vegetables, and for those who were brought back to the village also didn't have access to nutritious food because of closing down of the local market. Along with that, rest, is also one component that was missing in general for all women but pregnant women who are in special need of that didn't get in the crowded camps. But the same crowded camps gave them respite from household chorus. Their need for regular medical check up and immunization was also disrupted. Plus, an accompanying fear for life was all through their journey. But the experience of child birth without any kind of medical assistance perhaps is the most daunting. Rohima was one of the two pregnant women in the village.

“I was already 6 months pregnant when I went to Bamunguri camp. As long as I was at the village, I would visit doctor and the ANM would also visit us regularly. At Bamunguri camp, the doctors would visit every week and i consulted the doctor there. As long as i was there i got medical facilities like iron folic acid tablets and ANM would also visit our camp but the food that we got in the camp was not good. Some time it would not be properly cooked. I had to manage whatever food I got in the camp. Nutritious food or not don't know, what they provided us I ate. Many times i would get beaten rice/ puffed rice and had to rely on them for my lunch and dinner. Since it was summers and the camp was very crowded i could not take proper rest. I would feel very hot at night, couldn't sleep properly at night .I felt weak during my entire period of pregnancy. After one month when i was shifted to

Aambari camp, the real struggle started from there. We were given bamboo and paper to build our tent. We were provided with rice, salt, oil, beaten rice along with bamboo and paper. The relief materials were provided per head. So i knew that i had to manage with those materials as long as we are here. Many times I and my husband won't eat fully; I didn't have any kind of vegetables during that time. I never got any nutritious food during her pregnancy. Along with that i had to do the entire household chorus alone.

I was also very scared to stay there as it was a char area and in case of any possible attack we won't be able to run.. My husband erected the tent from the material given to us . We made a makeshift cook stove and cooked whatever ration we got at the camp. Tube well was at next to my tent, so i didn't had to walk long distance for drinking water. But the area being an island, had sand which would heat up at noon .It was unbearable hot for me and many times i had fallen sick because of heat. In the afternoon neither i could stay inside the plastic tent nor could I go out as there were no trees in that area. During her advanced stage of pregnancy i had to wake up many times to relief myself and since there was no bathroom, i had to walk a bit far. I would wake up my husband to accompany me. Once there was a thunderstorm and everybody ran to take shelter under the bridge. I could not run and had to walk till the bridge, by the time me and my husband reached the bridge both of us were totally drenched. Many tents were blown off by the storm along with ours. My husband had to build it again I had fever the following day. I did not get any medical facilities there. I didn't take medicine either, as everybody suggested that at this condition I shouldn't take medicine without consulting the doctor.. My labour pain started at night and my husband didn't have any money at that time to take me to any nearest health service system. My husband called his sister-in-laws along with other women in the tent helped me deliver the baby. I delivered the baby under the sky. There was no hygienic condition; my placenta was removed bare hand by women who conducted the delivery. It was later buried somewhere at the char. The umbilical cord was cut by a razor; fortunately it was a new razor. The child was wrapped by a new saree that one of them had got in relief material.

Although the camp was there for 8 months but I stayed there for 2 months. After my delivery, I went to my parent's place, as they had registered land they were already brought back to their village. The child got immunized only when i went to my natal house after two weeks. I didn't have any idea whether I and child were under weight or not. After I went to my natal house, I had proper food with vegetables. My husband stayed at Aambari because in case of any relief material being given they might miss it. Although I had to go to my natal house but i was very concern for my husband. Every time the phone would ring i would get scared. I was in a constant dilemma during my stay at her maternal house. I was constantly worried about my husband's security because if something happens to my husband, my children's future would be hampered. But my husband can't come and stay with me or else we would miss out on the relief material which is crucial because my husband was not earning at that time. Neither can i stay at Aambari with a new born child which had a very difficult condition.”

As mentioned above, Rohima had to stay in the camp during her entire period of pregnancy because her parents were also staying in some other camp, along with the concern

of loss of relief material. These concerns made her physically vulnerable during pregnancy. Although this situation was quite similar for both the women but for Kulsum, her maternal village not being affected with conflict helped her to take shelter there, but that too only after they were shifted to Aambari. She stayed in the camp till they were sent to Aambari, primarily for relief material and secondly, the condition in Aambari was quite bad without any access to any medical facilities along with that the frequent shower which is common during the summer season. At her natal home she had proper medical facilities along with food and rest. She also got institutional delivery as well. However, the uncertainty about the future and her husband's stay at Aambari made her anxious for which she couldn't sleep many nights. As she narrates-

“I was already 2 months pregnant when the conflict started, when I and my family went to Bamunguri. I registered myself with the ASHA worker at my village. But once the conflict started i had to go to Bamunguri where i stayed at my parent's place for the initial few days after which i went to stay at the camp. One of the reasons being the relief material and the other one is the availability of health personals like doctors and ANM at the camp. I and my family thought that if i stay at the camp i will get regular medical checkup. As long as i was at Bamunguri camp i got regular medical attention but in between I had fever at Bidyapur when I was staying at the camp. Although I got medical facility in the camp but since the camp was too dirty and I had to sleep at hay, I went to my relative's place at chikmik. But once we were shifted to Aambari, there was no medical facilities and it was thought that I should be with my parents at Bamunguri where I can get better treatment and care for my delivery. During my stay at camps, I was provided with beaten rice, kichuri, which many times was half cooked. I wouldn't often eat the food provided in the relief material because I had to save for future needs as we didn't know when we would go home or when my husband would get a job. Many times I would not feel like eating and would vomit every time if I would eat anything. I didn't get any nutritious food during my pregnancy and often had to half eat whatever she would get in the relief camp.

After we were shifted to Aambari we had to build the camp from bamboo and paper and it was very hot to stay inside the tent during afternoon. I had to sleep on the thatch spread over sand. Uff!!it was so pinfull. I cooked whatever I had saved from our earlier stay at the camp. Collecting firewood was another problem as there was no tree near by the camp. So, my husband would go to collect firewood. During storms at Aambari our tent would be blown off and we had to take shelter under the bridge. After which we had to again build the tent. Since i was pregnant I could not run. After the first storm, my husband decided to send me and our daughter to my parent's place at Bamunguri.

I went to Bamunguri at my parents place on bike, which my husband borrowed from someone in the camp. After I went to Bamunguri I got my ANCs and my delivery was conducted in the subcentre. My parents told the ANM that it would be very risky to take me to the civil hospital in Bongaiagon, so they would prefer the subcentre for her delivery. They requested

the ANM to conduct the delivery there only. After the delivery, I stayed at my mother's place for 1 month after which my husband and all other people staying at Aambari were shifted to the village. So, I was also brought back to the village from my parent's place."

Both Rohima and Kulsum begum were the two pregnant women in the village at the time of conflict. Both of them had to walk till Bamunguri to reach the relief camp. Both of them had their maternal house at Bamunguri even then they stayed at the camp because if they stays at her maternal house, they will be missing out on relief material, which might help them to survive in the later part as there was uncertainty regarding livelihood options

In both the cases access to health service system along with access to nutritious food and availability of medicines were a big issues and in the absence of this they were at the risk of many complications. One of the respondents (Rohima) didn't have any idea of baby's weight. However, their experience of giving birth in the context of conflict varied because of accessibility issue. None of their husbands' were able to afford any medical treat for them or could take them for institutional delivery. On top of that Rohima's parents were in the camp and were not in a position to help her. Fortunately, for Kulsum her natal family's condition was better off and they could afford her medical expenses. That affordability of services brought whole lot of difference in terms of their place of delivery, their access to ANC, nutritious food and proper rest. Thus, affecting her chances of getting institutional delivery and post-delivery care.

Although pregnancy brings lot of taboo regarding the work and food but in those taboos were not practiced while staying in the camp. As case Rohima narrates-

"When I had our first child I was told by my mother-in-law and my mother to eat good food. I was told to eat ghee and non-veg more often. I continued doing the household choruses till my last month but it's only that I stopped lifting heavy weight during that time. I would ask my husband to carry bucket of water from the well. After my delivery, I only had milk and sago pearl as it was considered that till my wounds are not healed properly, I should have that only. Along with that I was not allowed to come out of a room for one month. But during the second child neither I was able to eat good food not I was able to follow any restriction post-delivery. I had to lift heavy weight during my stay at the camp.

When you are staying in a camp in an island you can't escape all these. There was no scope of following any rituals at all."

Women's agency here means what women did for the survival of their family in conflict times. So whether it was feeding the family with the ration , saving her own or deciding to leave early for the relief camp when the entire village was still reluctant to leave. Women's care giver role for her family was stretch beyond the premise of her family to accommodate the new role for her community. The Bengali Muslim families, they also used their agency when they came together for helping a woman deliver her baby at Aamguri .island. As Aamguri is an island the chance of getting any medical assistance is obscure. So, all the women in the camp conducted the delivery of a pregnant woman who went into her labor one night. Speaking of the incident one of the women said that since they all were staying in the camp together they knew about her pregnancy from the beginning. They would enquire about her well-being always. They all were worried about her since she can't even go to her maternal home also.

"...When her husband couldn't arrange any vehicle to take her to the hospital, we all had to step in. Her husband informed the sister-in-law and we all went to her tent. She was in pain and we decided we have to do it although none of us trained in it but most of us have children, so we had some idea. Immediately one of us went to get hot water, somebody got a new razor from her husband one of us got a new a new pair of saree that we got in relief material. My mother in law conducted the delivery and we all assisted. We didn't know at that time who got what because it was such a chaos; everybody was running around for something. The men were also anxious but they couldn't come near. Finally the baby was delivered and it was only later on that we came to know who got what."

Even now when we remember the birth of the baby we all laugh, as she is growing up we joke around that we will tell the story of her birth to her in-laws also." (Salma Bibi)

6.3 Adolescent girls

There were quite a few adolescent girls in both the villages, and they encountered conflict in a very different way. With the grown up adolescent girl , the families' priority is to ensure their safety .No double safety and security of each family member is a concern but grown up adolescent girls safety is govern by her vulnerability of conflict related crime like

rape , molestation etc. Thus, different measures are adopted by the family members to ensure her safety.

Sahida's Daughter stayed with her parents at the Bamunguri camp, but she was sent to her aunt's place in Sonagoan (Pseudo name) as the condition in Bapupatti camp was very bad. There were no bathroom facilities as such; she had to take bath after 2-3 days and that too at local people's residence. There were no sanitary pads and she had to use clothes during her menstruation which had to be dried and sometimes they were not even dried properly. Since there are menstruation taboo and shame associated with it, she could not let the clothes dry under the sun. She had to dry them inside the camp, as male members would be staying outside the room and women and children were staying inside the, so she had to dry them inside the room. Non availability of bathroom made it extremely difficult for her during night. Especially during her periods, she could not change at night. She had to wait till morning and then go to some local resident's place to change and wash clothes.

"...yes I was scared but since we all were together I wasn't that scared. But more than scary it was uncomfortable in the camp. Specially during periods. We got pad at Bamunguri camp but it didn't last for even a month. The neighbouring women were very good they allowed me to use their bathroom and when I ran out of sanitary pads they tore their saree and gave me to use them. Then, they also showed us place to dispose off the used pads. As most of my friends were sent to their relatives place ,so I couldn't discuss all these with them and I had to ask my mother .Even she didn't know what to do. Finally she asked the neighbouring women and they showed us a place to dispose all the used pads/clothes. had problem in changing. As nights were scary we won't go out. Even the bathroom in the camp didn't have any electricity. Our parents didn't allow us to go out even to relief ourselves. My clothes would get stained and had to take bath and clean before everyone wakes up. My mother would wake her up early. So when the news of the shifting of the camp came , my parents called my aunt and send me to her place. Since my aunt's place was not very far off. My cousin brother came to pick me up ." (Sahana-pseudo name)

Even though sending off one family member means losing out on the relief material, the parents didn't mind letting go off the relief material. This act reflects how much concern the safety of their unmarried daughters is.

Nurbano's eldest daughter was 16 years at that time. She was sent off to her aunt's place. The family was to be shifted to Aambari and it was considered safe to send her off to a relative's place. Aambari is an island area, which was considered as a vulnerable area in case of an attack. Her aunt stays near Nishitala town. Her place was not affected with conflict.

After her family came back to the village, she was not brought back to the village immediately; she had to stay at her masi's place for quite some time. Finally, when she was brought back to her village she was not allowed to go to the school for almost 6 months because, the road to the school passes through a Bodo village and even though she goes to school on a bicycle, she was strictly prohibited to move beyond the village. As a result of all this restriction she had to miss one whole year of her school.

“When my parents came back there were no houses in the village except two of them. They all stayed in those two houses at night. My mother called me to inform me about the condition of the village . When I came back I realized my books were also burnt and my parents didn't allow me to go school for six months. I lost one year of school. So when I went to the school next year I told my situation to my teachers and they asked one of senior to lend me her books. My teacher got some copies and pen for me also.”(Faisa –pseudo name)

Omeda Khatun's daughter have two teen aged daughters both of them were at school at the time of conflict and they were sent to their maternal uncle's house at Nishitala district, that place being a multi ethnic town had minimum chance of ethnic conflict according to them and was considered safe . That's why it was considered as a logical option according to them to keep them at their maternal uncle's place rather than at the camp.

“our daughters were brought back to the village almost 2-3 months after our family shifted to the village and when it was considered safe for them to stay at the village. But they were not allowed to go to their school as their school was in Notungaon town for which they had to go through Bodo village. None of her friends have joined the school after the conflict .We also didn't allow them to go out of the village for anything.” (Omeda Khatun)

The girls usually walk to the school in groups. They missed their school for one year. They were not allowed to go outside the village and bath in the river flowing next to the village. Even the boys didn't go to the Basundhara market for 6 months - which is the nearest market situated in the next Bodo village. Instead they went to Notungaon market in a group of 10-15 males. The boys went to their school after 6 months because they have bicycles.

These three narratives explain that girl's safety was predominant concern for their parents and to ensure that, most of them were sent off to their relative's place at various point of time. The decision to send them to relative's place was taken by their parents and it was mainly adolescent girls who were transferred whereas sons stayed with their parents. It was perceived unsafe for them to stay at the camps by their parents. Some of them were sent at the beginning of the conflict whereas some were sent off from the camps, after they had some problem while staying in the camps. Whereas, others were shifted before their families were transferred to Aambari.

All the girls were shifted to their relative's place in multi ethnic Nishitala town. That town being multi ethnic had minimum chance of ethnic conflict according to them. That's why it was considered logical to shift them at Nishitala rather than any other nearby town. So, they were made to stay at their relative's place even after their parents were shifted back to the village and were only brought, once their parents were fully assured of their safety. Even after they were brought back they were not allowed to go out of the village for almost six months, a very strict gendered control was exercised on them. As a result of such control the girls had to miss their school for six months and for that they couldn't appear for exam which means one year of academic loss. Further, the girls were also not allowed to go and take bath in the river which flows next to the village- which they usually do. Even the boys missed out on school for quite some months but eventually they joined their school as they had bicycle and the girls usually walk to the school in group and the school is in Notungaon town for which they had to cross Bodo village.

Along with restricting the movement of adolescent girls, another way of ensuring their safety was to get them married as soon as possible. Although early marriage is quite common in the village and girls usually get married at 15-16 years. But post conflict in 2012, their concern for getting their daughters married was to ensure their safety and to those locality which have multi ethnic population, which reduces the possibility of an ethnic conflict in that place.

So, Maimona Begum's eldest daughter was already married at the time of conflict but her second daughter was married off in 2013 as it was considered best to ensure her safety. She was only 15 at that time. Her schooling was stopped midway because of her marriage. Infact when they were at the camp, they called up their relatives at Nishitala asking them to look for groom for their daughter. So, as soon as they came back to the village, her marriage was fixed with a guy from neighboring Nishitala district and the nikah ceremony was conducted within six to seven months of their shifting to the village. As she narrates

“Everybody was sending their daughters to their relatives place but we didn't have any place to send her. My eldest daughter was also in a different camp along with her family .We had to ensure our daughter's safety. If something happens to her who would marry her. Our daughter would become flawed. That is when we called our relatives in Nitishitala to look for a suitable groom. We wanted to give her to someone who stays in the town. Nishitala town has people from all community so it was not affected with conflict. After few weeks they called us informing about this guy who has his own e rickshaw. We thought this to be a good prospect and confirmed the wedding.”

“After one month of shifting to the village they came to see our daughter. Fortunately our house was not burned down. So we were able to host them. They liked our daughter and fixed the date of the wedding .It was big relief after that. So during the 2014 conflict we worried about ourselves but we were also relived that our daughters are married and safe. ”

During one of the field trips Maimona Begum's daughter came to her natal home for visit and the researcher had a chance to talk to her about her experience of staying in the camp and how conflict brought changes in her life.

“I stayed with my parents throughout the camps. I was never stayed at my relative's place. But I had many problems in the camp. I was very uncomfortable especially during

menstruation. Changing clothes was a big issue. The bathrooms were dirty there was no electricity in the bathroom. Although neighbours were very good they allowed us to use their bathroom. As we moved to the bigger camp at bappupatti the real struggle started there. Firstly staying with so many strangers was a big problem especially with so many men. I really felt uncomfortable. I told this to my mother I think my parents discussed this and then told our relative to look for a groom for me. ”

“...Before the conflict I was studying in the school. I was supposed to join school after the summer break. But my schooling was stopped during the time of conflict and after we came back I got married. I never returned to school. I wanted to pass my matriculation exam but that never happened. Usually girls in our village get married in school only but I never thought this will happen to me so early. After marriage I moved to a town I am happy there. My husband is nice guy. My in-laws took me out to the town in his e rickshaw. I really liked the town. It has big shops and my husband promised me that he will take me there during eid. ” (Sonu Khatun- pseudo name)

Clearly from both the narratives that the most reliable way for assuring her safety is by getting her married- a notion which is internalized by the girls as well. Education or having a career never figures in their list of priorities.

As stated earlier for the women of Bashbari they didn't have to stay in the camp. But once their neighbouring village was set on fire, they had to rush to the camp; they realized their village is also under threat. However, their stay in the camp was only for few nights, therefore they didn't sent their daughter's to anywhere. Only two families were able to shift their family members and furniture to different locations of BTR which were not affected by the conflict.

For the Bodo girls, although they stayed in their own village but restriction on their movement was also imposed on them. They only moved out of their village in groups. But as the perceived threats among the Bodos were less, they didn't take the measures adopted by the Bengali Muslims. As their school was next to their village which was turned into a relief camp so, the school remains nonfunctional till the relief camp was there. Consequently, the students missed their school till the re-opening of the school. After the reopening of their school the girls didn't miss their school owing to their proximity of their school to their

village. However apart from going to school they were subjected to other sorts of restrictions specially at night.

“We were allowed to go out to meet our friends after school but we were not allowed to go out of our house after dark. Our fathers were out guarding the village and we would be at home. The entire situation was so scary for us even we didn’t want to go out. However after the people from the neighbouring village came back and our parents stopped guarding the village we were still not allowed to go out at night. Earlier we used to go to our neighbour’s house even at night. During summers we would stroll on the roads at night during power cuts. ” (Bina Brahma)

These narratives of the adolescent girls show that among all the section of women it is the adolescent girls who are considered the most vulnerable and to ensure their safety they not only had to face a gendered control where her schooling and going out of the village even for recreations were completely stopped.

All these gendered control on women especially among adolescent girls, were well informed how women’s bodies become a weapon in war. Women are often seen as the cultural bearer of the community and controlling their body and sexuality then becomes a means to ensure the honor of the family and community. Women’s body then becomes more than a biological entity. It is then seen as the most valued possession of the community, as her body will be the bearer of the next generation, she will pass on the culture to the next generation. Ironically all these very notions make her the most vulnerable in the community. And unmarried adolescent girls then become easy targets not only for assault and rape but also for abduction and forced assimilation. Violence on women’s body in the context of conflict is not just a means to hurt the victim rather injuring her purposively is to give a strong social and political message to the opponent.

6.4 Loss of livelihood option

Conflict not only affected the social fabric of the communities and instilling a sense of fear and anxiety in the people rather it was also responsible for the loss of livelihood. Agriculture

is an integral part of their life for both the communities. As maximum of the Sonai people either have their own land or work as agricultural laborer, so missing out of work during sowing and harvesting season affects their yearlong earning. People there only grow one crop in a year and the yield decides their earnings for the entire year. The conflict started at the month of July which is a peak sowing season and some have just finished sowing or were still in the field, in between suddenly came the news of the conflict. When the final news of people coming to set their village on fire arrived, some of the people were still in the field. They had to run for their life.

“Somebody came and said that people are coming to set their village on fire .They were still working on our field, all of them ran away. Some of them ran away leaving behind their slippers and umbrellas. They had to stay in the camp for so many months .We didn’t get much yield. We were also not able to pay them much. They came back after so many months, even after coming back we were not meeting them, they were scared, we were hesitant. Ultimately, we gave them money but we know the money wasn’t enough.”(Misimi Boro-pseudo name)

The crops were left unattended at the field which didn’t give much yield. This affected both the communities. For the Sonai, maximum of the population is dependent on agriculture and that was their sole source of earning, while for the Bodo’s agriculture was a source to substantiate their earning. Maximum of them rent out their land (Adi) as they are engage in some other form of job. They are supposed to get the money at the end of the agricultural season but conflict has disrupted these cycle as well affecting their earning , hence they were forced to look for some other means for their survival.

So, again in this case, for survival the Muslim people had to sell some of the rations along with bamboo from their garden to get money for other expenses. Along with that they kept the ration for one month which was pulled to two months and the worst sufferer of this arrangement was the Sonai women because its women who is taught to eat at last and less. So, in this situation where they have to save ration for their future use, owing to their uncertainly of livelihood, it’s the women who ate even less. As their main livelihood options i.e agriculture is destroyed, some of them resorted to being laborer at construction site but

they were mere reduced to the level of being a helper and hence were earning meager. But they preferred to go to Notungaon as the road to that town didn't pass through Bodo village.

“We didn't have any other option .Someone from the next village already works there, they told us that the contractor needs people as the helpers who were working couldn't come to work because of conflict. So I went there and started working. I merely got 200 per day but that were ok at least something is better than nothing.” (Mahsun Ali)

For relief material they got twenty thousand followed by thirty thousand rupees in relief. But that amount was not given immediately. They first got twenty thousand and then after one year got thirty thousand. But money doesn't last if it is not replenished and in this case also the money didn't last for long. As the compensation amount which was given was not enough so initially some of them were staying under the plastic sheet and some had make tin houses. However after some months their houses were constructed by Jamat-e Islami hind – which is an offshoot of Jamat-e-Islami. But for the Bodo population since, they didn't had to stay in the camp as their extent of loss was not much, so they didn't get any compensation.

As the profile chapter showed that the Bodo people had government job and agriculture in most of the cases merely act as a subsidiary occupation .Even the land holding is better than the people of Sonai .Thus, for the government employee they got their salary every months and for those who were dependent on agriculture and had lease out the land had to work on their field themselves with the help of family labour only.

This arrangement did affect the agriculture and the yield was less as compared to earlier years. Getting a tractor for hire or buying fertilizers from the town market, everything got impacted. Even while harvesting also, the lack of human resource did create a problem. But owing to the fact that most of the agriculturist had subsidiary occupation therefor the loss in agriculture was compensated by their subsidiary occupation. Their condition was never as bad as their Sonai neighbours. They never had to struggle like the Sonai people to make the ends meet.

Owing to the conflict, the local market was close down. The local market is frequented by people of other villages as well. People who are other than Bodo-they are both sellers and buyers. With the onset of conflict, everybody stopped coming to the market apart from the Bodo people. As a result the usual business went down in the market for which people who were dependent on the market for their earning had to incur huge loss.

“Both my sons have business and owing to the conflict the business at the local market were no very good, they had to incur huge loss as they had to sell pork at 2000 to 2500 which usually sells at 10000 to 12000rs. Business in the local marker could not function for almost two months as the local vendors could not come to the market. The vendors at the local Basundhara market are both Sonais and Bodo people. It was only the local Bodo people who could go to the market during that time to sell and buy products and the local Bodo people also could not go to Notungaon market as the road passes by Sonai village and Basugoan market is pre dominantly at the Sonai area. Everything in the village market became very expensive, one of the shopkeeper was even got beaten up for over pricing the items. Sellers from other villages could not come, neither the buyers from other people could reach the market especially the muslim villagers from the nearby village couldn't. It was only the Bodo people who came to the village.”(Hiya Brahma)

Some of the Bodo vendors who came to the market sold vegetables at inflated price. One of the shopkeepers even got thrashed for overpricing. For some of the people who were jobs and had to commute daily, even they had to miss their offices for almost one month.

Here again the impact of conflict in terms of loss of livelihood was more among the people of Sonai and the consequent desperation among them to secure their future in whatever means possible. With the start of the conflict till their stay in the camp, it was their ethnicity that was the most prominent fact which decided the consequence of the conflict among them.

The chapter gave a distinct picture on how women of both the villages experienced their lives in the camp. Within the women of Sonai village a further distinction in the experiences was visible owing to types of land ownership. So those who didn't have registered land had to stay few more months at Aambari , which is an island. This also made

a visible difference about their lives in the camp. The chapter also captured the experienced of two pregnant women who stayed in the camp. Adequate attention was given on showing the adolescent's girls experience of the conflict. The effect of conflict can't be limited to its physical and emotional consequences only destruction of livelihood is also a notable impact of conflict.

However to capture their experience of conflict completely, it is important to see how the women reacted once they were shifted to their village. What consequences of conflict they had to face once they came back to their respective villages. The next chapter would try to see what were the difficulties faced by the people of both the villages once they came back to the village-difficulties in terms of physical health and its impact on emotional well-being.

Chapter 7

Returning and rebuilding lives

After coming back from the camps the people from both the villages had to rebuild their lives. This chapter focuses on their struggle to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of conflict. How women from both the community silently reconstruct the family lives will be the focus of this chapter. The chapter is divided into sections as (i) coming back to the village (ii) meaning of conflict (iii) post conflict scenario .

7.1 Coming back to the village

People who had registered land were, transported back to the village on a truck. They were cramped in the truck they already knew that their village has been burnt down but they were not sure whether their house has been burnt down or not. As put down by Anwara-

“While coming back by truck I was constantly praying to Allah that our house should not be burnt because if they burnt our house we won't have anything. Our sons have already lost their job and if we lose our house we won't have anything. It was a relief to see that my house was not burnt down.”

The first view of the village itself was very disturbing. According to them it looked like a cremation ground and tears rolled down their eyes. People started howling and crying looking at their village. Some of the people whose houses were completely burnt off, they built their houses with plastic sheets. They even built a makeshift bathroom using bamboo and plastic. It was difficult for them to stay inside the tent during the day because it would become very hot and humid. The situation acted as a catalyst for those who already had some medical problem. As Morina Bibi's (Pseudo name) narrates-

“My husband is in his seventies and had high pressure. He can't sit inside the tent so for the entire day he would take shelter under the trees. Fortunately, the village has a lot of trees in every house and alongside the roads as well. He would regularly wash his face and

mouth with hand pump water. We had electric pump before the conflict but everything got stolen. ”

Similar kind of narrations was found among many elderly people of the village.

The absence of proper facilities for rest was especially detrimental for women. They had to do everything considered necessary for social reproduction and after doing that they were not able to get rest. The burden of social reproduction has obviously increased for them in the changed situation.

“After we came back to the village we had to start from zero. Everything has changed. We had to clean the courtyard. Everything was burnt down. Nothing was left, not even the broom to clean. We made a broom from the branches of the tree. Then we didn’t have cylinder but we have to cook we have to feed our families. Didn’t know what happen to that. But we made a make shift oven. Some of us had some utensils left so we shared. So whatever we were left with we shared it with our neighbours. So somehow we managed.(Sonai Hussain)

So the biggest advantage of coming back to the village is that they can get twigs, herbs and vegetables which grow in the village alongside the road.

A CRPF camp was set in their village and there were only two houses which were intact, so all the people who were transported back stayed together in those two houses at night. One of them was a bigger house and the CRPF camp was set in her compound, so maximum families stayed at that place. The presence of the camp was not only a security assurance for them but also for the neighbouring people of Bashbari, who had already shifted to their village but were reeling under the fear for their life.

Al though the entire village of Sonai was divided according to the types of their land holding, but the starting point for both the groups of people were same. They all had same questions in front of their eyes ‘How to start their lives?’ The hardship that they faced in rebuilding their lives was because of their present situation but that would take them back to their earlier life before the conflict.

During rain they would either run to those two houses or would take shelter in some half burnt house. As Reshmina Describes

“My bathroom was not burnt down so whenever there would be rain, we would run to take shelter inside the toilet. As everybody can’t fit inside the toilet, the children would be inside the toilet I would be at the door and my husband would be just under the shade.”

Some houses were totally burnt down some were half charred and for those lucky one’s whose house were not burnt down their belongings were missing. All the expensive things including warm clothes, pets were missing. As Mamoni Begum describes -

“My house was not burnt down but all my belongings, my utensils were stolen. My chickens were not there. She was relieved to see her house. I think some of the chickens were also eaten by the CRPF personal in her village. But I didn’t mind that as long as they protected them.”

When they returned, the CRPF camp was already there. Although it was a relief to see the camp as the presence of the camp assured them of safety. The people at the village spent their night at those houses which were not burnt down especially at Mamoni Begum’s house since the CRPF camp was in her vicinity. In the morning they would return to their tents .

After staying at Aambari for 9 months the second batch of people of Sonai were shifted to their village. The initial experiences of the women were quite similar to those people who were first brought to the village. Their first encounter was not as traumatic as their counterparts who had been shifted to the village. They already knew about the situation as they would get regular updates from their neighbours

“My husband would call our neighbours over phone to enquire about the village, so we already knew what we are going to see. It was only on phone that he got the news of relocation to the village. He said people in VCDC had told that we would be taken to village soon. We were so elated. The happiness to be able to go to our own village is something that we can’t explain. If we can go back to our village , we can start working or we can think what to do, how to do. Where to being with but going back to the village is the first step.”

As explained earlier the pain of leaving their village (*bhita matti*) was more among the older generation of women similarly to be able to come back to the village also more among them. However, their happiness is not because they can now think of a livelihood options, or the future of their children. They have separate reasons to rejoice-

“When my son told me that we might be moved back to our village, I was so happy and finally when government people came and took us to the village, I was assured that I will die in my village only. I always wanted this; if I would have died somewhere else I won’t have rest in peace.” (Khadija)

Migration not only involves change in the physical environment, it also includes rupturing /breaking of bond associated with the place and to the identity based on this place

Once they were shifted to the village, they had to re-built their tents and their lives like their predecessors in the village.

“As our houses were burnt we had to rebuilt our tents here as well but staying in our village is much better than the camp. We feel much safe and secure here. Our people are here .We don’t have to walk far to get water. We don’t have to walk in the heated sand .Although our gas stove was stolen but firewood is also easily available. We can go to clean bathrooms. We can go to bathrooms during periods. We don’t have to think twice before going to the bathroom. We can dry our period clothes at our backyard now. It’s much better than Aambari.”(Rehana)

Once they were back, their one uncertainty was resolved i.e their chances of returning to the village. However another uncertainty still remains there. The support that they got once they were in their village considered favorable for their wellbeing. Their predecessor helped them to build their tents. They guided them in this changed lifestyle. The villagers in Sonai were following a particular routine like finishing dinner early and going back to those two houses at night.

Staying in village also means access to clean bathroom and clean drinking water. Unlike the camps where sometimes they had to skip bathing because of scarcity of water and

unhygienic bathroom here in the village they are able to get those things .The availability of those things in their made them count their life better in the village al thought their houses and belongings were still missing.

The residents of Banshbari came back after three nights of stay in the camp. After coming back e two families sent had sent their daughter-in-laws to their natal home or to some relative's place. These two families had access to move out (money and vehicles) and have relatives at other places. Out of these two families one of them had the highest landholding in the village which falls under large category according to the agricultural census. The other had government job and medium landholding. These families also shifted their belongings to a safer place as well. Their houses also had boundary walls making them much safer as compared to their neighbours. Others had to stay in the village as they didn't have any resort.

When the people of Sonai village were brought back, life was almost back to normal for people of Bashbari. However the local market was still receiving less seller and buyers .The local VCDC office which was functional but was not frequented by people of Bengali Muslim communities. However they were in touch with each other over phone. Women from Bashbari village were going to the weekly market in the nearby town in a group.

Sonai people were still avoiding the local market, next to their village. The women of Sonai didn't come out at all. The CRPF camp which was set up in the village was also removed after few days of their return from Aambari. Till the CRPF camp was in the village, there was an assurance that there won't be any attack from either side. All the movements of people were because of the assurance of safety by the presence of the camp.

But all these changed after the people from Aambari were shifted to the village and the CRPF camp was withdrawn.

“One day we saw people from Aambari being brought to the village. We didn’t think much about that .But after few days we saw that the CRPF people were also leaving .We called each other’s to inform that. Everybody came out of their house and saw the jawans leaving. We discussed what would happen now. Subsequently, the men decided that they will guard the village as they were doing earlier and women and children would stay together. So we followed their instruction.”(Rani basumatari)

After the camp was removed, men from both the villages started patrolling their respective villages. The women had a very similar routine in both the villages. The men would have an early dinner followed by women and then everybody would assemble. The lights would be switch off and nobody would go out to relief them- they would wait till dawn. For the initial few days nobody would talk. For the people of Bashbari they assembled at five houses. Whereas for the people of Sonai it was only two houses .Women of both the villages sleepless nights were common, worrying about their husbands. The men however, would take rest in the morning after their patrolling duties, but for women their daily choruses need to be done. So for women in both the villages, they would have to continue doing their daily duties. However, for the women of Sonai village it was more detrimental because most of them didn’t have a house and those who have doesn’t have any boundary wall. It is a common practice in the villages not to have boundary walls in the house.

.In case there would be some movement of torch light at the backyard of their house at night they would get scared. If one of the women would notice some kind of torch light at the backyard she would wake up others as well and then rest of the night they won’t sleep. The initially few weeks after the CRPF people left the village was the scariest most.

“Oi din er kotha bhable gaye kata diye uthe . Ki din par korlam baap re baap . Khali alla re daktam. Oi CRPF camp choile jawar por geram er purush ra meeting kore bollo j ora geram pahara dibe r amar oi duita bari te rait e thakum. Aage aage to ki bhoi korto. Sondha howar loge loge sob thana , accha sokale tao manush er much dekha jai kintu sodha ki bikaltheke mon kharap lagto r songhe howar loge loge na maush er much dekha jai na awaz suna jai. Khali jhi jhi pokar daak.”

“...raite bhat khawar por amara sobai joma hoitam. Ato bhoi lagto ,mone hoto peran bair hoyajabe. Jader chudo chudo sawa silo mai ra bhuker bhitor niye boisha thakto. Amar

zure zure kotha koite dor lagto. Kew acche naki baire mone hoito. Aye bujhi aylo kew . dom dondho kore boisha thaktam.”

“Remembering those days gives me goose bumps. After the CRPF camp was shifted from the village. The men of the village again had a meeting and it was decided that they would guard the village while we would continue staying in the two houses at night. The first few nights when the CRPF camp was removed were very scary. Right from the sunset we would feel sad and scared. We could at least see people’s movement in the morning but that would stop complete as soon as the sun sets and so is the human voices. After the sunset we won’t hear any human voices only cricket chirping sound would be audible.”

“...So, after dinner when we would assemble at our neighbour’s house, we won’t talk to each other, we would just whisper. We were even scared to talk. Those who had small children at that time would hold them close to their chest.” (Khadija)

After the CRPF camp was removed everybody in the Bodo village got scared. Fear of a possible assault started gaining. Strict vigilance started again and women, who were a bit relaxed by now, had started staying together at night again- a practice which some of them have stopped after the CRPF camp was set up. Their sleepless nights also started again.

“So as long as there was CRPF camp in the next village , we know there wouldn’t be any attack but we still guarded our village. But once the camp was removed, the possibility of an attack was quite clear. So, those who went back to their house after few days had to again come back and assemble at one house for the night. Any torch light movement at the backyard would scare us.

...So, there is this sawtali village and they would do fishing at night near the pond and their torch light would fall in courtyard .On the first night we got so scared that we all started screaming as if somebody is going to attack us. We were only ladies and we thought somebody might have got to know that we ladies are staying at the house. But after we started screaming, the sawtali boys also got scared , they also started screaming and told us that they are only fishing here..” (Pujara Brahma)

Although there was some movement of people from the village but they still prefer to avoid the road leading through the Bodo village so when Sonia Hussain’s husband was suddenly fainted one morning, it was a task for them to arrange a vehicle for him to take him to the hospital . Once the vehicle was arranged they preferred Nishitala civil hospital rather

than Dimara hospital. For arranging the vehicle they had to sell off a portion of their relief material.

“My husband suddenly fainted one morning .He was standing outside the tent and I was swiping the courtyard I saw him falling down. I rushed to hold him. I started screaming and calling people to help. My neighbours came for support and we laid him gently down on the bed. My neighbours suggested that it might be because of blood pressure and we should take him to hospital for checkup. But we don’t have any vehicle in our village. We can’t take him on a bike. My neighbours called someone from neighbouring village who has a tempo, but he was not willing to take out his tempo . Finally my neighbours somehow managed to convince him to take us to the hospital on the condition that if it gets late, he won’t come back and in that situation we have provide him food for the day. We agreed as we didn’t have any options. Then we sold off some of our ration from the relief material to pay for the expenses. The tempo driver said that he won’t go to Dimaracivil hospital as the entire stretch of road passes through Bodo village and the road is quite secluded till it reaches the National Highway. So we agreed upon Nishitala civil hospital. It was quite far off from our place but a very small part passes through Bodo village .So, the risk of any kind of attack is also quite less in that road ultimately we took him to the civil hospital at Bongaigaon.” (Bilkis Begum)

Almost same narrative of fear is visible among the Sonai people. As long as the CRPF camp was there, the men of the Sonai village didn’t have to guard their village. After the CRPF camp was withdrawn and the men in the village started patrolling at night the women started staying together.

For the people of Bashbari, the shifting of the people of Sonai brought back their fear of being attacked. As soon as they were brought back, whatever small movement of people has started earlier stopped completely. They again started to live in confinement. Post evening nobody would move out. Although they were still not guarding the village as there was a CRPF camp but they were vigilant.

The local market although was closed down but some time few vendors from the nearby village would come but not on daily basis. So the prices were quite inflated moreover availability was also as issue. So, they prefer the Notungaon market. The women’s routine

was pretty similar that they were following after being shifted to the village. They also had restricted access to food but that was because of closing down of the local market rather than any affordability issue. Fortunately for them, their belongings were intact and they didn't have to do any extra household chores. Their houses were also undamaged so they didn't have to undergo the hardship that their counterparts in Bashbari went. Rest was same as earlier. They did feel an underlying fear because of the overall situation of the region. However having entire family members together specially the men was a big relief.

“Yes we were a little bit scared but since we all were together and the men were with us so we were bit relaxed. We carried on with our daily routine and daily life.”

The moving away of the camp brought back the fear of life which was till now a subtle reality of their life. The fear of being attacked brought back the notion of women as weak who needs to be protected and men the worrier and protector.

As decided by the men, The men had dinner by 7- 7:30 P.M whereas the women would eat after that and then they would go and assemble at somebody's house. Even then they won't sleep and would stay awake whole night and would only doze off at dawn. Throughout the night they would switch off the lights . Nobody would go out to relief themselves as because bathrooms in the village are usually outside the main house. Only the children would sleep whereas everybody else would be awake. While the men in the village continued patrolling for two months the women stayed together at some one's house for all those period. The fear of attacked was also aggravated as most of the houses don't have boundary walls. In this situation the possibility of attack from any sides increases. Along with that fear, they all were worried about their family members who were patrolling the village.

“How could we sleep? We were here and our husbands were guarding the village with only sticks. If something happens. If somebody attacks, we keep calling them, instructing them to be together. After few days we discussed among ourselves that CRPF camp is in next village. They would protect us. We discussed this with our husbands they also agreed but told us that

we can't solely rely on them. CRPF camp is there no doubt but we can't just go to sleep off at our homes.” (Riju Brahma)

Recalling those moments *Nijwum Brahma* mentioned

“We went to Raju Mushahari's place and there were other seven women along with their children .Once the light goes off the children would start talking or they would create noise. They are not used to sleep at 7. We would hash them but they wouldn't listen. Sometime we would slap them or would scare them by telling them ghost stories. One of our neighbor had one year old kid. She would make him sleep at home and then would take him, otherwise he would get so cranky”

Coming back to the village they had to do all the household choruses. The men would also return to the home tired after patrolling the village. They would go to take rest whereas women would be cleaning the courtyard first, followed by cooking the breakfast and then cleaning the entire household and washing, preparing lunch and then they would get some time to relax in the afternoon. Soon after that they had to prepare dinner. This repeated exercise drained them of their energy. Making them feel sleepy and weak in the morning.

Later on some of the women from both the villages started staying at their own house at night. They were getting tired of this schedule of constantly moving to others houses post dinner. However, They didn't stop going to neighbour's house suddenly; rather they started it slowly, like staying at their tent for one or two nights consequently, then again going to their neighbour's houses for few days. Even those two houses were crowded as all the women in the entire village was staying in those two houses.

As the Sonai population has seen maximum destruction, their emotional outburst after seeing their village for the first time after the conflict and the subsequent struggle for survival was observable in their account of the incidents –a plot which was missing in the descriptions of the Bodo women. However, fear of attack from the other community was quite visible in the narratives from both the villages. Fear which got manifested by reinforcing patriarchy, It reestablish men as the protector and women as protected. So, the men took the charge of

guarding the village whereas the women stayed together at night. Strict gendered control was imposed on them as women of both the communities stopped going out of the village. Along with that women of both the communities were very anxious about their family members when they were out at night patrolling their respective villages.

The conflict was successful in reinstalling the idea of women as vulnerable category that needs to be protected. That resulted into many gendered control like restriction of movement for women from both the communities to go out of the village. These restrictions which were imposed on them after the Sonai people were shifted back to the village. Before that, elderly women from the Bashbari village did go out to the Basugoan market as the nearby market is closed but after the Sonai people were shifted back, even they were denied to go out. These restrictions had negative consequences on their well being. As women from both the communities are now robbed off their opportunity to meet each other, which was their only recreation after their days work.

“We used to go to their home to collect saag, they never stopped us from doing that but now we can’t do that. We would always meet at the field in the afternoon. We would chit chat, some of them would come to take back their cows. But after the conflict we can’t do that we could only see them from distance.” (Shefda)

Similar sentiments were narrated by women of Bashbari as well

“Although we never visited their houses, they would come to our house to collect herbs and leafs, our children would together at the field in the afternoon while we would chat. That was our time to relax after lunch. We would get all information about everything, about people from different villages about markets about mela and fare. It was very good, but after the conflict we couldn’t do that, they didn’t come out of the village. We would always see them from the road next to the village, but they didn’t come out of the village, we were also told not to go out of the village. So, after initial hesitation we went to the field we went to the field and called them but they didn’t come. After some days they came out. I was happy to talk to them after so many days.”

The disruption of their daily recreation was exclusively experienced by women of these two villages. This was not experienced by men of the villages.

This restriction was especially detrimental for the well-being of young adolescent women, who not only had to miss out on their schooling for a year but also were stopped from going to the riverside to take bath, which for them was very important source of amusement.

“Our brother’s joined the school after few months of returning to the village , but we were not allowed to go out . They go by cycle and we go by walking and that’s why we were not allowed to go to the schools. All my friends have to miss one year of schooling but our bothers didn’t miss that. We were not even allowed to go for bath in the river. We didn’t go out for mela also in Notungaon. Not to Notungaon market also for one year.” (Amna)

Some of them were married of at an early age, as marriage is considered as a way to ensure their safety and security. Although early marriages of girls are common in the village but with the conflict it has become more prominent and their preferences for place of marriage for their daughters have also changed considerably. Earlier they preferred to marry their daughter’s to places dominated by people of their ethnicity however after the conflict now they wish to married them to multi ethnic places which according to them have less chances of being attacked.

The conflict along with the subsequent displacement and loss of property besides the fear that it has generated, played a vital role in shaping their idea about their own lives.

. “Kokhono kokhono aka thakle bhabhi ami ki hariyechi.Chok bondho korle sob chokher age bhaste thake. Amar jobon akdom film er moton mone hoi.”

“My life is like a film. Whenever I stay alone, I realize what I have lost”. (Anjur Bewa)

All these experiences have also made them prepared for any such situation in the near future. For some they would rather prefer to stay at their own village and fight back and would rather prefer to die here then leaving these place whereas for others, they would simply choose to stay at some relative’s place in other villages. The deciding criteria for this different expectation are the amount of time spent in the village along with dependent family members. So, the elderly women who have spent more time in the village as compared to the younger women would prefer to stay at the village and face the conflict. Further, for women

who have dependent family members, a clear preference for shifting to another village was visible.

In fact their earlier experiences about conflict made the people of both the villages alert during the 2014 conflict. They were ready with packed bags and essentials. The women and children used to assemble and stay at one place at night whereas the men would patrol at night. So, the women and children would assemble at those houses which are at the middle of the village. The men usually carried sticks and *daw* along with them for patrolling. As the people of Sonai have seen maximum destruction the fear of being attacked was more among them. As Anjur Bewa said

“when the news of conflict came in 2014 we were worried. I don’t know how to deal with this fear and threat. I need some peace. I didn’t know why the conflict started, where it started I didn’t want to know .I just wanted some peace. ”

In all the conflict studies what gets silenced is how women rebuild their lives. So, whether it was Bengali Muslim women’s struggle to provide for her family or the Bodo women’s visit to Notungaon market to provide food for her family. In both the cases the women used her autonomy and took charge of the situation. Few women from the Bodo village comprising of all age formed the group and decided to go to Notungaon weekly market to get vegetables and other essential items. There was only one male in the group who accompanied them to the market. Since the local market was closed and they had to feed their family, the incident reflects their personal as well as group autonomy. Along with that when they met their neighbors from the next village , their initiative to have a cup of tea with them in the local tea shop can be view as their autonomy. They further used their personal autonomy and tried to build their broken inter community ties by asking their well-being and assuring that it was not people from the bodo village who burnt down their village. As one of them elaborates

“Yes we were scared but we had families to feed. So we decided to go to the market.”

Even after the return of the people of Sonai the women of Bashbari who were already in their own village used their personal autonomy to call the women to their common meeting place for chit chat, a practice that they used to do regularly before the conflict.

“Nobody told us to call them and talk but when we saw that they were not coming out of the village. We thought to call them to the field. We were feeling bad about not being able to meet them, ever since we were kids or even our parents told us that elders from both the villages grew together and now the situation was so bad that we can’t even talk. We could see them moving in their villages but we were also scared initially to go out of the village and then we decided that we would call them to the village. We have been staying as neighbours, how can we not meet and talk to each other’s for so long.” (Jurmona Brahma- pseudo name)

The loss of only recreation after the day’s work was experienced by the women of both villages .This consequence of conflict was only experienced by women whereas men never had that experience. The gendered control and even their own fear and suspicion about each other also restricted them to resume their daily afternoon activity of rewinding.

Along with that, women role as care giver in the “normal times” was stretched beyond the boundaries of her domestic sphere when they have to double up as care giver in the absence of any qualified health care provider. These women without any formal training in care giver became vital during the time of conflict, whether it was the ASHA worker of the Bodo village who was called at the night to conduct a delivery in the camp. Although she belongs to the cadre of health care provider but lacks the training of conducting delivery , however it’s the role of her assistance where we could see her stepping out of her role as care giver of her family to assist a delivery.

“As my house is next to the school, some of the ABSU activists who were taking care of the camp came to me and informed me about the women. She was in labour and was in need of immediate medical attention. I asked them to call the ASHA worker. She came and saw the women. We both were scared as none of us are trained in conducting deliveries. She asked me to get hot water, a new razor and a new set of clothes to wrap the baby. I didn’t have a new set of clothes, so I got my dokhana for that. After that, we brought her to my house and the ASHA worker did the delivery. I cleaned the baby, wrapped the baby with a dokhana. We shifted the mother and the baby to another room. After that I cleaned the room my husband buried the placenta in our garden. After, the delivery the ASHA worker left. I

asked her husband to let her stay at my house for two three days so that the baby is taken care of.

So for the next three days she stayed with us while her husband stayed in the camp. The ASHA worker visited in between to instruct us on newborn care. Rest I took care of. Lactating mothers need to be fed non spicy food but the markets were closed, so whatever i could manage from our kitchen garden i gave her. I gave her black cumin powder with rice , as it is believe that lactating mothers should have it. We (me and ASHA worker) taught her on how to hold the baby, how to breast feed her. I helped her in bathing the child . After three days she went back to camp although but I would visit her every day, as the camp was next to our house. After few days we suggested her to go to her natal house so that the baby could get proper care.”(Promila basumatari)

7.2 Meaning of conflict

The consequences of any conflict is something that is always discussed at large but to understand the lived experiences of conflict it becomes important to understand meaning of conflict for the two warring communities. It is important to see whether the significance of conflict as mentioned by other scholars actually holds true for them as well or the people who actually faced conflict attaches a different connotation of it. What is the origin of the new meaning of conflict would also be dealt in this chapter.

The whole incident of conflict brought different experience for both the people of Sonai and Bashbari. For the people of Bashbari their inability to protect their neighbours from sonai village despite giving initial assurance was a matter of real embarrassment. This, put a strain on their relationship- a fact which was quite evident during the data collection when the Bodo women were reluctant to speak to the researcher .The reluctance to speak was initially because of the ethnicity of the researcher .But sometimes it is born out of the uselessness of the exercise assumed by the respondents and sometimes it is from the fear that their narratives would be held against them. The extend of loss was much high for the people of Bengali Muslim village. The people of Sonai village had to spend more time in the relief camp as compared to their counterparts from Bashbari- which also signifies that they were under the threat of losing their identity associated with their place. In terms of material loss

also the people of Sonai had more damage since the houses of the people were burnt down, their property was lost, and their livelihoods were destroyed. Whereas for the Bodo people, extend of loss was not much in term of material possession. Their houses were not burnt down nor did they have to loss their livelihood for long. As they had more land holdings along with that most of them have alternative source of livelihood (mainly working as government employee).

But there was also a realization among the people of Banshbari that the houses of their neighboring villages were burnt down by the people of their ethnicity. But an open acceptance was never an option for them, as their account might be used against them. One of the respondent when asked about who set the village ablaze insist that-

“We don’t know who set the village on fire but it was some people who came from the southern part.”

However, the trust and the fellowship that was developed generation after generation was not completely lost. During the time of conflict when the people from the Bengali Muslim village were in the camps they would call up the people from Bodo village and would enquire them about their village and house. When the Bodo people would go to the Basugaon market because the local market was closed down they would often get to meet people from Sonai , who were staying there at the refugee camps. Their meeting would be always amicable and they would discuss about the situation and would assure the people of Sonai that it is not the Bodo people from Bashbari who have set their village on fire.

“ Gondogol logar 2 mahor pisat ami Natungaon bozaar goisilu. Yar bozar besi bondho asile aru ji bur bostu asile bahut daam.Bozar gole hiyotok log pau. Hoyoti tate camp ot asile. Ami gaon or kotha patu. Ami xorur pora ake loge asu kintu atiya beleg beleg k thakibo loga hoise. Ami kou amar gaon manuhe hiyotor gaon ot jui logwa nai. Amar maya lage hiyotok ami cha khowau bozarot. Camp ot khana bhal k paise ne nai khabar lou.”

“I along with two people went to basugaon market 2 months after the conflict because everything in the local market was expensive and the local market was not even opening properly. There I met some of the people from the neighbouring village. I enquired their

where about. I told them that despite staying together since childhood we had to stay separately now. I told them that it was people from different places who set their village on fire and not people from their village. We had tea together. I felt really bad for them. But when they were shifted back to the village for some time we didn't interacted with each other. We both were suspicious of each other. They thought that we might attack them and we thought now they are back in their village, they might take the revenge."

During their stay at the camp the Bengali Muslim people would always enquire about their village from the people of Salguri, over telephone. This represent that their inter community ties were stained but the Bengali Muslim people stilled trusted them to some extent.

After they came back to the village the men also refrained from going to the local market for months because the road to the local market passes from the neighbouring Bodo village. Instead they prefer to go Natungaon market which is a multi-ethnic market. The Natungaon market was preferred by people from both the communities because the vendors from different villages were not able to come to the local market. Their meeting in the market would always be friendly. The women didn't go out of the village for almost one year. They even stopped going to the field which was a common meeting place for the old and the women of the both the villages. After few months of initial hesitation from both the sides some of the old Bodo people started going to the field. The initial effort to restore the lost ties came from the Bodo people. One of the incidents described the respondent –

"We went to the Natungaon market and came to know that case... daughter has fever and neither they have medicine nor they could take her to health center. After learning this, my husband came home, took some medicine for fever that we had at home and called case...to come to the field to give medicine."

"Once we came to know from the market Hanif had to sell of their ration to meet their medical expenses when they were at the kasutala camp. They don't have anything to eat now , so my husband called him to the field and gave him some rice, dal and medicine for fever."(Usha rani pseudo name)

The old people of the village also tried to bring the people to the field- their usual meeting place. The field , owing to its location considered as a neutral venue. The ties which were disrupted at the time of the conflict were tried to restore by the old people of the

Bodo village. Describing the situation at that time one of the old people of the Bodo village described that Haradhan Mushahari said-

“We have been staying here for so many years. We have grown up together and now, some outsiders will tell us who should stay here.”

After initial reluctance, the old people came to the field for chitchat although; their visit to each other's village was still not visible. The women of both the villages however stayed at the village and didn't go to field. Slowly, the men from the Bengali Muslim villages started going to the local market. Some of the people from the Bengali Muslim villages sell vegetables there, whereas others go there as buyers. The local market is frequented by the buyers and sellers from the nearby villages and thus, it acts as a meeting place for people of different villages. They would also meet at the VCDC office.

During the subsequent visits by the researcher over the year it was observed that the ties were restored completely. The people of both the villages go to each other's home and they meet at their usual meeting place.

Clearly, for the people of Sonai village the loss was mainly in terms of livelihood and displacement whereas for the Bodo people it was mainly loss of ties with their neighbors. Firstly, because of their inability to protect their neighbours from the attack and secondly, to face them when they were displaced knowing that it was people from their shared ethnicity who are responsible for the displacement and loss of their neighbours. That's why the first move for re conciliation was also initiated by the people of Bashbari.

With this background the termed used by both the communities to address conflict are different from each other. For Bengali Muslim people the conflict is termed as *pora pori* (burning) whereas for the Bodo people of the village they associate conflict with *gondogole* (disturbance) . Evidently, their terms for the conflict are very much influenced by the

consequence that the conflict had on their lives. For the Bengali Muslim people, their houses were burnt down and that's why they term the conflict as *pora pori* whereas for the Bodo population, this conflict produced a disturbance in their life that severely affected their relation with their neighbors and created a sense of doubt on their neighbor's mind for them.

7.3 Post conflict scenario

For the Bodo people their dependence on agriculture or as daily wage laborer was comparatively less than the Sonai population. In the absence of their livelihood, their first resort was selling off some of the portion of their relief material to get some money that is needed to fulfill other needs apart from food.

“My son got skin infection probably because we had to sleep in a tent without any mosquito net. So for his treatment my husband sold some of the flattened rice that we got in the camp. With that money we bought medicines from local medical shops. We didn't consult any doctors because usually we first go to the local medical shop for any kind of medical problem.” (Bilkis bi- pseudo name)

After that, some of them worked in MGNREGA for few months. Women also worked in MGNREGA to substantiate the family income. This is for the first time that women are also working as independent agents usually they work as a part of family labour. However they didn't continue doing the job for long, as soon as their husband's got a stable source of livelihood all of them returned to their domestic spheres. This hardly can be counted as women's independent agency on the contrary this shows that women's role as caregiver is expanded to incorporate her new role. It is expected from women that she would take care of her family and would do whatever needed for the well being of her family.

“ I worked in MGNREGA for few months and after that my husband got job as a construction worker in at Nishitala town, his earning was enough for our survival so I stopped working and more over the MGNREGA work was also over. Women in our village don't work outside so I also didn't look for anything.” (Sahana Bi)

While those men who had some skills, used it to get other job. Like one of the respondent explains –

“After they returned to the village, for the first few months we survived on the ration that we could save from the camp. After that my younger son was hired as mini truck driver from one of the neighbouring Bodo village, which he is still continuing.”(Nurhana)

Post conflict the village has seen many changes; one of the changes is where people from Sonai village are now not solely dependent on agriculture. They still take adhi or the newly emerging contract system but now they are also diverting to other occupations like selling vegetables or fish in the local market. As the local market starts early and finishes early they can manage both. Along with that the agriculture doesn't need effort of entire year. Its only during the time of plantation and harvesting that people need to work whole day ,so during those days they would stop their subsidiary occupation. This specific change in occupation came after the conflict.

“ We had a really hard time during the conflict and we had nothing when we came back to the village . So we have learned that we will do something along with working in the agriculture. In that way we can earn more which will help us in future. ” (Fakruddin-pseudo name)

Some contacted their relatives from other villages who are working in the informal sectors in Bangalore, Cochin, Chennai . The village has witness its first case of migration when rahman ali (pseudo name) went to Kerala with one of his relatives who was already working there. As per his family, he is working there as a security guard.

And some changed their job location. As many of the job avenues were closed down because people refrained from travelling by road, they resorted to informal sectors. As Moinoma narrates-

“My husband who was working as an agricultural laborer couldn't go to his work place because of the conflict. After few months he started working as a laborer in a construction site in Notungaon. He went to Notungaon for work because that was nearer than Kajalgaon, where he was working initially.”

But it is mainly the men who went out in search of the work as women were refrained from going out of the villages and in case of Bodo women they never went out of their village to work. As mentioned in the above section the loss of livelihood for the Bodo people was not an absolute one. They didn't have to search for an alternative livelihood.

As mentioned earlier because of conflict, maximum houses were burnt down in Sonai. The relief material which they got was not sufficient enough to build houses. Post conflict the entire region saw a number of NGO's doing the relief work in various villages and one of them was Jamat-e-Islami Hind. Jamat-e-Islami Hind build houses in the village and all the Muslim villages in the area. So, many of the villagers who had *kuccha* houses with thatch roof, now got two room *pukka* houses with tin roof. However the base of their old house is a reminiscent of their old times.

“Whenever we see the base of our old house we remember our old times. Our old house was kuccha house with tin roof. Now we have a pucca house but that house we had built with whatever we could afford. This house looks like all other houses built by jamat-e-Islami Hind. Initially I couldn't recognize which one is our house. This house reminds us our village was set on fire. (Nasrim begum-pseudo name)

Another change which was quite significant post conflict was, sending off the male child of school going age to Kerala. A talk with the villagers revealed that, some people came to the village and convinced them to send their sons to Kerala. They just have to pay for their train tickets once and rest will be taken care off. As Fatima bi (pseudo name) explains

“Our children won't get job because we can't send them to good schools, we don't have money for that. So, some people came to the village and convinced us that we should send our sons to Kerala. They would get educated in madrasa there and at least can become maulabi in mosque. Their stay, food, education everything is free, along with that their travel back home during vacation is also free. They call us every week; we get to know about them. We are happy that our children are getting good education, good food and will get a job at the end.”

All these changes which came after the conflict are not usual for the people of the Sonai. Migration of people started after the conflict. Migration for better job opportunities, better educational opportunity all started after the conflict. The conflict undoubtedly forced the people of Sonai to look beyond their village for different opportunities.

Post conflict along with the efforts of the people of both the villages there was a systematic effort of the local people for the region for reconciliation; one of the NGO from the nearest town also organized a friendly football match among the people of the area, as an attempt to restore the community ties. This included people from all the villages of the VCDC.

According to the people of both the villages they are now extra vigilant so that “outsider” can’t create any problem between them. So during the 2014 conflict people from both the villagers talk to each other and mutually decided that they would guard their villages. The realization of the snapping of inter community ties was so much among the Bodo people that they were initially reluctant to talk to the researcher as she was considered as an “ outsider”.

Thus , the chapter depicted how people of Sonai had to start their lives’ from scratch whereas the residents of Bashbari were spared from these owing to their minimal loss in the conflict. However in all these rebuilding what usually gets silenced is how women contribute towards rebuilding the lives. In both the villages women didn’t succumb and continued with the social reproduction of life. However, for women of Sonai the struggle was much greater as the context of their lives was more difficult than their counterparts from Bashbari. And with different life experiences in the background of conflict their nomenclature for conflict was also different. Material loss was more visible among the people of Sonai whereas disruption of inter community ties was more realized by the people of Bashbari. But conflict also strengthen the intra community ties. The conflict also led the people of Sonai to look beyond their village for various opportunities.

Chapter 8

Discussion and conclusion

The essence of the research is to capture the lived experience of ethnic conflict of the Bodo and Bengali Muslim women of Chirang district of Assam. Lived experience in terms of encountering the conflict for the first time, experience of staying in the camp and rebuilding their life post conflict. Lived experiences of these women here also means negotiating their way out.

Assam has a dynamic history of many socio-political conflicts, many of whom were violent in nature. The dynamics of Bodo and Bengali Muslim relation has changed over time . The Bengali Muslims were first brought to this part of the country from the neighboring than east Bengal for their farming skills and to provide more food for the British Government. They were settled into the western part of Assam and the char and low lying areas of the bank of river Brahmaputra. Post-independence the conscious push by the state government to make Assamese as the official language of the state instilled a sense of fear among the Bodo's along with many tribal communities of Assam. This sense of fear brought the Bodo and the Bengali Muslims together against the Assamese communities. However, with the signing of the Bodo accord a new controversy arose, in the form of numerical majority. As the Bodo's were not in the majority in the villages allocated to them under BTAD, it is alleged that ethnic conflict was a way to gain that majority in the BTAD areas. What followed was a series of ethnic conflict between the Bodo's and the Bengali Muslims in the BTAD areas at various points of time. One such conflict erupted in the BTAD in 2012 which spread in others parts of the regions as well.

The present study tries to see how conflict affects people at large and women specifically. The most visible effect of conflict is displacement which quite often leads to injuries and death. The physical consequences of death and injuries affect the emotional well

being of the people. These affects are not specific to men but women are often entrusted with the responsibility of social reproduction. This gender role expectation in the context of change circumstances created by conflict makes women's experience of conflict standing out from their male counterparts. Broadly aim of the study is to capture the experience of the Bodo and Bengali Muslim women in terms of displacement, livelihood, health and health access in the backdrop of ethnic conflict in Chirang district of Assam. More specifically the study tried to understand the meaning of conflict for the Bodo and the Bengali Muslim women. The changes brought in their lives by conflict, in terms of displacement and livelihood was also looked upon. To understand how conflict affected their physical health and emotional wellbeing was one of the main objectives of the study. To explore the difficulties faced by the women to access the health care in terms of availability, affordability and accessibility of services was also examined. To understand how ethnic identity, socio-economic status and age shapes their experience in conflict situation was under the purview of the research. The research was also informed by the fact that women are not simply victims of violent ethnic conflict, rather they manage their way out. That's why the study also focused on how the women of both the communities overcome these hurdles in the time of emergency.

8.1 Methodology

The present research used qualitative research strategy. The study included two communities involved in ethnic conflict of 2012 .Two villages selected for the study are Sonai and Bashbari and are inhabited by two communities namely Bodo's and Bengali Muslims, situated next to each other . Both primary and secondary data was collected for the study. Primary data was the lived experience of the women from Bodo and Bengali Muslim community of Taru district of Assam. A semi structured interview schedule was administered on all household. The Bodo village has 78 household and the Bengali muslim village has a total of 50 household (VCDC data). So, women who were 15 years and above from both the communities and who were displaced due to the ethnic conflict in BTAD in the year 2012 were purposively selected for the study.

Owing to the sensitive nature of the research topic and to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents all the names of the places mentioned in the research are pseudo names .

While collecting the data it was realized that women's experience of conflict can be divided into three major phases i.e their life before the conflict, experience of staying in the conflict and life post conflict. Following this the chapter is divided into various sections. The first section talks about how people of these two villages came to know about the conflict. The second section traces their journey through various camps. The third section focuses on their trauma and trump once they came back to their villages. The forth sections brings out the difference and similarities in the experience of conflict among the women of these two villages.

8.2 Encountering the conflict

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the study is conducted in two neighbouring villages of Bashbari and Sonai . Both the communities have been staying in there for many generations. They are inter dependent on each other for agriculture and share a very cordial inter community bond. Both the communities have never experienced conflict before, so when the news of conflict in other BTR came in, people didn't pay much heed to it .VCDC member assured the people of Sonai village of protection in case of any "problem". As the news started coming in of a possible attack on Sonai village-VCDC member asked them to leave.

As the news of a possible attack on Sonai village started pouring in and people started to leave their village. Ethnicity became a deciding factor in assessing the effect of conflict. A relief camp for the Bengali Muslims people was set up at Bamunguri village at Bamunguri School for the initial few days. Women and children were the first one to leave the village whereas the men stayed back to guard their property and the village. Those who didn't left the village actually witnessed burning of their village and had to run away from their village

to save their lives. While doing so they fell down got injuries and bruises. They couldn't take any of their belongings as they were being chased. Fear of life drove them from the village. Once they reached the relief camp, they got medical assistance there. After the men reached the camp and gave them the news of village being set on fire, the women who were so sure of returning to their village after few days, realized that, it will be a distant dream for them now. A sense of uncertainty for the first time started looming large. Uncertainty in terms of returning to their village (*Bhita Mati*) as their houses were burnt down, fear of life and losing their identity appeared to be true. Leaving the village is not simply an act of moving from one place to another, it is also about erasing the identity associated with that place. There was a clear division regarding their idea of future life. For the elderly Bengali Muslim women, retaliation they stated was a possible way for them but won't leave their *bhita mati*(homeland). Whereas for younger generation of women, safety of their family members was paramount. They would not mind leaving this place if faced with similar situation. The idea of retaliation or moving to safer places comes from the fact that older women who have spent considerable amount of life in the village have formed their identity around the village and their talk of retaliation is not just to save their *bhita mati* but to fight for their identity. Whereas for younger women , they are yet in the process of associating their identity with the village and thus their idea of future was the safety of their family , even if that requires them to dissociate themselves with their present village.

For the people of Bashbari they didn't have to leave their *bhita mati*(homeland) even when the entire neighborhood was empty. Thus, they were never in the fear of losing their identity. They seem to accept the presence of fear and violence in their life but at the same time refused to get bog down by it. Bashbari villagers' relief camp was opened next to their village so they didn't have to run away. Moreover the village was never set on fire. They went to camp after an LPG cylinder blast in the next village and they mistook it as a bomb blast. So after the blast it was decided that the men would stay and patrol the village while the women went to the camp. As they never perceived the amount of threat as compared to their neighbors so, while going to the camp they left their belongings at home

Bashbari people never had to leave their village nor had their feeling of leaving their *Bhita Mati*. It was realized that the conflict had put a dent in the inter community ties. Along with that, rumors also played its part to put suspicion on people of both the communities – firstly, it was of Bodo people coming to attack Sonai village. Secondly, Sonai people having bow and arrow and a possible retaliation. Both the villages have quite a few adolescent girls, so people of Sonai sent their daughters to their relative's place who stays at multi ethnic area. Whereas adolescent girls from Bashbari on the other hand stayed with parents as there was no perceived threat to them.

Women's agency drew from what they did for the survival of their family so when one of the women of Sonai village defying the conventional role, took decision to leave early when the entire village was reluctant to do so .Similarly, Asifa took up arm to protect herself when her husband went out to drop their children to different village and got stuck in the curfew.

Similar kind of findings were reported even the ICRC report 2001, it states that conflict brings displacement, diminishes employment opportunities specially loss of agriculture and aggravates poverty. Manchanda (2004) also focuses on all these issues during 2001 conflict in Nepal. More specifically Goswami (2008) spoke of conflict in Chirang district which has seen similar kind of displacement.

8.3 Life in the camp

People of the Sonai village stayed at Bamunguri camp which is 5Km from their village. It was opened specifically for people of Bengali Muslim community. For the first day the locals provided them food, water and hay (to spread on the floor) along with that assurance of protection , as the surrounding people were of same ethnicity. From next day onwards the government provided food which was mainly dry ration that included puffed rice, biscuit etc and sometime cooked food like *kichuri*. The people of Sonai village stayed in the camp for 1 month.

From there they were shifted to Bapupatti camp for 1 month which was already crowded and dirty. In contrast to the earlier camp people were non cooperative initially, but once the acquaintance grew they helped each other. As everybody was facing the same situation of no livelihood options, relief materials was the only means for survival. Everybody ate half meal specially women , as it is women who are entrusted with the responsibility to take care of the family even in the changed situation .Thus eating half meal was applicable to all the women irrespective of their health conditions . For some of the women standing in the queue for food was very demeaning as some of them had their own farmland.

As mentioned earlier, the camp was in a bad condition, bathrooms were dirty and women had problem using them. Nobody came to clean it, however the neighboring people allowed them to use it. Cases of diarrhea and dysentery were very common but there were no medical facilities in the camp. In the absence of it they resorted to self-medication or quack. Absence of proper rest was evident. Al though the women in the camp didn't have to do any household chorus but crowded camps and hot humid weather made it difficult to get proper rest specially for those who had any medical problems. They had no resort apart from staying at the dirty camp as they had lost their livelihood options and relief material would help them to survive till someone in the family got an employment opportunity.The camp also gave temporary relief from the care giver role to the women . At this point assurance of livelihood was one of the core issues to define their well-being.

For the women of Bashbari they stayed in the camp for 3 nights and too when an LPG cylinder burst at the neighbouring village scared them of a bomb blast. They stayed in the camp for the night and came back in the morning whereas the men guarded the village at night. They also had sleepless nights as the men were guarding the village and there was a constant fear of attack and rumors of attackers coming. In this regards they had similar experience like their counterparts from neighbouring Sonai village. However, after their return from the camp, the women had to do the entire household chorus. They didn't have

any respite from their role of care givers. As duration of stay was quite small, it didn't create any medical condition for them. However, access to any medical emergencies were affected and in the absence of proper medical facilities medical emergencies were dealt with other alternatives which came into existence at that moment like quacks, bone setters and ASHA worker conducting deliveries. Those who had access to move out (money and vehicles) and had relatives at other places; they sent their daughter-in-laws and shifted their belongings to a safer place.

For the people of Sonai village, they were divided from Bapupatti camp according to type of landholding. So , those who had registered land (*Medhi patta*) were taken back to the village- whereas those having unregistered land (*Khash patta*) were taken to Aambari (island). Thus, people who had unregistered land had two uncertainties in front of them: one about their return to the village and second about their livelihood.

8.3.1Life at Aambari

People at Aambari had to build their own tent with plastic sheet provided to them. Women had to do the entire household chorus there. Out of all, fetching water was a hard task. There was one hand pump in the island and no bathrooms in the char. The women had to wake up early, before the menfolk and freshen up .They would go together at a distance to relief themselves and to take bath. As the day progressed the sand in the island became hot and walking in the sand became difficult. Fear of life was most palpable at the island as the there was no security forces and in case if any attack, they feared that they won't be able to save them. They would wake at the slightest of the noise at night.

During rain they had to take shelter under the bridge, men would run faster and women would get drenched. Tents would be blown off and everything would get drenched. They had to rebuild the tent again. While rebuilding the tents there would be constant comparison with their earlier lives and their neighbours who were already in the village.

They would not go out in night and that would be difficult during menstruation, as no option of changing clothes and sanitary napkins and that would stain their clothes.

Fever was quite common in the island, but rest- which is essential to recover from any illness, was impossible there. Firstly, it was their gender role that didn't let them take any rest – secondly there was no means to take rest-no bed and lying on the bed sheet spread on sand wasn't a very comfortable arrangement especially during the hot afternoon when the sand would get heated up. To add on to that there was no medical assistance. Accessibility of services was an issue. Along with that, affordability of services was also a very important issue as they didn't have any money with them. There were two pregnant women in the village. They didn't get proper food during their entire period of pregnancy. Neither proper rest nor ANC or any medical checkups was afforded by them. One of them gave birth in the island without any medical assistance.

The women, children and old people of Bashbari stayed in the camp for three nights and came back in the morning. The camp was next to their village so the women did the entire household chorus in the morning. After an early dinner at 5 pm they would form group and would reach camp by 7 pm. As their duration of stay was quite small, it didn't create any medical condition. But the women had sleepless nights as the men were guarding the village and the fear of attack being constant. More often there would be rumors of attackers coming to attack their village. Fear of being attacked by people of either ethnicity was common in the narratives of women from both the villages. This fear is generated more by rumors rather than actual events. Spending sleepless nights to complete restriction on their movements during night –so much so that they wouldn't go out to relief themselves at night, were some of the shared experiences of women from both villages. The fear of being attacked brought the notion of women as a vulnerable category.

After three nights, the local ABSU people asked them to leave the camp as people from far off villages were coming. As their stay was quite small they didn't get any relief materials. After they came back to the village those who had access to move out (money and vehicles) and have relatives at other places sent their daughter-in-laws and their belongings to a safer place. There were two families who have sent their daughter-in-laws and their belongings to other villages. One of them had the highest land holding, which falls under large category according to agricultural census of India. The other one had medium land holding and a central government job in the family. So, it was occupation and landholding that brought a division in the experience of conflict among the women of Bashbari. Their access to the food was also limited as the market was closed. They got food items from kitchen garden and poultry. Rest was still invisible so was sleepless night as the fear still remains there. Doing all the household chorus and then staying awake entire night made them tired and weak in the morning.

As mentioned earlier despite facing such adverse situation women's agency was visible at every stages of their journey- like challenging many established menstrual taboo while staying at Aambari. Women, during their stay at Aambar would wash their menstrual clothes in public, which is a taboo. Secondly, the women at Aambari Island helped a fellow woman deliver her baby when her husband was unable to arrange any medical assistance- this can be seen as an extension of her role as she is the care giver of the family and helping a women deliver her child was an extension of that role which went beyond her family boundaries.

Even according to Bagchi and Dasgupta (2006), in case of mass – scale displacement women restart their daily routine of social reproduction. They rebuild their and their family members' lives and organize shelter in changed circumstances. But this act of social reproduction quite often fails to get recognized as an act of refusal to succumb to the existing situation.

Ocasiones (2007) ; Meffert and Marmar (2008) ; Douglass and Ahendzie (2008) ; Jansen (2006), have also shown that loss of life and property resulting in conditions of uncertainty

and fear, lack of knowledge about relatives left behind puts stress, anxiety and severe depression on people staying in camps. All these affects their wellbeing.

UNIFEM 2002 , Bosman et al (2008), Heymann (2001), Sheikh (2006) have observe that access to health service system gets severely affected by conflict. Among all other services their reproductive service that is mostly affected. Unattended ANC and PNC are also common, even home deliveries and unattended births also become quite common during conflict. This was substantiated by ours findings as well.

8.4 Returning and rebuilding lives

For the residents of Sonai, people having registered land (*Medhi patta*) were brought to the village first. They knew the village was burnt down but were not sure about their house. The first sight of the village was quite disturbing for them, some of the houses were completely burnt .There were only two houses intact. For the first group of people, coming back to the village gave them relief from one of their uncertainties, whereas staring at their face was another uncertainty about restarting their lives with complete loss of livelihood.

They built houses with plastic sheets and bamboo provided to them as relief material. Everybody in the village stayed in those two houses at night. They remained awake whole night and slept only at dawn. The reminisce of their old house; the old base of their houses (*Bhita*) reminded them of their old times.

A CRPF camp was there in the village. CRPF jawan patrolled the village at night so the men didn't have to guard their village. The presence of the camp was an assurance for both the groups that there won't be any attack from either side. The CRPF camp was shifted after people from Aamguri were brought back .Once the CRPF camp was shifted women from both the villages had similar kind of life style .They would have early dinner, followed by

assembling at somebodies house, staying together in one room, all the lights would be switch off and nobody would talk or go out to relieve themselves .Men would be patrolling their respective villages.

But women of both the villages were not in similar situation. The women of Sonai village were in worst situation than their counterparts from Bashbari village because-(i) most of them didn't have houses (ii) none of the houses had boundary wall. With this their bout of sleepless nights began again .After few months houses were built by Jamat –e-islami –Hind but the old base of the house(*bhita*) was a reminder of their old times and there was constant comparison with their earlier times which was regarded by them as a criteria to define well-being .

For the people of Bانشbari their loss was a not in term of material possession rather it was loss of inter community ties. They realized conflict strained inter community relationship.

There were few adolescent girls in Sonai village who were left at their relatives place, confirming the notion that adolescent girls are the most vulnerable categories among the women. They were brought to the village 2-3 months after their parents had returned to the village and the perceived danger was regarded less by their parents as compared to their earlier times. Even after coming back severe gendered control was exercised on them which made them miss out schooling for a year .They were further stopped from going to the riverside to take bath which was source of recreation for them. Their movement was only restricted to their village. Early marriages of girls were common in the village but the choice of place for their daughter's marriage after the conflict has changed. They now prefer to send their daughters to multi ethnic places. After the conflict early marriages are seen as a means to ensure safety of their daughters.

Adolescent girls from Bashbari were only allowed to go to school which is within the village. Otherwise they were also put under strict gender control. However they were not

married off like their counterparts from their neighbouring Sonai village as the perceived idea of threat for them was less as compared to their neighbours.

As the access to health services were totally disrupted, women role as care giver during “normal times” was stretch beyond the boundaries of her families as she had to double up as care giver in the absence of any qualified health care provider e.g ASHA worker from Bashbari and her helper who conducted a delivery on a women who went into the labour while being in the camp.

Further, their group and personal autonomy was visible when the women of Bashbari went to Notungaon weekly market and took initiative to talk to their neighbours from Sonai village who were in the relief camp there. They asking their well-being and assuring that it was not their people who set the village on fire.

Once the people of Sonai village was brought back , Bashbari women used their personal autonomy to call the women of Sonai village to the field to meet and talk to them - which was part of their daily routine during pre-conflict time .

Even Manchanda(2004) also brought out the fact that ethnic conflict raises question on entire community and establishes patriarchy in a renewed form. Conflict brings back the notion of men as “protector” and “protected”.

According to Bagchi and Dasgupta (2006), women in normal times are seen as icons of the honour of the community and in the turbulent time, the fear of ‘rape’ ‘abduction’ by the other community is quite high .So, they are put under double control exercised by the patriarchy. Firstly, it is the male of the ‘other’ community who ties to establish their own identity by ascertaining their control over the woman’s body and secondly, by her own community, who tries to put various gendered control over her. All these control tries to rob

off her agency. Early marriage of girls also stems from this notion of prized possession that needs to be protected.

Our findings on women's agency in the entire phase of their movement from village to the camp and back to their village was corroborated with that of Rajasingham-Senanayake, (2004) and Yadav (2020) finding in war zone Sri Lanka and Nepal. In both the cases women refused to surrender. They challenged the age old notions and took up role that goes beyond the expected norms of the society. The literature on women's agency in war shows that women agency run through all stages of war and in various forms. Even Bagchi and Dasgupta (2006) have tried to show how Bengali refugee women in Kolkata successfully raised a home in changed circumstances by pushing many boundaries.

Although it is still a debatable topic whether women gain from conflict or not but the present work definitely tries to give a valid point contrary to the image of double victim as portrayed by many partition literatures like Butali, 1998 ; Menon and Bhasin 1998.

8.5 Policy implication of the study

Conflict marks severe restriction of access to health services .This restriction is specially detrimental for pregnant women , as was evident in this research. Two pregnant women had to give birth without any medical assistance and in another case ASHA worker had to deliver a child although she was not trained to conduct deliveries. The government can give some emergency obstetrics training like assisting normal deliveries , to all the women of the villages along with the ASHA workers to deal in such situation.

Emotional outburst, fear, trauma was recorded in the research as an outcome of the ethnic conflict however there was no mental health program by the government for these

people .The government need to set up a dedicated mental health program for the people affected with conflict along with physical health services.

Apart from the above mentioned issues that are applicable at the larger level, there are few macro level issues that could be addressed by the local administration.

Underage marriages among the girls are also quite common in the Sonai village and with the onset of conflict, ensuring the safety of girls became a very tortuous issue for the parents and the one of the way to ensure that was to get them married as soon as possible. This poses many health risks for the young girls who are gets pregnant immediately after marriage. Although this phenomenon doesn't count as one of the direct and visible consequences of conflict which often remain untouched by the government policies. Thus, counseling of adolescent girls and their parents about the consequences of early marriage become important specially in conflict situation.

Staying in the camp menstruation becomes a big problem and women are confined to their camps. Along with that the distance of bathrooms from the camp also poses a problem for them to use it especially during nights. As result women restrict their use of bathroom at night. It could pose serious health issues for the.

Location of water source is another where women need to be consulted. As women are expected to do the household responsibilities the location of water source far off from their camp also exposes them to the risk of being attacked.

Consulting women on these two issues would reduce their exposure to the risk of physical and sexual violence in the context of conflict.

Further, in the absence of proper health care workers, women took up the job of providing health care to the people in need. Thus, training women into basic health care would empower them with the scientific knowledge of health care.

8.6 Conclusion: Addressing conflict

There are certain similarities and dissimilarities in the experience of conflict among the women of both the villages. First, the point of dissimilarities among the women of both the villages

In any ethnic conflict it is the ethnicity which decides the proximity of the victim and here also it was the deciding factor in assessing the effect of conflict in terms of wellbeing, displacement and loss of livelihood. So the Bengali Muslim people were displaced from their village (Sonai) and had to lose their livelihood. Displacement does not simply implies movement of people it also implies breaking of bond associated with the place and to the identity based on this place . Thus , the people of Sonai were displaced and stayed in the camp for a substantial period of time which means they were under the threat of losing their identity based on their place of origin whereas the people of Bashbari who are mainly Bodo people, never had that fear. This fear of losing their identity had an adverse effect on their wellbeing.

Accessibility was an issue for both the communities -for the people of Sonai its affordability of services (delivery at the island, selling portion of ration). Whereas for the people of Bashbari it's the physical accessibility and availability of services were the real issues. Within Sonai village it's the type of land holding and within Bashbari its combination of occupation and landholding that was brought the division among the villagers about their experience of the conflict. Women in changed situation entrusted with social reproduction however for the women of Sonai village this social reproduction was in the context of two uncertainties (i) returning to village (ii) livelihood

So, For the people of Sonai wellbeing was defined as (a) Safety of the family (b) livelihood options .Whereas the people of Banshbari define well being in terms of (a) Safety (b)inter community relationship

For People of Sonai village, their houses were burnt down, they were displaced , their livelihood was destroyed , so they address the conflict as *Porapori* (to burn down).Where as for the people of Bashbari it created disturbance in the inter community relationship , so they call it *Gondogol* (disturbance).

ICRC (2001) study reveal that conflict create disturbance in the social fabric which was also corroborated by our study. The literature on ethnic violence mainly showed how people from two communities were being attacked owing to their ethnicity, the present study conducted among two communities involved in bloody ethnic violence showed a different picture. No doubt people were attacked because of their ethnicity but people from other ethnicity came forward to protect their neighbours as well. People from Bodo ethnicity took initiative to establish their broken ties with their neighbors by providing them with various kinds of support whenever needed.

There were some similarities as well in the experience of conflict among the women from both the villages. The fear of attack from the other community reinforced patriarchy and establishes men as the protector and women as protected. So, those who had relatives in other places which was not affected with conflict had send their daughters and daughter-in-laws to those places.

Secondly, Women's agency was visible at all the stages of their struggle for survival. So whether it was Amina begum who took the decision to leave early for the camp when all the villagers were reluctant to do so or the refusal of the elderly Bodo women who refused to leave the camp despite being asked to do so . Women from both the villages used their individual autonomy in both the cases. They also exhibited their group autonomy when

women from Sonai village challenged menstruation taboo and washed period clothes in the open. The Bashbari women took initiative to rebuild the broken inter community ties with their neighbours by inviting them to the field for their daily chitchat.

Thirdly, women of both the communities experienced conflict at two level- group level and at individual level .At the individual level, threat to their safety, loss of livelihood and at the group level dis continuation of their daily recreation (meeting with women from other villages). These experiences of conflict are exclusive to women and their idea of wellbeing is also formed at these two levels.

8.7 Scope for further research

The present research was conducted to look into the implications of ethnic conflict on two warring communities namely Bodos and the Bengali Muslims who have witness ethnic conflict as a community for the first time. However the present study couldn't include those villages who have already experienced ethnic conflict earlier .Including them would give a new dimension in the research about their perception of future and their preparedness to deal with such situation which people from both the villages in the present study lacked. Further, the BTR is inhabited with people of other ethnicity. There was a Hindu Bengali village next to the Bengali Muslim village, incorporating their experience of conflict , as they were caught in the cross fire between the two combating communities would be a novel idea for any future research.

8.8 New Reflection on the study in the light of Covid -19 Pandemic

The area is mainly inhabited by the Bodos, Rajbonshis, Bengali Muslims and Hindu Bengali people. Some of the people are employed in Mumbai and Kerala as security guards . Whereas some of the well-off Bodo and Rajbonshi people have sent their children to Kota (Rajasthan) for education. As the country went into lockdown from March 25th 2020 , these

people were struck in their respective work / education place . Later on the Assam government brought back the stranded students from Kota and they were subsequently put into quaretime, where as some of the workers working in Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra came back , whereas some who worked as security guards are yet to come. The workers , mostly of them have lost their livelihood and hardly had anything to survive in the city, whereas those who are working as security guards are still continuing to be in the service and hence didn't come back. Similarly some of the people from the village who are working in Kerala are yet to return .

Apart from these livelihood options some of the people from the villages under the Bangaldhoba VCDC were also vegetable vendors. In normal times they would sell vegetables and fish in the local market and the Wednesday haat . The local market was frequented by the buyers and sellers from different villages. However, after the announcement of the lockdown, the local market and the Wednesday *haat* were closed down. This greatly affected their livelihood options, but rather than succumbing to the prevailing situation they made their way out and started a local market in every village. No doubt, the usual local marker which had buyers and sellers from different villages gave them good price for their product but in the absence of that opportunity, they had to survive with much lesser income.

Some of the young boys who were sent to Kerala for education post the ethnic conflict of 2012 were brought back by bus. A total of 8000 rs were spent for their transportation. The government had paid 2000 rs and rest 6000 was transferred to their children's account by the parents. It took them three days of travelling by the bus from Kerala to Assam's Srirampur border. They were not provided with food, water or any amenities in the bus; they carried their own food, mainly biscuits and water bottle and survived on them. Only once the bus stopped on the way and they bought their food from a road side dhaba . Upon reaching the Assam border at Srirampur they were put to institutional

quarantine for fourteen days. After that they were sent home and were again put to home quarantine.

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Annexure 1

Schedule for village profile

1. Village:
2. Area (sq km) :
3. Total number of household :
4. Total Population
5. Total number of male
6. Total number of female
7. Stayed during the conflict: 1) Village 2) Camp
8. Distance from nearest NH :
9. Age distribution of the population :

Age group	No. of respondents
14-19	
20-25	
26-31	
32-37	
38-43	
44-49	
50-55	
56-61	
62 and above	

10. Occupation

Cultivators	
Agricultural Labourer	

11. Level of Education

Sl. No	Education level	Percentage of respondents
1	Illiterate	
2	Primary	
3	Middle	
4	Secondary	
5	University degree / Post graduation	
6	Technical education	

12. Distance from the Sub centre :

13. Distance from the PHC :

14. Distance from the nearest town (Bongaigaon) :

15. Distance from the district head quarter :

16. Distance from primary school :

17. Distance from Middle school:

18. Distance from High school :

19. Distance from college :

20. Distance from the post office :

21. Public transport – 1) available 2) Not available

22. Road condition :

23. Electricity : Yes No

24. Number of cemented house :

Annexure 2

Interview schedule for women

1) Schedule no.

Date :

2) Name of the village

3) Name of the respondent

4) Age

5) Number of family members

6) Relation with the head of the family

7) Community

i) Bodo

ii) Bengali Muslim

8) Main source of income for the household

9) Agricultural land

10) Housing Pattern

i) Kucha

ii) Cemented :

10) Live Stock

11) Main source of income for the family

12) Earning members of the family

13) Approximate earning of the family

Interview Guide for women

1. Meaning of conflict for women of both the community (Bodo and Bengali Muslim)

- What is the local term of conflict
- According to you why did the conflict started? What is the reason for the repeated conflict?
- How did they come to know that the conflict has started?
- How has the situation changed after the conflict
 - 1) Relation with your fellow villagers
 - 2) Freedom of movement
 - 3) Any sanctions or restrictions
- Do you think you or women from your village could have done anything to stop the conflict .If yes, how. If no, who could have done it

2.Issue of Displacement and Livelihood

- Did you have to leave your place at the time of conflict? If yes, where had you gone/ stayed? Did anybody have to stay back? Why?
- What happened to your house and your belongings?
- How did they come to know about the relief camps?
- After how many days of the start of the conflict did they come to the camp
- How did they reach the relief camp
- How many people stayed in one room/ tent
- How was the basic facilities in the camp -1) Food 2) water 3) Medical 4) clothes

- How did your family's source of livelihood was affected by conflict? Did you used to earn before?
- What is the main source of income for your family now? Who are the main earning member/ members of the family now? Are you still earning? If yes, how? If no why?
- How much is the earning of the family (Approximate)
- Do you get the money in your hand to spend? Do you have the freedom to spend money according to your wish?
- Did you get any government help in rebuilding their lives?
- Do you think your daily routine has changed after the conflict? If yes, how?
- How did you manage to run the family in the absence of any source of livelihood?

3. Physical Health

3.1 General Health

- Did you/ your family members get injured at the time of conflict?
- Were there any cases of illness in your family before the start of the conflict? What happen to that during conflict?
- Did you/ your family member fall sick during your stay in the camp? Were you/ your family member bed ridden at that time? How long?
- What physical problem did you/ your family member had?
- Why do you think you/ your family member fall sick?
- What did you do to treat the illness? What were the available options at that time?

3.2 Reproductive Health

3.2.1 Pregnancy

- Was you/ any family member pregnant during her stay at the camp
- Stage of pregnancy at the time of conflict –
- Any problem faced during pregnancy

Anemia

Morning sickness

Bleeding

- How long did it last
- Any home remedy done to decrease the affect
- Where did the delivery took place
- Who conducted the delivery
- Any complications during delivery
- Did you / your family member had to spent money for the delivery
- Did the ASHA worker come for your ANC and PNC
- Immunization of the new born – 1) where 2) who did

3.2.2 For adolescent girls (between the age of 10-19)

- Could they access toilets during that time, especially at night
Was the toilets hygienic (water, clean)
- Do they normally practice any menstrual taboo – Cooking or any other household chores or staying in separate place (segregation)
- Did they practice the taboo during their stay in the camps? Why?

4. Emotional wellbeing (fear, anxiety)

- How did it feel while leaving your houses?
- Do you want to go back to your house/ village
- Did you feel secure at the camp? What did you do to feel secure?
- Was there any anxiety at that period of time? How did you overcome that anxiety?
- Episodes that were making you more scared/ frightful?
- Did you leave anyone at home to take care of your house?
- Did you have pets earlier? What happen to them? Where did you keep them?

- Could you sleep at night during that time? Did you have nightmares? What type of?
- What are your hopes and aspirations for your future?
- What are your hope and aspiration for your children's future?
- What is wellbeing for you? In what terms?
- How do you compare your earlier life (before 2012) to the present life?

5 Access to health care

- What were the services provided in the camp?
- Who provided the services
 - 1) Government health personals
 - 2) NGO/INGO
- How did they reach the health institution
- Where did you get the medicine
- Did you/ your family member had to spend money to get the services
- Who accompanied you to the health institution?
- Did do practice any indigenous medicine previously? Was there any problem of access to the indigenous medicine
- When do you consider it sever enough to go the doctor?
- For what types of health problems do you use indigenous medicine and for what type of health problems do you consult the doctor ?
- What is the most preferred Health Service system? Why?
 - 1) Sub Centre/ PHC
 - 2) Local medical Shop
 - 3) Indigenous medicine prepared by them
 - 4) Any other forms of medication

Differential Experience of conflict due to ethnicity, age

- Did you face any form of discrimination from the government official due to their ethnicity or because of their class back ground :

- 1) How was the relief material distributed (per head or per family)
 - 2) Who got the relief material in your family
 - 3) Did you ever experienced any form of discrimination in the distribution of the material
 - 4) Did the NGO people /government personal ever demanded money in lieu of the relief material
- For adolescent girls-
 - 1) did you have to leave school
 - 2) Was there any restriction on their movement
 - 3) What is the normal age of marriage for girls and has it changed after the conflict.
 - For married women
 - 1) Do you feel that you have to face any discrimination because of your ethnicity specially in the health institution – 1) attitude of the health personals 2) language used by them for you
 - 2) If yes , then what did you do
 - 3) Would you like to go to the health institution again
 - 4) Would you like go to that health personal again for any kind of medical assistance

Annexure 3

Observation check list:

Village level -

1. Is there any restriction on women's movement
2. Is there any restriction on the interaction of women with their fellow villagers.

Camp/ home -

1. What is the daily diet of the family members
2. Food distribution among the family member
3. Any change in the food pattern after they shifted to the camp.
4. Daily routine of women and men.

Annexure 4

Questions for group discussion

1. How many times you as a community have seen conflict?
2. As a community have you been displaced earlier?
3. What is the reason for the continuous conflict in BTAD?
4. How did the conflict in 2012 started?
5. Do you want the conflict? If yes, why? If no, why?
6. Who can stop the conflict?
7. What is the way out?
8. As a community what aspirations do you have for your community?
9. As a community how did you responded to the violence ? what did the community do to save themselves ?