

EDUCATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

From the very primitive stage, people move from one place to another which involves the movement with purposes of settling, either permanently or temporarily, at a new location for security and livelihood. This movement makes people dislocate from their original habitations. As a result, people face many challenges like shelter, food, security, education etc. in their new settlements. In Assam such displacement is very common where thousands of people internally displaced because of flood, erosion, militant activities, ethnic clash etc. Irrespective of any reason, displaced people face lots of difficulties for basic necessities of life, hence violation of human rights including education has been denied in new settlements. In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the human rights violation of internally displaced persons in general and education in particular in Assam.

KEY-WORDS: *Displacement, Human rights, Education, IDPs*

INTRODUCTION:

From the very primitive stage, people move from one place to another for various reasons. It is the general tendency of all living organisms of the world including human beings. Migration of human beings involves the movement of people from one place to another with purposes of settling, either permanently or temporarily, at a new location. Like migration, clash is the most prominent instinctive behaviour of all living organisms. The general tendency of migration and instinctive behaviour compels human beings to move from one place to another for their security and livelihood among others either voluntarily or involuntarily. This movement whether voluntary or involuntary, makes people dislocate from their main habitations. Due to this dislocation people face many challenges like shelter, food, security, education etc. in their new settlements. The process or instance of voluntary and involuntary movement of the people from one place to another is called 'displacement', which may either be external or internal in nature. Among all other prominent issues, displacement is also one of the most emerging crises that the entire world community is facing today.

CONCEPT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS:

The process or instance through which the people are displaced from their native locality is called as displacement. When people face security crisis in their own communities and all other strategies fail to work, they try to flee to another place. This unsafe condition may occur due to ethnic conflict, inter and intra group conflict, natural or environmental hazards and vigorous developmental works within the country. Due to these causes people leave their own habitations for their survival, safety, settlement and for a better future. Thus, the people who are displaced by conflict or by any other measures and remain within the boundaries of their own country are called internally displaced persons (IDPs). In its guiding principles on internal displacement, the United Nations interpreted the internally displaced persons as 'Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or

human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border' (UNO, 1998).

Since independence, India has been continuously witnessing displacement due to various reasons including arising out of internal security. The major displacement has happened in Jammu and Kashmir in our country because of internal conflict in the region. Insurgent activities, political instability in the region and violation of human rights led people running away from their own localities. The communal conflict in Gujarat in February 2002 forcibly displaced religious minorities from their homes. In central India, Maoists or Naxalites, have significantly increased their insurgent activities in the states of Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Due to the increasing insurgent activities by Naxalite, people displaced from their own homes.

India's North-east is basically a place of tribal people which is geographically isolated and economically underdeveloped. Many tribal rebel groups are active in the region which leads to ethnic conflict among them. Ethnic conflicts have been noticed in almost all states of Northeast which displaced millions of people from their own habitations. In northern Tripura, thousands of people displaced due to ethnic fighting and attacks. Similar situation occurred in Nagaland because of freedom struggle for a separate country for Nagas. In Manipur, counter-insurgency operations and ethnic clashes have displaced the Hmar and Paite ethnic groups. In Assam, ethnic clashes over territorial issues, insurgency and communal violence have been taken place which shifted thousands of people. Severe ethnic violence has been taken place in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills district most recently. Thousands of civilians have been displaced due to conflict between Karbi, Kuki and Dimas insurgent groups. In October 2005, there were clashes between the Karbi and Dimasa tribes, which continued for a long period of time. In North-East India, displacement was taken place because of increasing complexities in their own habitations. Among the North-Eastern states, the rate of internally displaced persons is quite high in Assam (Hussain, 2007). These persons face severe crisis in general and human rights including education in particular.

IDPS AND VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

Human rights are a very comprehensive and dynamic term; hence it is very difficult to clearly define its proper meaning. Human rights constitute those very requirements and rights which are essential to survive as human being in the society. These are rights of people to live as human beings with equality and dignity in the society as they have born as human beings. We people are born free and have equality in all aspects along with appropriate self-esteem. Human rights, as commonly understood, are the rights that every human being is entitled to enjoy freely irrespective of his religion, race, caste, sex and nationality etc (Aggarwal, 2018). These are claims of the individual for such conditions which are essential for the fullest realization of the innate characteristics which nature has bestowed oneself with as a human being. These are the basic fundamental rights which cannot be denied to individuals by any individual or government simply because he or she is a human being (Alam & Halder, 2018). Understanding the importance of human rights, the United Nations General Assembly had adopted the Universal Declaration of Human rights in the form of 30 basic articles in the year 1948.

Though human rights are considered as universal legal guarantees to everyone, sometimes those can't be enjoyed by some people in general and internally displaced persons in particular. The violation of human rights is very common in case of those people. The

insufficient food supply, miserable sheltering facility, non-supplement of baby food, lacking of pure potable water and sanitation facilities, unavailable health services, lacking of proper clothing are very common that violate the nominal code of human rights of camp dwellers. Government has supplied such basic commodities to the camp dwellers but that is not enough considering to the number of people. Apart from these basic amenities, the protection of child rights including education is also violated among the internally displaced persons in different temporary relief camps.

IDPS AND EDUCATION:

Education is one of the most important vehicles of supporting psychosocial wellbeing of children and youth during the time of conflict and displacement. Being a subsidiary priority, education is less likely available in the emergency phase of displacement as the authority focus on security and on provision of basic necessities of life. While trying to fulfill the primary needs of people, the authority has paid very least attention to provide education to the children of internally displaced persons. Displaced school going children are shifted from their original schools during the crisis where they may have been able to access education, but they settle in a place, may be temporarily where there is no provision of education at all. But, being an important aspect of human development, education cannot and should not be denied to the children of IDPs as education is lifesaving and life-sustaining. It mitigates the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by giving a sense of normality, stability, structure and hope during a time of crisis, and provides essential building blocks for social reconstruction and future economic stability (Ferris & Rebecca, 2010).

In a situation of conflict induced displacement, schools remain closed for longer period of time which hampers education of both displaced and non-displaced children. 'The immediate result' of ethnic conflict in Manipur during the period 1994 to 1998 'was the closing down the educational institutions for months together and turning some of the schools and colleges into temporary camps for the homeless and affected people' (Singh, 2008). Therefore, such educational institutions cannot be used for academic purposes unless the relief camps shifted to other safe places. The Bodo-Muslim conflict (1993), Bodo-Santhal violence (1996 and 1998) in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, West Goalpara, and Udalguri districts, and the ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong (2005), Dimas-Zeme Naga violence in N.C. Hills (2009) collapsed the entire education system in those localities. In Karbi Anglong, as almost all camps were set up in educational institutions, so all schools and colleges remain closed after the end of the vacation in the year 2005. These affected thousands of students as educational institutions being used as homes of displaced persons which affected not only displaced children, but the non-displaced too. In a report it has been stated that at Rowtabagan camp in Udalguri district of Assam, 500 out of 1100 children attended a makeshift school without benches and desks. In Darrang district, 47 school buildings had been used as camps during the Bodo-Muslim violence in 2008 (IDMC, 2010).

The educational facilities are generally not available for the children of internally displaced persons either in relief camps or in nearby area which compel them to remain absent from the schools. During the period 1993 to 2003 no provision of education was accessible in relief camps of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Assam. In 2003 a centre was established by SSA in Goroimari camp which gave some kind of incamp access to education. In Devsri camp there was only one Education Guarantee School (EGS) with two teachers who looked after 198 students in the year 2008. In Kachugaon relief camp children attended local government school but faced discrimination as compared to local children in admission (IDMC, 2010).

Linguistic barrier is yet another major problem that the children of internally displaced persons faced in the field of education. Displaced children, who are ethnic minorities and may have different mother tongues, face difficulties with learning (Ferris & Rebecca, 2010). Displacement unduly affects minorities and indigenous groups, who may not speak the local language of instruction due to which children of IDPs face problems, as no provision is available to access education in a language they understand, though every child has the right to receive primary education in their own mother tongue.

Flood is a very common natural hazard that crop up almost every year in Assam. Apart from ethnic clashes, flood and erosion have also displaced thousands of people every year in state. In 2004, it affected more than 10 million people (Hussain, 2006). The sensational scenario that has been televised in electronic media indicates the devastating situation that flood created in Assam. This is a very common picture that we see every year in Assam particularly in Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Morigaon, Nalbari, Darrang and Majuli districts which displaced lakhs of people from their own homes and forced them to reside in relief camps that mostly set up in educational institutions. In 2009, 'large numbers of families are displaced from their original place of residence and the economic consequence is very large in terms of property and loss of crops in Dhakuakhana sub-division of Lakhimpur district. Displacement of children from their location, have badly affected their education, health as well as livelihood' (Bora, 2010). Educational institutions of those localities remain closed for a longer period of time until the flood situation improves and some of them for entire rainy season. People thus displaced, reside in the camps and their children remain absent in schools during the whole season as no alternative arrangements set up for them to access education. District administrations during that time are busy to save lives of the people, hence providing of educational facilities is treated as secondary.

Missing schools by the children of internally displaced persons is another major threat that prevails in the field of education. This picture is very common among the people of erosion induced displacement, who are living in river embankment, especially in Majuli, Rohmoria, Matmora, Morigaon, Kamrup, Nagaon etc. After erosion the land either completely submerged by the river or turns into an infertile land, popularly known as 'char' area, where there is hardly any provision for getting education by children.

In the 'char' areas of Assam, educational facilities are very limited in general and there is hardly any provision for children of internally displaced persons. In a report made on erosion induced displacement it has been stated that 'the total population of the comprehensive territory (14 chars) is learnt to have crossed 100,000 by the close of the millennium, but no improvement in respect of education has yet been witnessed' (Jana, 2008). They often miss the schools as their physical labour is needed to improve the livelihood of their family. 'Most of the children had to help their parents in earning a livelihood by bringing thatch from the distant chars for sale' (Jana, 2008).

Thus, the children of IDPs face tremendous problems in the field of education, as educational facilities are not available for them in their new settlements. Authorities pay importance for supplying basic amenities and security of those persons, but educational provision is hardly noticed in those new settlements.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RESOLVING EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS OF IDPS:

From the above observations, it has been realized that to promote educational opportunities to the children of IDPs in new settlements, the following measures can be suggested-

- i) **Arrangements of in-camp schools:** Temporary arrangement of schools within the camp should be arranged so that the children of IDPs can avail educational opportunities.
- ii) **Provision of 'School in a box' kit:** As educational institutions either remain closed or unreachable, the distribution of such 'kits' can be done, to the children of IDPs which contain educational materials that can bring to camps.
- iii) **Removing of linguistic barriers:** educational facilities should be provided with instruction in a language that those children understand.
- iv) **Providing alternative schooling or skills training programmes:** Alternative arrangements that provide education and training of skills can be provided to those children of internally displaced persons.
- v) **Distribution of educational materials:** Distribution of materials like pencils, books, pen, other stationeries which are essential for accessing education should be made.
- vi) **Providing of quality teachers:** Initiatives should be taken to tackle shortage of quality teachers by managing alternative arrangements to provide education to the camp dwellers.
- vii) **Counselling:** To organize awareness programmes to counsel the parents as well as children to overcome psycho-social problems in general and education in particular.

CONCLUSION:

From the discussion above it has been revealed that the people, who are displaced for different reasons, face various problems in their new resettlements, where they need to spend a very miserable life, as minimum requirements of different kinds are unavailable and hence human rights are completely despoiled. In a situation where security is more important, the focus of the authority is to maintain the law-and-order situation and on provision of basic necessities of life, education is made subordinate priority; as it is less likely available in the emergency phase of displacement. Therefore, the displaced children of any forms face tremendous problems of accessing education and hence remain absent from schools during displacement. In spite of having problems, some alternative provisions, may be temporary, should be made available so that the children of IDPs can continue their education as earlier without any hamper, otherwise the right to education and Millennium Development Goals will remain as long distant dream.

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