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Rehabilitation of Displaced Tribes in North East India: A Case Study of Reang Tribe in Mizoram

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ABSTRACT

Reangis one of the twenty one Scheduled Tribes, located in Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura. The Reang tribe is also called Brus inMizoram. Since they migrated to Mizoram, they had faced systematic discrimination and alienation because they are considered alien to local cultures and languages. The result is that they have been continuously deprived from exercising their fundamental rights.Mizoram government has granted Autonomous District Council (ADC) status to other tribes such as Lakher, Pawi and Chakma whichinspired Reang to demand the same for their political, social and economic development.Their demand was not only rejected by the Mizos community led state government but a massive violence unleashed against them to suppress their demands. The Mizo civil society groups, bureaucracy, police and other powerful groups hell-bent on ethnic cleansing of the tribe permanently. The repercussion of the state-sponsored violence is that Reang were displaced from Mizoram and took refuge in Tripura and other states in makeshift camps.The Mizo led state government continuously failed to instill sense of security for Reang's successful rehabilitation.Reang's diabolic situation has forced the central government to intervene so that they could be safely repatriated to their home state. The repatriation deal, however, was brokered by the central government in 2018 but Mizoram governmentdid not accept their demand of ADC that further weakened the tribe's political identity.Reang, therefore, showed their utter reluctance to rehabilitate in Mizoram unless their demand for ADC status is granted. In addition, Reang tribe haddenied their participation in the Assembly elections of Mizoram in 2018. Even they rejected the idea of coming to Mizoram to exercise their right of franchise. In such a scenario, the rehabilitation of Reang has stuck in limbo that needs to be resolved to prevent further injustice, ethnic violence and infringement of their fundamental rights. The aim of the paper does not only to expose the failure of Mizoram government which could not provide protection to the Reang tribe but it will also provide the substantial solutions for their rehabilitation.

Key Words : Reang, Bru, Mizoram, Tripura, Tribe, Rehabilitation, Internally Displaced Persons, Ethnic Conflict

INTRODUCTION

In India, 'tribe' constitutes around 8.2 per cent of India's population (Census, 2011). Since the British colonial time, anthropologists and Indian administrators had used the term 'tribe' for the people who were living in the forest areas. For British, the term 'tribe' was equivalent to barbaric, savage, uncivilized, backward and criminal. This term has been continuously used in the contemporary discourses of academia and government documents (Thong, 2012, p. 378). 'Tribe', therefore, is one of the most contestable terms in India and officially no definition is given to it till date because the Government of India's concern was not to define it but to identify it. In constitution, the 'tribal' people are recognized as Scheduled Tribe (ST). It shows that the decolonization process has not been ended yet as the government in its documents, reports, schemes and policies are carrying forward the term which was imposed on these people by the British Empire (Fanon, 1963, p.2).

Fundamentally, a 'tribe' is anartifact of the colonial writers that denoted to a particular set of people living in a community who do not have connectivity, interaction and exchange of values, cultures and ideas with the larger

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society. They permanently live in the forests or in the remote areas. During British colonial policies, they were considered diverse in bodily and etymological qualities, demographic magnitude, ecological situations of living, are as populated, phases of social construction and stages of acculturation and growth. The term is tantamount to primitive and barbarity and hence, pejorative in many conducts (Xaxa, 2008, p.2). In other words, tribe is understood as a phase and particular sort of society devoid of characters of modern society. Their ways of living was not considered as unique and particular but it was compared with the modern society based on hyper materialism and consumerism, generated by neo-liberalism.

Rehabilitation Process in North East (NE) States:

NE India encompasses Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. It covers geographical area of 2.55 lakh sq. km. It is home to over 200 ethnic groups in the region. Under Look East Policy (LEP) and Act East Policy (AEP), the region is considered a 'Gateway to South East Asia'. They are located at sensitive geo-political location with various tribal clusters and ancient credentials. Largely, NE region has experienced the two kinds of views, wherein, former considers the region as a somewhat composite entity protected by India's borders with neighboring countries, the latter view considers the region as highly ethnically diverse with spread of several languages, religions, traditions, rituals, histories and politically volatile because of the emergence of several insurgency groups based on different ideologies (Miri, 2001). It is multiethnic, multi-linguistic, multicultural and multi-religious that is both a boon and a bane for the region and rest of India.

Geographically, the region is dominated by complex terrain, fast slowing rivers that often flood the region and anthropogenic activities that damage environment regularly. The NE region is connected to rest of India with a thin patch of land called Chicken Neck Corridor that created impediments in speedy transfer of goods and persons that kept it economically backward and under-developed that often fumes violent reactions between tribes and against the government (Panda, 2013). The scant developmental initiatives embedded with neo-liberalism failed to protect the ecology because the focus of the initiatives was to earn profit as more and more private players are allowed to participate in policy making. The result is that human needs are given priority over ecologism that also caused massive displacement of population.

Politically, NE stayed as adelicate and troubled area because of its alienation by the British colonial policy and further, the region is neglected by the successive governments (Hussain, 1987, p. 1330). Therefore, a massive scale of population displacement is experienced by the region. Possibly, the NE countries have produced the largest numbers of IDP in India. The ratio between citizen and IDP is very high in NE region (Hussain, 2008). It is also very challenging to determine the precise number IDPs in the region because neither the state governments nor the central government have launched any official policy to estimate their numbers.

To resolve the displacement problems inside of any country, generally, the government needs to take concerted, proactive and swift actions, mandated by the rules of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) policy, formulated by the United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR). According to the UNHCR, "IDPs are those people who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or place of habitual residence, as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or man-made disaster, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border" (UNHCR, 2019). Particularly, in NE region, the communities have also faced dual displacement as they are not only victim of environmental displacement but they are also displaced because of ethnic conflict at the same time. Even the status of 'displaced' which should be transitory or temporary has now become long-lasting where a banished person looms and struggles to persist in all-encompassing condition of fear and ambiguity (Davies, 2012, p. 43). The systemic denial of right of rehabilitation to IDPs further alienated the aggrieved tribe in the region that created perpetual disenchantment against the state apparatus.

Regrettably, in India, the issue of 'conflict-induced IDPs' so far did not find a space in the agenda of building peace and conflict resolution because the focus of peacemaking policy remained on the insurgents and separatists rather than those who got badly affected by the violent movements. In addition, the emphasis of state sponsored post-conflict rehabilitation packages is given first to only insurgents/ex-insurgents and the criminal elements that duly left the innocent IDPs from the

rehabilitation process (Hussain, 2005). The medical care and formal education to the IDPs have always been major issues that tarnish the state's image both at domestic and international stages. The supply of food has always remained sporadic and insufficient both in quantity and nutrition (Narzary, 2008, p.2). Michael M Cernea developed the Impoverishment Risk Model to understand the development and rehabilitation problems of IDPs. According to this model, "all the IDPs of the NE region experienced the displacement, landlessness, homelessness, joblessness, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, high level of marginalization, deprivation from the access to common property rights, disintegration and social disarticulation" (2015, p.7).

The displacement in NE is being repeatedly reproduced in different shapes and sizes and spaces, is now an inseparable part of the post-colonial political economy, ethnography, and religion. In such a backdrop, the case of Reang community is important that was violently expelled from Mizoram in 1997 and became IDPs in the region. Their future remained in limbo because both previous central and Mizoram governments failed to instill the sense of security in their minds so that they could repatriate to their homes in Mizoram.

Reang Tribe of Mizoram:

Reang is one of the twenty one Scheduled Tribes (ST), located in Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura. The tribe has been given derogatory name called 'Bru' in Mizoram by the demographically hegemonic Mizo tribe. They are the second largest group after Mizos in Mizoram. They are found in Mamit, Aizwal, Lunglei and Chhimtuipui districts (Bhattacharaya, 2011 p.87). Originally, they migrated from the Shan province of Burma and settled down in Arakan Hills and later, they moved to Maiantlang in East Pakistan (Bangladesh). They moved to Tripura in the 14th century and in 19th century they finally settled down in Mizoram (Sharma, 2017, p.7).

Gradually, Reangs were integrated as one of the Tripuri clans and also considered to be the original inhabitations of Mizoram because it was part of the Tripura kingdom until 1872 (Ali, 1998). According to Lincoln Reang, "They belonged to the Mongoloid groups and speak the Tibeto-Burman language 'KauBru'. They have a religious practices and usages of their own for ages. Major rituals of the Reang (Bru) community performed by the priest including the entire rituals starting from birth to death" (2017, p.657). They have a belief on the Benevolent (Buraha, Longdrai); and the Malevolent (Songrongma, Mainokma, Khunokma); Spirits, Animatism (Attribution of life to physical objects); Animism (Belief on the natural objects); Totemism (Transmigration of soul); beliefs in Dreams/Divinations, Magic/Witchcrafts, Omen, etc. (Kumar, 1998, p.56). These practices are purely attached to natural worship with subtle similarities with Hinduism.

The census handbook states that Rengdil Lake was made by a certain unknown Reang Chief who once reigned over the surrounding areas along the Hachhek Hill range. Yet another important site is the Rengdilpuk, a small cave measuring 2.10 metres (m) in depth, 2.5 m wide, with a height of 1.5 m. The same report adds that this cave is the handiwork of the Reang Debarma Chief, who reigned in Tripura (DCO, 2011). The Mizos do not consider the Brus/Reang to be an indigenous tribe of Mizoram, but these two historical sites prove that the Brus are one of the indigenous (as they use it in terms of the notion of the "son of the soil") tribes, inhabiting Mizoram much before the Mizos (Bhattacharyya and Adeney, 2006, p.116). In 1946, A. Macdonald, the then superintendent of the Lushai Hills, through an official order (no 734–47G on 29 April) declared that the races Pawi, Paihte, Hmar, Lakher, Chakma, Reang (Tuikuk), Matu, Chawrai, Hrangkhawl, Langrawng be deemed "Lushais" for the tenacity of house tax assessment under notification No 4973 of 16 July 1934 (Patnaik and Lalthakima, p.11). The order also went on to state that such a categorization does not affect any restriction on immigration into Lushai Hills district from other areas. Thus, based on a historical administrative blunder by the colonial administrators, the Brus are still deprived of an identity and they continue to be considered a sub-tribe of Kuki (Joshi, 2005, p.58).

Genesis of Conflict:

The conflict between Mizo and Bru tribes is caused by the control over resources, wealth and power that shaped into ethnic violence. More explicitly, it can be said that economic backwardness, political hegemony and colonial type behavior became the instrument for the tensions between both the tribes (Mique, 2007). The remoteness and isolation of various social groups, lack of attention from the ruling establishment and lack of representatives in administration and difficulty in communicating grievances, non-representation in ruling class, government, and cultural segregation led to the generation of parochialism between both the tribal groups

(Bhaumik, 2007). One of the root causes of ethnic conflict was the direct offshoot of socio-political consequences of mass conversion by Christian missionaries since the mid-nineties. Bru National Union President Saibunga said in Silchar, "we are being persecuted by Mizos since we strongly opposed conversions. Mizoram is a Christian dominated state and they want everybody to become Christian. Besides, about 40000 Chin refugees who were working in bottomless jobs in Mizoram for quite a long time were forced to go back to Myanmar from where they had fled to Mizoram earlier (The Telegraph, November, 2009).

The causes behind their expulsion are sophisticated bureaucratic regime, powerful civil society and culture-religious bodies led by Mizos dominated organized politics and everyday life in Mizoram. This bureaucratic structure and regime are drawn primarily from the dominant ethnic majority in the state-the Mizos (Abraham, Newman and Weiss, 2010, p.224). The Presbyterian Church, Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and Mizo Hmeicche Insuihkawm Pawl (MHIP), among others, complete the civil society and culture-religious bodies, albeit being hegemonic in their practice of politics. Consequently, Brus not Mizos are the squeezed and constantly violated, who remained politically and economically weaker community (Butt, 2017, p.308). The case of expatriation of a large number of Brus from Mizoram presented a picture of an increasingly hostile inter-ethnic co-existence.

Though insurgency ended in Mizoram, inter-ethnic continued as the major problem for the establishment of peace, stability and prosperity in the state. The insurgency or secessionism died down but ethnic conflict within Mizoram had sharpened significantly during the post-accord (Mizo) period. Conflicts between the Mizos and Hmars on one hand, and the Mizos and the Brus (Reangs) on the other were not resolved (Hussain, 2003, p.984). The rage against Brus was a product of the supposedly incommensurable presence of these communities in someone else's home (Roy, 2005, p.2179). Mizos repeated used exclusive means to alienate other communities, for instance, in 1990s "Quit Mizoram Notices" were served (Singh, 2014). Such events were fuelled by the strong "sons of the soil" sentiment of the Mizos which articulates Mizoram as a place only for the Mizos, denying the history of co-existence and heterogeneity (Ganguly, 2007. p.51). Furthermore, those who refuse to convert to Christianity are conveniently turned into a common enemy by Mizo community. Even Chakmas faced the discrimination in Mizoram unless they are granted the ADC which helped them to secure seats in medical and engineering sectors.

Mizoram has the second largest literacy rate in India but the literacy rate of Reang community is less than one per cent. A systemic and well-planned discriminatory policy was used that not only alienated them but also had prevented them from collecting firewood from the forests, denied them ration and kept Reang children out of schools. The result is that the number of graduates in Reang community is very less. According to Tuisarai Bru, "it is essential for us to free ourselves from the continuous domination of Mizos. The only way to do is to raise our rights through constitutional means so that we can become equal residents in Mizoram" (Hmar, 2006). The government turned a blind eye to their banishment by Mizos. Yet, relatively speaking, quality of governance and the electoral process have been institutionalized in Mizoram but the Reangs have been isolated because of the perpetual threat to their existence in Mizoram. The result was that a large number of Reang were forcefully ousted from Mizoram. They are now living in state sponsored relief camps in Assam and Tripura waiting to go back to Mizoram (Braithwaite and D'Costa, 2018, p. 195).

The roots of the current conflict can be traced to 1994, when a political party called the Bru National Union was formed to promote tribe's welfare. In September 1997, the BNU adopted a resolution to demand for an Autonomous District Council (ADC) for Reang in the western belt of Mizoram (Hassan, 2008, p.45). In the 1990s, the Reang, expressing their historical oppression and political exclusion, made the demands for: inclusion of the Reang programme in All India Radio, Aizawl; reservation of jobs for them in government services; nomination of the their representatives in the legislative assembly; and creation of an Autonomous District Council for the Brus (Haokip, 2003). Interestingly, though the Brus are the second largest population in Mizoram after Mizos their demand for an ADC went unheeded (Lalfakzuala, 2006, p.49). The reaction against Reang demand for ADC erupted large scale violence by Mizos that forced the Reang to settle in the adjoining states of Tripura and Assam in 1997, where they continue to languish in refugee camps. These Reang refugees have steadfastly rejected all appeals by the Mizoram government to return to their homes. To be sure, a majority of the Reang refugees did

not support violent activity though all of them want an autonomous district council for the betterment of their tribe (Phadnis and Ganguly, p.255). Nearly 17000 of them, whose number steadily grew to about 37000 by early 2000, were housed in six relief camps in the Kanchanpur sub-division of North district of Tripura (NCPCR, 2018, p.43).

In a petition to the Prime Minister and the NHRC, Reang leaders alleged that many members of their community have been killed, many of their women raped, and a large number of temples of Hindu Reang destroyed by members of the Mizo Students Organization, Young Mizo Association and the Mizoram Armed Police (Phadnis and Ganguly, p.256). However, the Mizoram government dithered over the repatriation of the Reangs, citing reasons like an inflated number of refugees, militant groups like the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF)[1] and subsequently, Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram (BLFM), emerged out of the camps and indulged in intermittent violence inside Mizoram (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2018, p.42).

Ever since, they were confined to their relief camps living on rations doled out by the state, without proper education and health conditions. A report by the Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network says that the ration quota is so inadequate that Brus do not report deaths as it means a further reduction of the rations. They did not have voting rights in Tripura and were not being issued birth or death certificates. They were neither entitled to work under MGNREGA nor were they given farmland to earn a livelihood and were referred to as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Centre for Social Justice, 2015, p.9). Many young Brus had missed out on education and could not even get job cards under central government schemes. The President of the Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples Forum (MBDPF), Elvis Chorkhy, says, however, that everyone at the camps, except newborn babies, belongs to Mizoram and that all have official proof in the form of citizenship certificates, bank passbooks, ration cards, and birth certificates (Jayanta, p.88, 2011).

The Mizoram Bru Displaced Peoples Forum (MBDPF), an organization of the displaced Brus, had expressed the willingness of the tribe to return to their homes in Mizoram if their demands, including security and rehabilitation in 16 cluster villages, were met. The Mizoram government remained ambiguous on the MBDPFs demand, which included the free supply of food grain for two years along with the allocation of land to them, which had been opposed vehemently by the Mizo organizations (Sharma, 2017, p.5). Bru community members do not have adequate knowledge about the proposed villages in Mizoram and are prone to misinformation and rumors spread by stakeholders with vested interests in keeping the community in makeshift camps in Tripaura (Sengupta, 2018). The abject conditions and the lack of employment and education had made the camps a good recruiting ground for militants. Some of the young Brus from these camps have joined militant outfits out of desperation. Contentious issues like a compensation package, security, identification, repatriation and rehabilitation in cluster villages need to be deliberated upon by all parties to find a mutually acceptable, pragmatic and amicable solution.

Another displacement of Bru took place in November 2009. The refugee's repatriation from Tripura to Mizoram has been stalled by a series of incidents: it was supposed to have started in November 2009 but stopped when a mob in western Mizoram burnt down around 700 tribal houses after an 18-year-old Mizo youth was shot dead by unidentified assailants (The Pioneer, 2018). Following the violence, about 5500 displaced Reang tribe took shelter afresh in adjacent North Tripura (Nayak, 2016). It was alleged that a letter purportedly written by the 'Bru Revolutionary Union' (BRU) was recovered from the dead body. From 13th to 17th November 2009, about 500 houses in 11 villages belonging to the remaining Bru minorities were burnt down by persons whom the officials of the state government of Mizoram termed as 'miscreants' and 'anti-social elements' (Refugees and Migrants, 2013, p.27). About 5000 Brus were displaced and over 2000 fled their villages and took shelter at Cheragi Bazar in Karimganj district of Assam, Chhimluang, Kanthol Bari and Lungthir villages in Tripura near the Mizoram border, and at Zampui Hills under Kanchanpur sub-division in North Tripura[2]. The Mizoram government had announced the unilateral declaration for the repatriation of the Brus on 16th October 2009 without addressing the fundamental differences that created deep resentment among the displaced Brus who were living in Tripura (Khan and Hausing, 2018).

The displaced persons constantly shuttle between the states of Mizoram and Assam. Often the states have, in the perception of the afflicted victims, failed singularly in providing security to them. Besides attacks on government-run relief camps, many of the victims of

Urabari, Tripura, as Basu Majumder points out, want to return to their homes only on condition that pickets of Tripura State Rifles (TSR) are posted in the villages (Goswami, 2016, p.30). It seems that their return will never mean restoration of the status *quo ante bellum* that existed prior to the outbreak of violence. A village without any recorded history of conflict limps back to normalcy, but a normalcy that gets redefined with the posting of police pickets.

Resolution of Conflict:

The Statute of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) entrusts UNHCR with the responsibility of "assisting governmental and private efforts to promote voluntary repatriation or assimilation within new national communities" (Art. 8.c of UNHCR Statute, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 14 December 1950, Resolution 428 [V]). However, International Refugee Law, according to UNHCR, has no provisions aimed at protecting individuals within their own country, since, by definition; refugees must have crossed an international border. If they remain in their own country, they are considered Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), and their government is entirely responsible for them. Nevertheless, international human rights conventions and international humanitarian law set certain limits to states' sovereignty over their residents.

In terms of repatriation, the only protection guarantee for individuals is the fact that repatriation to their country of origin must be voluntary. The 1969 OAU Refugee Convention reaffirms and emphasizes this principle by stating that the "voluntary character of repatriation shall be respected in all cases and no refugee shall be repatriated against his will" (Article 5.1 of OAU Convention on Refugees). Refugees must therefore be able to freely evaluate the advisability of a return. In this context, it is difficult to repatriate Reang to their homes in Mizoram unless they are instilled with the sense of security and protection because the massive ethnic violence not only structurally damaged their economic, cultural and political resources but it has also psychologically made them further alienated not only from Mizo community but also because of their lack of trust in the government initiatives whether it is at center or state governments.

According to Reang leader Ms. Ubati Reang, "the newly elected Mizo coalition government has refused to concede the demanded Rs. 1 lakh compensation for the displaced individuals. The state government and the Mizos volunteer organizations have openly announced that they will resist our repatriation move. And the displaced Reangs are now facing intolerable crisis (The Economic Times, 2018)." In addition, the Chief Minister Zoramthanga refused to repatriate 40000 Reang refugees living in Tripura camps since October, 1997, on the ground that they are not permanent settlers, has it further complicated the issue. No official explanation has been given as to what forced them to leave the state (Indian Express, 2018). The fact that Reang constitute the second largest ethnic group in Tripura should serve to emphasize that if the refugee are not taken back, the Mizoram-Tripura border will remain tense, a perspective neither side will relish.

Leaders of the tribal people in Tripura want the Mizoram government to concede the demand of Reangs since an ADC is constitutional provision that would help the all-round development of the tribal people. Prominent tribal leader and Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) MLA Shyma Charan Tripura said that Reangs were the responsibility of the Mizoram government to ensure their development through constitutional means (Sen, 1982). In order to accelerate the repatriation process, the Tripura government discontinued food rations and medical services in some camps, causing at least 16 people to starve to death. In addition, around 1400 reportedly became seriously ill. According to National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the displacement camps are even susceptible to attacks and mismanagement, for which NHRC castigated by the Mizo government. There have been several allegations of misconduct of relief distribution officers, reported by Bru Refugee Committee's General Secretary, Lalduwang Liayana and Joint Secretary Chandramani Malosi (Indian Express, 2019).

Since 1997, the Centre had given financial assistance of Rs 348.97 crore to Tripura for relief and rehabilitation, and 68.90 crores to Mizoram for the resettlement of 8573 persons. The points of difference between the two sides relate to determining the number of refugees who would be repatriated from Tripura and the structure and the nature of the political arrangement that should be put in place after the refugees are rehabilitated (Indian Express, 2018). The repatriation of Brus was chalked out in a road map in a meeting held in 2009, attended by representatives of MBDPF, BNLF and BLFM members was a failure because the demand of

Brus of Cluster settlement in large Bru villages with at least 500 households and the settlement of all families in Mamit district were not accepted by state government.

In April 2005, the Mizoram government and the BNLF had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) after 13 rounds of talks to resolve the decade-old ethnic crisis, leading to the surrender of about 1040 militants of the BNLF and BLFM. However, BLFM and BNLF militants did not surrender at that time and continued their violent activities. In the MOU, there was no time frame for repatriation of Bru IDPs but the MOU initiated the process for the identification of the genuine Brus. The MoU, however, did not address the problems of internally displaced Brus who constituted the overwhelming majority of the Brus of the Mizoram. It only attempted to rehabilitate the BNLF cadres (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009, p.105).

The Mizoram Chief Minister, Lalthanhawala said repatriation will begin only after the identity issue is settled. NGOs are to be engaged to help in the identification process. The special development projects will be launched in Mamit, Kolashib, Lunglei and Aizwal districts in Mizoram (Lalthakima, 2008, p.155). Mizoram government had apparently agreed to take back Bru refugees sheltered in the camps. The decision was taken at a meeting in Aizwal, on April 31, 2009, between the representatives of the Mizoram government, headed by CM Lalthanhawla, and members of the MizoBru Displaced Peoples Forum (MBDPF). Yet, the government did not assure the granting of ADC status to Reang. Chorky argues that the repatriation of displaced people hangs in the balance as successive governments have given no clear assurances of taking them back and resettling them properly. In addition, the names of a number of Reangs were struck off the voter lists before the assembly elections of May 2009 to prove that the Reangs were not original inhabitants of Mizoram (Bhattacharya, 2009).

Another repatriation and rehabilitation process was started in November, 2010. Since then, six rounds of repatriation had taken place with little success. The last attempt to repatriate the Brus between June 2nd, 2015 and September 4th, 2015, also failed miserably, as only one Bru woman named Porati, a native of Zawlnuam village in Mizoram, opted to be repatriated to Mizoram from the relief camps to Tripura (Karmakar, 2018). The identification process conducted in the relief camps at Tripura was completed during the period November 2nd to 23rd, 2016. The officials identified 32,755 Brus belonging to 5413 families as bona fide residents of Mizoram, while the state government had earlier proposed to repatriate around 21,000 persons belonging to 3445 families (News18, 2015). According to the Mizoram voters' list, those who were yet to be repatriated were 3455 families-2594 families from Mamit district on the Mizora-Tripura border, 628 families from Kolasib district on the Mizoram-Assam border and 233 families from Lunglei district on the Mizoram-Bangladesh border (New Indian Express, July 27, 2018). Meanwhile, the proposed physical repatriation of Bru families from the six relief camps in Tripura scheduled to commence from November 30th, 2016 failed to take off due to several reasons such as the absence of a formal decision from the Ministry of Home Affairs to fix the rate of enhancement of the rehabilitation package for the resettled Brus (Indian Express, 2016).

The lackadaisical attitude of state government of Mizoram, forced MBDPF, the apex body of Bru refugees, lodged in six relief camps in Tripura, had again revived their demand for a separate ADC by filing a writ petition in the Supreme Court to this effect. The writ petition, which called for the creation of a separate council for the Bru community, is a reversal of the letter written by the forum on May 4, 2016, to the Ministry of Home Affairs, in which it said it was no longer pressing for autonomy for the community (The Hindu, December 02, 2016). The MBDPF, in the petition, appealed to the apex court to direct the Indian government to establish an ADC for the Bru community in accordance with Article 244 (2) of the Constitution read together with the Sixth Schedule. State Home Department officials expressed concern, saying the petition if admitted by the apex court, might again derail the proposed repatriation process (Northeast Today, December 3, 2016).

The third meeting of the Joint Monitoring Group was held in Delhi on November 24th, 2016, attended by Union Home Minister, Mizoram government, Tripura Government, MBDPF, Bru Coordination Committee (BCC) and Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA). The MBDPF placed their 8 point charter, where it demanded that each family must be given 5 hectares of land and with a government job to each family, a wholesome cash support of Rs. 80000, grant of Rs. 5000 per month of 2 years per family must be given as a grant, more than 1000 Reang families need to be identified, freedom to select villages for their relocation, the

formation of skill development training for the Bru youths and building of houses before repatriation begins (South Asia Terrorism Portal, July 2018). The Mizoram government even denied the allotment of 5 hectares of land to each family demanded by the Reang tribe. However, it was only ready to re-construct their houses within their village councils. Another problem was that Reangs were denied the freedom to select the villages. More than 1000 Reang families which migrated after the violence were put under strict surveillance that ultimately deprived them from their free movement within the Mizoram. The MHA accepted the government job for each family along with 5000 Rupees per month compensation for two years. Those who were born after 1997 were to be updated in the population data bank to prevent the illegal refugees entering from outside. Meanwhile, the MBDPF had filed a petition in the Supreme Court making several demands while the Bru Displaced Welfare Organization (BDWO) sent a letter recently to MHA, saying that no Bru would return to Mizoram until and unless all their demands were conceded by the Centre and the Mizoram government (US State Department Report on Human Rights 2017).

According to 2017, Ministry of Home Affairs Report, The Ministry of Home Affairs has so far sanctioned 308 Crore rupees to Tripura government and 58 crore rupees to Mizoram government for the rehabilitation and re-settlement of the Reangs in 2017. The Bru migrants are repatriated from Tripura to Mizoram in phased wise manner. The repatriation process was disrupted by the Mizo NGOs in 2011, 2012 and 2015. By the end of 2017, around 1622 families were living makeshift camps in Mizoram. So far 5407 Bru families have been identified to be repatriated. On July 2018, Home Ministry of India announced that a 'historic agreement' had been signed by the governments of Mizoram, Tripura and the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum that ended a 21-year wait for over 32000 Brutribals, who were displaced from Mizoram and were living in Tripura. The Brus were seeking the relief on the lines, given to Kashmiri Pandits and Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. The first phase of repatriation started in November 2010, when 1622 Bru families with 8573 members were resettled in Mizoram. The process was stalled in 2011, 2012 and 2015 amid protests by Mizo NGOs.

The latest peace deal was brokered over three years, starting in 2015. It involved a Joint Monitoring Committee with members of civil society groups including Young Mizo Association and Mizo Students' Association, and representatives of the state governments and the Home Ministry. The financial package of Rs. 435 crore was agreed on. It covers 5407 Bru families (32876 members). Each family will be given a one-time assistance of Rs 4 lakh- to be kept in fixed deposit within one month of repatriation-and cash assistance of Rs. 5000 per month through Direct Benefits Transfer, as well as free rations for two years. Rs. 1.5 lakh will be provided as house building assistance, in three installments. For security, the Centre has asked the Mizoram government to create police posts and border outposts. The Home Ministry will sanction funds or setting up the checkpoints. The Tripura government will ensure that Aadhaar cards issues; bank accounts opened and ration cards updated for each Bru migrant before September 30, 2018. The package includes a special development project, Eklavya residential schools, and access to Jhum cultivation land, permanent residential certificates and ST certificates and free transportation from Tripura to Mizoram. The displaced families had demanded land at one location, which Mizoram rejected. An agreement was reached that they will be relocated to the villages from where they had been displaced.

The problems of NE IDPs, particularly, Reang tribe needs to be given special attention so that such ramification of ethnic conflict should not be extended to rest of India. To permanently resolve the IDPs problems of Reang tribe, a strong political will is required that must be devoid of complex ideological hurdles that prevent the permanent resettlement of displaced Reang in Mizoram. There is also a need to model technology and rights based tools to stop avoidable displacement of population in India. To resolve the conflict permanently, the stakeholders from Bru and Mizo communities, Mizoram government and central government need to create a peace-making mechanism pertaining to the issues such as resolution of bloody ethnic conflict; grant of ADC to Brus; removal of traditional rivalry between Brus and Mizos. In addition, there is need to remove tension between both sides civil society groups, Mizoram government to make balance approach by not siding with Mizos only, strengthening of law and order in the Mizoram and particularly in the Bru villages and regular recruitment of Brus in Mizoram administration. The exclusion of Bru from the articulated cultural and political space of Mizo represents their exclusion from the dominant and their appropriation within the dominant.

(1) The establishment of the BNLF led to growing militancy in the post-1997 period. The BNLF, an armed outfit of the Brus, was formed in 1996, its objectives being the protection of rights, dignity and the religious identity of Brus, which it identifies with Hinduism. Initially, it had demanded a separate Bru homeland in Mizoram. Subsequently, it toned down its demand for Autonomous District Council and was willing to negotiate for something less, like a Regional Council. Besides this, it had also taken up with the Mizoram government the issue of repatriation of Bru refugees who had been displaced during the October 1997 ethnic clashes. BNLF had both inter-organizational as well as external linkages, which is used to procure arms and train cadres (Khojol, 2018). Rosno Meska of the Shiv Mondoli said that the Mizoram government, through the Church groups, sends out feelers to the Reangs to convert as this would ease their passage home. Birmohan Wairam of the Ram Mandali Committee said that few Hindu organizations, except for the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram and the Banswara Group have shown any interest in the plight of the distressed Hindus. According to Sunil Adhir, the only solace for the Hindus in the camps is that they can now cremate their dead, while in Mizoram they were forced to bury them as the Mizos did not allow cremation.

Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram (BLFM) is a break away faction of BNLF formed in 2003 because on September 7, 2002, the BNLF had been engaged in a series of negotiations with the Mizoram government. However, a solution had not been found to end the violence. On May 26, 2003, Mizoram government had endorsed the draft proposals for lying down of arms by the BNLF cadres and repatriation of Bru refugees lodged in the Tripura relief camps (Hussain, 2007, p.99). In the eight years of its existence, the BNLF had been involved in extortion, abduction of several Mizos and killing of security personnel.

(2) Several Reangs who were forced to leave Mizoram had related their ordeal during the onslaught by Mizos. Gunador Reang is a 46 year old man from Reang tribe who lives in Naisingpara, North Tripura. He flung away, with his family, from his native state of Mizoram when the ethnic violence broke out there. Since then he and his family has been living in different refugee camps of Tripura barely making both end meet. Due to unsupportable and regressive government policies he was unable to find proper work for himself; he used to earn just 2000 Rs/ month. Being the sole bread earner of the family, this meager income was completely insufficient for providing even basic necessities to his family members (Sewa International, 2016). In the Gachiram Para camp in Kanchanpur sub-division in North Tripura, housed 18000 refugees. The Enteric diseases have taken a heavy toll of the refugees. Soibanga Reang insisted that violence is a part of calculated move for ethnic cleansing. He alleged that the first names of 20000 Reangs were deleted from the voters' list. Next, there were state-sponsored atrocities. Those who fled to Tripura inmates told a group of visiting journalists that at least 44 vilages in Aizawl and Mammit districts were attacked, forcing them to leave their ancestral homes (Tripura Infoway).

The forced displacement of Reangs and the failure of the state government to bring the Brus back from the relief camps in Assam and Tripura, therefore, go against the fundamentals of good governance. Serious attempts should be made by the government of Mizoram to build confidence among the Brus residing in the camps. Security in Mizoram is one of the most important concerns of the community, living in the camps, hence, a strong security mechanism and confidence building measures among the community need to be taken into consideration (Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group). The Bru must also be trained in any vocational skills and those who are skilled are must be certified to prevent the hampering of their employability.

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