

Violence and Search for Peace in Karbi Anglong, Assam

Tom Mangattuthazhe



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Chapter 1: The Background of Karbi Anglong

The Northeast of India is known as a region of conflicts. Also the Karbi Anglong district of Assam has been experiencing a large number of conflicts. This booklet is an effort to understand the reasons of this violence, ethnic conflicts in particular, and their impact on the life of the people. Some suggestions are made in the booklet for precautionary measures to be taken to prevent conflicts. It also presents a plan of action for bringing peace if conflicts occur. In particular it points out the adverse impacts of the 2005 Dimasak-Karbi conflict with special reference to its social, political, cultural and economic effects.

Conflict is defined as a situation of two or more persons, groups or countries reacting to serious disagreements. Violence that results from it is a global phenomenon. In some western countries children may manifest an attitude of violence in ways such as bullying and through physical assaults. Of late this pattern of violent behaviour is spreading in the Indian society too. A more serious form it takes in India is communal violence obviously because religion forms part and parcel of the Indian psyche. Fundamentalist elements can easily exploit this multi-religious context to incite the masses of one religion against the members of other religions and whip up their emotions for their political and economic goals. The persons inciting others to communal violence may themselves be non-practising members but they use or abuse the religious emotions of the masses in a calculated and rational manner for their own vested interests.

Communal Violence

In the past communal violence was mostly between Hindus and Muslims. Today Christians are increasingly coming under attack from the Hindu fundamentalist forces who treat the minority religions as alien to India. So they systematically malign the cultures

of the minority communities and make false propaganda that they are de-nationalised, de-culturalised and even anti-national. Among others, incidents of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 and against Christians in Orissa in 2008 have shocked the conscience of peace loving people of all persuasions. These incidents show how people can be motivated to commit acts of violence in the name of religion by events such as the burning of the train at Godhra and killing of a Swami in Orissa. These incidents are condemnable but the violence that followed shows how cruelty and violence can be perpetrated in the name of religion. The facts and figures collected by the Citizens' Tribunal headed by Justice Shri V.R. Krishna Iyer are shocking. Justice Shri P. B. Savant, a former Judge of the Supreme Court who was a member of the team states that preparation for the Gujarat communal violence such as recruiting volunteers, training them in the use of arms, collection of information on the houses, shops and other establishments owned by Muslims, began at least six months before the Godhra train incident of February 27, 2002. The tribunal believed that at least 2,000 people were killed and 250 women were raped in the riots. The most disturbing aspect is that the police who were duty bound to maintain law and order and act as protectors of the victims either remained mute witnesses or participated in the crime. That can be called a sabotage of the due process of law.

The most fascinating feature of India's cultural heritage is unity in diversity. Through the ages intrinsic to the Indian cultural ethos has been utmost respect for and tolerance of all religions. That unity was the strength of India. The composite and synthetic culture emerged, developed and flourished out of this unity in diversity manifested itself in the art, architecture, paintings, music, languages and other forms. The Constitution mandated respect for this composite culture but the communal clashes are a big blow to this tradition. The greatest tragedy of institutionalised religion today is that some leaders hijack religion for their personal political and economic objectives by misguiding their adherents.

Religion advocates love and compassion, but in the hands of politicians, it has become a tool of hatred and division. In this context, it is imperative on the part of all the true religious people and pilgrims of dialogue to reach out to their own and other communities not only to give the message of love, tolerance and peace, but also to create in them an awareness of the dangers of these games.

The North East

North Eastern India, located at the junction of the vast trans-Asian landmass, is the natural gateway to Southeast Asia which was, in the British age connected by road to Assam and Bengal through Myanmar. Ancient Assam and other parts of the region had a long association with the South East Asian countries, especially South China and Myanmar. Therefore the Northeast shares many ethnic and cultural traditions with its eastern neighbours. The historic silk route from China to Central Asia that passes through Assam is a sign of this historical link.

Unfortunately, this ancient route and other trading corridors have fallen into disuse due to historical and political reasons but these links as well as cultural and trade relations are being revived. In November 2005 Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh brought the Northeast to the centrestage by flagging off at Guwahati the Indo-Asian car rally that ended at Batam in Indonesia. This link of the Northeast also brought to the fore the diversity of India which is a challenge that the region has to grapple with while trying to solve the problems of its economic backwardness, growing unemployment, militancy, recurring floods and immigration.

Assam, the biggest State in the Northeast is an ancient land of a rich cultural heritage, rituals, traditions, customs, beliefs, languages and legends. The state has been a meeting ground for people of diverse races, different cultures and civilisations. The fertile land, rich natural and forest resources, flora and fauna of Assam encouraged the wandering tribes and communities of people to settle down here. These communities with their diverse cultural

and racial backgrounds have contributed to the fusion of a new community. This history also makes most tribals of Assam different from those of mainland India. They have their roots in their own culture and civilisation and their laws of inheritance and marriage and other customs are not the same as those in the rest of India.

Box 1: Karbi Anglong at a Glance

Location: 24°54' North and 26°41' North latitude; 92°8' East and 95°53' East Longitude.

Area: 10434 sq km

Population: 812,320 (2001 census)

Civil sub-divisions: 3

Development blocks: 11

Revenue circles: 4

Rural areas: 103,97.01 sq km

Urban areas: 36, 99 sq km

Number of villages:

Inhabited – 2520

Uninhabited – 43

Total villages - 2563

Schedule cast population : 4.22 %

Schedule tribe population : 51.56%

Area under reserved forests - 185454.00 ha

Total cropped area -175785.00 ha

Total area cultivated more than once -52346.00 ha

Area under irrigation utilized:

For kharif season (Monsoon) -118,85.00 ha

For Rabi season (winter) -1085.00 ha

Ethnicity: Mongoloid: (Karbi, Dimasa, Rengma Naga, Bodo, Garo etc)

Topography: Karbi Anglong (Hills) are located at an average altitude of 740 meters above mean Sea Level (MSL) and Kopili, Jamuna and Dhansiri Valley at an average altitude of 200 meters above MSL.

Natural/Economic Resource:- Forest, Limestone, Iron, coal, Tea Industry, Hydro Electric Generating Rivers, Wildlife, etc.

Political Institution: Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC)

Official language: English

(Source – Director of Economic and Statistics, Assam = 2002-2003)

The two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar (NC) Hills have worked in close cooperation for two decades. The Karbi tribe of Karbi Anglong has lived in peace with the Dimasa tribe of NC Hills. In fact, these two were a single district till the 1950s. Even after their division into two districts, Karbi Anglong remains the largest district of Assam and shares the distinction of being a melting pot of different cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. It is bound by the Nagaon and Golaghat districts of Assam in the north and by the NC Hills district in the south. In the west, it is bound by the state of Meghalaya and in the east by the state of Nagaland.

The district is rich in natural and economic resources like forests, minerals such as limestone, coal, tea and wildlife which attract a number of tourists. The district headquarters is situated at Diphu which has a railway station, a good transport and communications network with the rest of the district, state and region. The district has three sub-divisions namely Diphu, Hamren and Bokajan. Its official language is English while Assamese, Karbi, Bengali and Hindi are some of the other languages commonly spoken here.

Most ethnic groups of Karbi Anglong belong to the Mongoloid stock. They include the Karbi, Dimasa, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Kuki and Rengma Naga tribes. Also people belonging to the Adivasi, Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Bihari and other communities inhabit this district. This diversity only increases the charm of Karbi Anglong particularly since such diverse peoples have been living peacefully since the formation of the district in 1951. Till recently ethnic unrest did not affect the people of Karbi Anglong.

The economy of the district depends mainly on subsistence agriculture but it has not achieved the desired result of improving the socio-economic condition of a majority of its people. They remain poor and a large number of young persons from poor families are unemployed. All that they can do is to roam around with no work in this land which has a scope for raising innumerable crops.

A climate of Violence

Historically, the indigenous people of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills have been subjugated. The exploitation and subjugation perpetrated upon them led the hill people to violence. In this context dead bodies are merely the ciphers to send the message of terror between the State and the armed groups or warring armed groups which are fighting for their 'own freedom'. So the cycle of encounter killings, custodial deaths and rebel inflicted bomb attacks in public places like crowded markets and railway stations take place in a spiral. The victims are mostly innocent civilians who have nothing to do with the conflict.

Apart from the army-rebel standoff, the factional fights and ethnic violence in many parts of the Northeast add to the deaths, destruction and displacement that begin with the so-called counter-insurgency operations. Various armed groups too are involved in an organised network of extortion or 'an indigenous tax collection system' that sustains the militant governments, maintains their staff, security infrastructure and allied activities. The tribal people are compelled to part with a part of their income for this purpose. The nexus between politicians and militant groups is an open secret and is used to win democratic elections, settle business deals and fight political rivals. This symbiotic relationship is the biggest stumbling block to law and order which is the responsibility of a democratically elected government.

This encourages corruption and undermines the moral authority of the state. The common people lose confidence in the state which is constitutionally committed to protect their fundamental freedoms and human rights. Since the state fails in this task, people hardly react when some militants punish corrupt government officials or politicians through their own courts. The common people may not approve of this method but they feel satisfied that someone is bringing some justice to them, whatever its type.

The failure of the state also explains why a large number of people in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills believe that they can solve their problems if they have their own state. Since there has been no response from the Central or State Governments some groups have taken to armed struggle to achieve this goal. At such a critical juncture, many extremist groups representing different tribes have been formed.

Box 2: Some Ethnic Armed groups found in Karbi Anglong

United people's Democratic Solidarity Group (UPDS) formed on 21st May 1999 by Karbi People's Force (KPF) and Karbi National Volunteers (KNV)

Karbi Longri – NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF)

Dima Halam Daogah (DHD – J) which is still not amenable to peace talks & (DHD-D) which is having a ceasefire agreement with the Central government.

Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA)

National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)

National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)

The Karbi-Dimasa Conflict

The Karbi-Dimasa conflict has to be situated in this context and of the tension that was built up during 2005. On many occasions during this year people resorted to violence imbued with the ideology of protecting their ethnic, religious and linguistic identities. However, many in Karbi Anglong believe that this violence resulted from a planned move to destabilise Karbi Anglong district through ethnic clashes. For example, in July 2005 there was violence between the Biharis and Adivasis who were living in the same village, doing the same type of cultivation and most of them had migrated to this area from the same place. In August 2005, the tension between the Karbis and Khasis over the border issue was blown out of proportion both in Assam and Meghalaya. The media in both the places published inflammatory articles and

controversial news reports in order to maintain an atmosphere of tension. In September 2005 a rumour was spread in the region that three persons belonging to the Kuki community were killed by suspected Karbi militants. This incident did not take place but the rumour rocked the district. (See the chronology of violence during the Karbi-Dimasa conflict in Appendix 1 and the number of victims in Appendix 2).

Because of this sudden spate of violence and other incidents many in Karbi Anglong believe that that the Karbi-Dimasa conflict was fabricated by the elements that wanted hatred between these two tribes. The plan was executed through the killing of three persons on 26th September, 2005. Three auto drivers from Manja, belonging to the Dimasa tribe were taken to the nearby forest and were brutally killed with sharp weapons. That resulted in the Karbi Dimasa ethnic conflict which destroyed the old bond between these two tribes. Many suspect that the conflict was meant to subvert the joint demand for an autonomous State. This conflict was even given a communal turn when on 1st October 2005, a church was burnt and looted. Many suspect that it was the handiwork of a national level communal organisation.

Conclusion

The background of Karbi Anglong given in this introductory chapter shows the climate of violence that has grown in the district. That has resulted in many conflicts during the last one decade. The next chapter will analyse some of their possible causes.

Chater 2: The Background of the Conflicts

It is clear from the background given in the last chapter that violence that one has witnessed in Kabi Anglong during the last one decade did not erupt all of a sudden. There was a build up to it. The effort in the present chapter is to understand the processes that led to this build up and the violence that followed.

A Review of the Past Events

The United People's Democratic Solidarity Group (UPDS) was formed in 1999 through the merger of the erstwhile Karbi People's Front (KPF) and Karbi National Volunteers. It sought to realise the dream of a separate state of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills and also aimed at accelerating the socio-cultural and economic upliftment of the people of the two districts. However, the UPDS later split due to disagreement on whether to hold negotiations with the central government or not. One faction agreed to hold negotiations while the other led by Mr. H. E. Kathar decided to stay away. The Kathar faction renamed itself the Karbi Longri National Liberation Front (KLNLF). Its demands include the creation of a political institution for self-determination for the Karbi people of Karbi Anglong and contiguous Karbi dominated areas of Assam and Meghalaya. They demanded this state under Article 3 of the constitution with additional powers under Article 371. KLNLF also demands the eviction of all non-indigenous people who have settled in the area after 1951. 'Self-determination here means self-rule within the framework of the constitution. The institution for self-rule demanded here is the creation of a full-fledged state. The new state shall be created by carving out the areas of present Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, contiguous Karbi dominated areas of Nagaon, Morigaon and Kamrup districts and the Ri-Bhoi districts of Meghalaya' explains UPDS Joint Secretary Wajaru Mukhrang.

A parallel militant group of the Dimasa tribe, Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) was formed in 1995. That too split into Dima Halam Daogah, Jewel (DHD – J) and Dima Halam Daogah, Dilip (DHD – D). The DHD-D demands the creation of a separate Dimaraji (Dimasa kingdom) comprising the Dimasa-inhabited areas of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts of Nagaon district and of the Dimapur district of Nagaland. Also its rival faction DHD-J, known as the Black Widow, formed by the ousted chairman Jewel Garlossa, is active in the twin districts. Another militant group is the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) (Karbi Anglong unit) formed in 2001 as an adjunct to the KRA formed in Manipur with the objective of using armed struggle as a means of achieving a separate homeland for the Kukis and work for their socio-cultural, political and economic upliftment. Also the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) is active in the district.

Some of these groups have signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre and have been assigned specific camps in the district. NDFB has been trying to get a designated camp in Karbi Anglong but this has not materialised. The Assam State Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Hemen Das says that this scheme of designated camps is dangerous because in the name of dialogue with the militants the armed groups are allowed to roam free and indulge in all types of anti-social activities. He adds that the bizarre practice of the militants belonging to both the UPDS and the DHD killing innocent villagers before the very eyes of the law-enforcement agencies, rings alarm bells about this practice of the government. The clashes between these factions are different from ethnic riots. Their perpetrators are not unarmed civilians but cadres of militant outfits that have entered into a ceasefire agreement with the state.

Renewed Demand for an Autonomous State

These incidents cannot be seen in isolation. They are integral to the larger issue of revival of the statehood movement in the two

hill districts. In 1970, when the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi contemplated granting full statehood to Meghalaya, a similar case for an independent state of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills was given in a memorandum signed by the cabinet member from Mikir Hills (renamed Karbi Anglong) and 11 others. Almost 16 years later on May 17, 1986 that demand for statehood led to the formation of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). The ASDC spearheaded a strong mass movement demanding an autonomous state under Article 244 (A) of the Constitution. That culminated in the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on April 1, 1995 between the Assam Government and the leaders of the ASDC.

The signing of the MoU led to an upgradation of the councils of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills with enhanced powers under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. But that has not stopped the demand for an autonomous state. The leaders who signed the MoU ten years ago are disillusioned with the councils that are in place in the hill districts. So they demand the creation of an autonomous state comprising the geographical areas of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The ASDC demand was unanimously passed in both the tribal councils. Subsequently the ruling Congress party tabled a resolution in the District Autonomous Councils demanding the creation of an Autonomous State comprising the hill districts.

The Karbi leaders have continued to make this demand also in the Union Parliament. In the course of a debate in the Lok Sabha, Veteran Karbi politician and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) leader Dr. Jayanta Rongpi said "the Sixth Schedule has been in practice since 1952. I have the experience of heading such an Autonomous Hill Council for seven long years. I was chief of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council for seven years. With that experience I can say that the Sixth Schedule has failed in India since 1952." The former MP from the Diphu constituency made a case for a separate state for the two hill districts of Assam by insisting that the Centre had upgraded all Sixth Schedule areas

into states. He pointed out that the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills were in the Sixth Schedule; that Mizoram was in the Sixth Schedule; and that the Centre had upgraded all these Sixth Schedule areas to states 'because there are inherent weaknesses in this Sixth Schedule' (Sushanta Talukdar. "Violence in the Hills," *Frontline*, November 18, 2005).

Leaders of the statehood movement argue that though 33 development departments were transferred to the tribal councils, the council authorities were not delegated adequate financial and legislative powers. As a result the council's dependence on Dispur (the State capital) continued and the very purpose of the Sixth Schedule was negated. For example, Holiram Terang, President of the ASDC and a signatory to the 1995 MoU, justifying the revival of the demand for statehood stated that the present situation could have been avoided 'had the Centre not ignored the warning that Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills have become a fertile ground for insurgency due to a combination of neglect and apathy of the rulers of Assam and the failure of the Sixth Schedule to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people' (Inil. "United We Survive Divided we Perish," *Frontline*, November 18, 2005).

Failure to Adhere to MOU

This demand is only one of the problems. Other problems are caused by the fact that the militant groups do not adhere to the ceasefire rules that bar their armed movement outside the designated camps. The militant outfits as well as the security forces continue to terrorise the twin hill districts of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. The militants violate the ceasefire agreement signed as the first step for negotiations on their demand for statehood. A series of gruesome killings of innocent villagers and arson are the manifestation of an internecine war that has been going on between the militant outfits. This violence has claimed hundreds of innocent lives and has rendered nearly 200,000 persons homeless between 2001 and 2006. Most of those killed or who lose their homes and

belongings are unarmed civilians, especially women who have nothing to do with this rivalry.

There is no instance of the law enforcement agencies enforcing this clause. Mr Rajiv Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, who accompanied Mr Sriprakash Jaiswal, Union Minister of State for Home affairs to Karbi Anglong accused both the outfits of violating the ceasefire agreement and even hinted at disarming them. However, the security forces make no effort to rein in the militants. As a result, in the postaccord period, there was competition between the militant factions and the democratic movement. But most people who had once rallied behind the democratic organisations remained aloof because they were afraid of retaliation from the militants.

Political parties like ASDC and the Congress (I) which are clamoring for an autonomous state and claim to have the support of the Karbi and Dimasa people and of other communities living in the two hill districts have failed to exercise any influence over the UPDS or the DHD-D and convince them to refrain from using arms against the villagers or against each other. This is most likely to weaken the democratic voice and encourage armed groups to dictate the terms of peace. For the Centre, it will again be easier to convince militant groups to accept a package in lieu of the statehood demand than to negotiate with leaders of the democratic movement on the same demand.

Moving Towards a Conflict

At the moment, the Karbi and Dimasa insurgency problem seems far away but there are many areas of tension between them. The first is confusion over the territories which they will occupy if an autonomous state is granted. The territories that the UPDS and DHD demand overlap with each other. The persistent demand of the UPDS that the DHD should shift to its designated camp away from the Dhansiri area of Karbi Anglong is perceived by the DHD as an attempt to stake a claim over the territory demanded by the

Dimasa militant outfit. With these perceptions, the two militant groups are most likely to intensify their battle for supremacy. The two hill states may have to witness more bloodshed if a solution continues to elude the twin districts and the political dialogue is prolonged further. There are also signs of eruption of communal violence between the two tribes. This assumption implies that even in a situation of ethnic conflict one has to focus on promoting communal harmony between these two communities.

The second problem is "taxation". That was the background of the 2003 Karbi-Kuki conflict. The tension between their militant groups resulted from their policy of "tax collection" which from time to time was not confined to their own communities though it was done in the name of safeguarding the interests of their community. Many minor skirmishes took place between these groups. Their victims were innocent villagers. Another reason for this tension was the UPDS ban on *jhum* cultivation in Singhason Khonbamon Hills on the ground that it led to ecological damage and soil erosion. Both the Karbis and Kukis followed this method of cultivation for a long time, but the conflict started when the Kuki farmers began to raise ginger crop on a very large scale and prospered. The Karbi farmers interpreted the ban on *jhum* as a strategy to free land for ginger cultivation..

A new situation arose when the hill leaders spoke of what they perceived as repression and exploitation at the hands of the Assam ruling clique. The dialogue of the UPDS and DHD with the Government of India was moved ahead and there was a new interest shown by the national media and political leaders in the affairs of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. The 2001 intensive tour of Karbi Anglong by the NDA convenor Mr George Fernandes was part of that positive effort.

The Sequence of Events

Despite these moves, many in Karbi Anglong think that the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 was engineered by a third party and that it was the response of the decision-makers of Assam to these initiatives. Since 2001, the hill people of this tract have experienced conflicts that they find mysterious. After the Karbi-Kuki conflagration of 2003 the tribals were amazed at its brutality and at the manner in which they could kill each other. Before 2005 there was no history of the tribals of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills killing or attacking each other. After 2005 they feel that the origin of the conflict remains a mystery. Also the 2003 Dimasa-Hmar clash has remained a mystery, so has the Karbi-Kuki and the Karbi-Khasi clashes in the same year. The Karbi-Dimasa clash of 2005 adds to the mystery.

Many who have studied the conflicts feel that those who engineered them have cleverly played the contradictions between the militant groups to ignite violence. The civil society members are never involved but sadly they become mere victims or spectators. In such a situation, the clashes cannot be categorised merely as ethnic violence. One has to expose the mysterious elements and the motive behind their actions. The political elements have created conflict situations between communities taking advantage of strong sentiments that go against their political aspirations. Analysts believe that the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 was an attempt to divide these two tribes and to portray them as mean and intolerant aggressors. The objective seems to divide these two tribes that are involved in a political struggle for a joint state. Simmering tension was built up between these tribes over the years. A small spark was needed to ignite a full scale conflagration and that was provided by the killing of three autorickshaw drivers on 26th Sept 2005. By accusing the UPDS of committing the crime the district police invited retaliation from the Dimasa tribe.

The possible objectives of the onslaught of violence in Karbi Anglong appear to be the following:

1. To divide the people of Karbi Anglong and their brethren in NC Hills.
2. To ensure that tribal aspirations are curbed by keeping them engaged in ethnic clashes. Inculcating the spirit of unhealthy competition among the people and forcing them to excel others thereby pushing them to be aggressive rather than assertive.
3. To ignite distrust and hatred among the tribes on the basis of aggressive chauvinism so that each tribe thinks of its own borders and territory and is engaged in violence and hatred and would not have time to join the others in any common demand.
4. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of this tract and all the conflicts have been in the agricultural season in May when agricultural operations begin or in October the harvesting season. That seems to be aimed at disrupting the economy.
5. To disturb the educational aspirations of the people in the area especially for the school and college going students whose examinations are held in October and November. Most conflicts have been during these months.
6. These conflicts also seem to be aimed at capturing the fertile and oil rich land in the Dhansiri area.
7. To encourage antagonism based on religion through false accusations such as forcible conversion, insults, arson, looting, raping and assaults on women.

These objectives have to be situated in the context of the inability of the Government to take any responsible and legal action to settle the land disputes between the Dimasas and Karbis. They have been pending for a very long time. Dhansiri which comes under Karbi Anglong is claimed by the DHD as part of Dimaraji (kingdom of Dimasa) and by the adjacent Nagaland as part of

Greater Nagaland. Dhansiri is rich in oil and that explains the interest of all the parties in this area. The 2003 conflict began in this area. The 2005 conflict was its continuation. During all the conflicts, the media played a dangerous role of misinterpreting the facts and figures and that led to further conflicts.

Social and Psychological Impacts

Whether the above were conscious objectives or not, these have been the consequences of the conflicts. These acts of violence have been sustained through a hate campaign especially through the media. During the conflict, external forces, for example the fundamentalist groups manipulate the minority communities and mislead them to achieve their political interest of suppressing their rights. The total disregard for non-violence is visible in the conflicts. In fact, the 2003 Karbi-Kuki conflict began on 2nd October, birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of non-violence.

An impact analysis was done of the conflict according to the socio-economic, educational, health and sanitation criteria. The evaluation was based on village or household surveys, observation, discussion and information obtained through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). It was also an attempt to throw some light on the socio-economic, political, educational and cultural feature of the area (see chapter 4). The clashes were enormous and their psycho-social impact could not be quantified easily. Most victims of the clashes were left homeless, landless, destitute, injured, dead or abused. Among the immediate consequences was loss of security in the clash prone areas as civilians took the law into their own hands and targeted their perceived enemies. As a result of insecurity, there was indiscriminate loss of human lives. Many others sustained physical injuries and most were traumatised.

The first impact of these conflicts is displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons but not all of them can be counted. A standard and perhaps convenient practice has been to adopt a head counting of the people who ultimately find their way to the relief

camps and close their eyes to the population who choose to migrate to the urban centres or mingle with the general populace. For example, as per the data available the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 caused around 75,000 refugees in Karbi Anglong. But many others live with relatives or in makeshift shelters far from the zone of conflict. Most of them received first aid and medical care but have no access to proper food, sanitation and clothing. Though it is presumed that refugees and internally displaced persons are one and the same and the only distinction between them is bureaucratic and legal attitude in reality the only commonality between them is that both are displaced from their traditional homes due to similar reasons. But there is a clear distinction between them.

The inadequate water supply and sanitation facilities coupled with overcrowding made the relief camps ideal places for outbreaks of jaundice, typhoid, diarrhea, chicken pox, measles, respiratory tract infections and other communicable diseases. The cultural heritage too was disrupted. The tribals were unable to go to their place of worship such as churches and temples as some of these holy places were destroyed. They abstained from wearing their traditional dresses for fear of being identified and attacked. The beauty of their culture and traditions was checked by this conflict. (See Appendix 2)

Economic Consequences

Whether they lived with their relatives or in the relief camps, in public buildings, makeshift shelters, schools or colleges the displaced persons faced acute poverty as their sustenance was destroyed during the conflict. They lived with little health care. The self-help groups (SHG) in the affected villages were showing remarkable progress by way of rural upliftment. Their activities were hampered. For example under Jirsong Asong (An NGO) 58 SHGs located in and around Diphu, Dhansiri, Rongkangthir, Kheroni and Manja were having regular savings, monthly meetings and income generation schemes. All the activities were disrupted since the members fled their homes.

However, the economic impact of the clashes has not been quantified since it is not easy to assess it. One can only say that the conflicts have resulted in a gigantic waste of human and economic resources. Agricultural activities were disrupted; important crops like sesamum, ginger, rice, chilly, brinjal, yam, ladies finger, cabbage, radish, peas and mustard were either destroyed or abandoned because of the widespread violence. Work on agricultural land stopped for a long time as farm workers stayed away due to fear of being attacked by the groups in conflict.

Other economic problems related to the clashes followed such as food insecurity, destruction of property, loss of livestock etc. Thousands of families lost their personal and household possessions as their houses, granaries, farms, shops and other premises went up in flames. The household possessions that were lost included furniture, utensils, ornaments, clothes, handloom sets, rice mills, vehicles, TV, VCD, radio sets, solar lights, shops and cash. Many lost cows, buffaloes, oxen, pigs, goats, sheep, pigeons, rabbits, ducks, dogs and other domestic animals and birds.

Impact on Education

A major consequence of the clashes is that the educational ambitions of the youth of the tribes of this tract are curbed by keeping them engaged in ethnic clashes. The school and college examinations are held during October and November and most clashes have been during these months. Thousands of school and college going children were unable to attend school or appear for the exams. Some children dropped out of school or college due to the financial and socio-economic constraints resulting from the conflict. Both the students and teachers belonging to the 'enemy' ethnic groups were forced to leave the district and go to other schools while some others abandoned their teaching careers. The students and teachers of the two ethnic groups treated each other as enemies and experienced feelings of fear, anxiety and distrust.

Tragically many children have suffered also emotional and

mental damage and psychological trauma as a result of the horrifying experience. Even those who did not witness violence or lose family members suffered the disruption of their normal lives as schools closed, friends dispersed and their homes were turned into ashes. Because of the trauma some children even lost their faculty of speech or became emotionally withdrawn. One fears that some of them may permanently change over to an aggressive behaviour or to revenge. That may manifest itself in another cycle of violence. Apart from losing their books, bags and uniforms, many children went hungry and fell sick because of inadequate food and poor living conditions. Schools were turned into relief camps. All of it added to the disruption of their studies.

Conclusion

Long standing political insecurity is the root cause of ethnic conflicts. The Indian heritage of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) preached by Mahatma Gandhi and the spirit of a life of simplicity or 'living lightly on earth' has been forgotten by the present day leaders. Instead of people's welfare, most leaders think only of their own good. In the process peace and harmony between communities are destroyed. Crores of rupees sanctioned for various schemes are not spent or are misused. That causes discontent among the people but the leaders exploit these grievances by building up animosity against other communities instead of dealing with the discontent. What is the way out of it? The next chapter will take a look at this question.