

Displaced Koch-Rajbanshis: forgotten misery



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Anuj Choudhury 31 May 2015 Updated 31 May 13576 views

At the peak of Bodo movement for separate homeland in the 1980's the first [community](#) that was targeted, [looted](#), killed and displaced, with the intend of ethnic-cleansing were the Koch-Rajbanshis. From our visit to the field it was reported that around 60 people belonging to the Koch-Rajbanshi [community](#) were brutally massacred by the Bodo militants. Haris Pathak (38 years) can still recall the heinous crime he saw when he was a child. He narrates one of the incident where a poor old Koch-Rajbanshi lady, who used to live her life by selling betel leaf, unable to pay ransom to the militants, was tortured, the militants stabbed her eye-balls mercilessly with sharp weapon and made her [blind](#) before killing her. With the rising violence, in the year 1989 from the northern part of Bongaigaon (now Chirang) district, about 220 Koch-Rajbanshi families from 43 villages fled from their homes leaving behind their valuable property like land, cattle, crops, etc and took shelter in various designated [camps](#) to escape the [carnage](#) unleashed by Bodo armed militants.

After being displaced, the [victims](#) for a year were kept in various [camps](#) in Bongaigaon district. They were first made to settle in Dolaigaon Lower Primary School and then from there they were shifted to North Boitamari High School, from Boitamari High School they were again shifted to Dangtola Lower Primary School and then to Kukurmari, where they stayed in make-shift tents. After a year, after being made to shift different places, in the year 1990 finally they were made to settle in Phoolkumari, Babunitila-I, Babunitila-II and Pochim Bhadrangaon relief [camps](#) in Bidyapur in Bongaigaon. As a relief material the displaced only received a 5-6 meter plastic sheet and Rs. 2,500 per family. In these relief [camps](#) there are also few Rabha, Sutradhar, Nath and Kalita families who have also been [victims](#) of mass killings of the Bodo movement.

25 years have passed till now; these families are still living in these relief [camps](#) in most pathetic conditions. Once these people who were proud farmers and tilled their own ancestral land have been pushed to extreme poverty and are fighting for their basic survival. Also, due to river bank erosion the land allotted for Babunitila-II relief camp is also no more. The river water has washed away this land. The 200 families that were taking shelter in this relief camp have moved to other [camps](#) and some have settled in the outskirts of Bongaigaon district on barren lands. The locations where they have settled are in Sanyasi Pahar, Khokorpur, Karigaon, etc.

Present Situation:

The inmates are having a hard time leaving in these [camps](#). The civil society organizations, student unions and the local administration have completely neglected this population. Majority of the population works as daily wage laborers for their income. The condition in the relief camp is so degrading and poverty ridden that the livelihood of many families is also dependent on selling of country liquor. There are also families in the relief camp where prostitution has become their means of survival.

The government has allotted 332 bigha of land for the Phoolkumari relief camp inmates but till today none of the displaced has received any land patta from the concerned authorities. This has also led to other communities who are in majority in that area, mainly the [Muslims](#), forcefully occupying the relief camp's land. Similar is also the case with Bamunitila Relief Camp where [Muslims](#) have occupied a major portion of the relief camp's land. Moreover, the inmates themselves have sold lands to other communities at very cheap rates due to poverty. The land which current [price](#) would be around Rs. 1.5 lakhs per bigha, the inmates have sold it for just Rs. [10,000](#). At present the main concern among the inmates has been to legalize these lands.

There is also problem of high dropouts and illiteracy in the village. The village school is not functioning properly as the teachers don't turn up regularly. Same is the condition with the anganwadi also. Moreover, anganwadi workers and teachers have been employed from outside the village which is [against](#) the rule.

Phoolkumari, Babunitila and Bhadrangaon have been brought under the ambit of revenue village and the inmates got their voting [rights](#) in 1997. But this population has mainly been seen as second class citizens and only used as vote banks. Every time before the elections they are promised many things by the [leaders](#) but after the elections none of the promises are fulfilled and the [leaders](#) only turn up after five years again. MGNREGA is functioning in the village but none of the inmate of the relief [camps](#) has got job cards. However, recently few families have received Rs. [10](#),000 under Indira Awas Yojana to build houses and the families have [BPL](#) card and are beneficiaries of the Public Distribution [System](#).

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