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Displacement and rehabilitation due to natural calamities: A historical study on socio-economic condition of rehabilitated villages in Tinsukia district, Assam

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Abstract

The study of displacement and rehabilitation due to natural calamities- earthquake, flood and erosion in historical perspective is helpful to understand a history of socio-economic condition of displaced and rehabilitated people. The earthquake of 1897 and 1950 had changed the structure of the Brahmaputra plain in the Northern bank of Dibrugarh District. Rohmoriamauza, situated at Dibrugarh District, Eastern part of Assam, has been known for the problem of flood and erosion. It is located in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River. The land of this region is very fertile; hence agricultural was primary occupation of the people. But due to earthquake and flood since 1950 onwards the region has lost and eroded 3rd/4th parts of its and 38 villages and altogether 1746 households in the Brahmaputra River.

The natural obstructions and its impact on local ecology changed the condition of entire region during the 20th century. As results the local inhabitants forced to displace and re-establish in the different parts of Assam. They lost their agricultural and homestead land and became landless community. Once the people of Rohmoriamauza were master of their properties, they had agricultural land, homestead land, own fishery for fishing, wet land for rice cultivation, domesticated animals and sufficient grazing land as well as common forest for firewood collection but after displacement and rehabilitation they deprived from these prosperous life. This work covers the rehabilitated areas of Tinsukia District to understand the consequences of natural calamities- earthquake, flood and erosion. To rehabilitation government has provided land in the different areas of Assam mostly in the forest and grazing land which resulted for the deforestation and adjustment problem in rehabilitated sites.

Keywords: Calamities, displacement, erosion, ecology, inhabitants, rehabilitation

1. Introduction

The study of displacement and rehabilitation due to natural calamities- earthquake, flood and erosion in historical perspective is helpful to understand a history of socio-economic condition of displaced and rehabilitated people [1]. The earthquake of 1897 and 1950 have changed structure of the Brahmaputra plain and due to heavy rainfall, deforestations in the Assam valley caused massive flood and erosion in the Brahmaputra River [2]. After the great earthquake of 15th August 1950, southward migration of the Brahmaputra River started and due to which there was continuous erosion of villages in Rohmoriamauza area. The research work in Rohmoriamauza area found that altogether 38 villages have been eroded since 1950 [3]. Since 1950 to 2011 altogether 1746 household eroded in the Brahmaputra River at Rohmoriamauza area and its people were displaced in different parts of Assam [4]. During these period, as with erosion of agricultural and homestead land, different historical and important places, institutes, roads, river, *beels*, temples were badly affected and eroded by the Brahmaputra River. Dibrugarh-Tinsukia-Rangagora (DRT) road also historically known as '*Tamuli Ali*', which was one of the important road for communication for the people of Rohmoriamauza with Tinsukia and Dibrugarh town also eroded [5]. Dibrugarh River was followed from east to west between Rohmoriamauza area and falls into the Brahmaputra was eroded during the last four decades of 20th century. The *beels* and rivers were the important source of economic for natives and especially for the fishing community of Rohmoriamauza [6]. Agriculture was one of the most important sources of economic and almost 90% of people were dependent on the agriculture but due to erosion of agricultural land, *beels* and rivers people forced to move their economic activities in the resettled areas [7].

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The maps available in the articles are shows that from 1915 to 2005 altogether 161.97 km² have been eroded out of the total land area 236.54 km² of Rohmoriam [8]. Thus due to erosion of land and migration of the Brahmaputra River in southward after the great earthquake of 15 August 1950 altogether ¾ part of Rohmoriam was lost its land and as results all affected people were displaced permanently and reestablished in different regions of Assam especially in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh District.

The study has focused on people displacement and their rehabilitation due to natural calamities during the last five decades of 20th century. This study will be exposed about the natural obstructions and its impact on local ecology and also investigated on impact of displaced and resettled of the people at new areas after lost their agricultural and homestead land. This work covers the rehabilitated area of Tinsukia District and to understand natural calamities-earthquake, flood and erosion and its consequences the study also focused in Rohmoriam area located at southern bank of the Brahmaputra River present in Dibrugarh District, Assam.

2. Methodology

The work has been completed after collecting data from primary and secondary sources after studying the affected area. During the investigation interviews have been taken of displaced and rehabilitated people where it has covered 16 rehabilitated villages as field work and research in Tinsukia District, Assam. Library and archive works and also case study of the erosion affected people have been carried out in purpose to understand the socio-economic history of the displaced and rehabilitated people. To understand the areas of study maps have been prepared in historical perspective.

3. Displacement and rehabilitation

Movement and settlement of people in search of livelihood is a natural phenomenon. It is generally associated with the interest, suitability, choice and selection of people themselves. But when the movement of the people was not associated with their choice, interest and when they were not given any notice to left their home in this situation all section of people were affected badly and this phenomenon can called, people displacement due to sudden accidents [9]. Displacement of people meant that people move from one place to another for resettlement and in search of their livelihood. Since the great earthquake of 1950 displacement of people also happened in large extent due to natural calamities like- flood and erosion in the Brahmaputra River in Assam [10]. People lost their agricultural and homestead land which forced to displace them in sudden situation and without any proper support by the government. Most of the displaced people have supported by the government of Assam and provided them land for rehabilitation [11]. In 1953 numbers of 20 families had resettled at Dhekiajan and 15-20 families at Kherjan, a forest reserve area located near Pengaree 12 km inside from Digboi town and 48 km from District head quarter in Tinsukia District [12]. These two villages were established after the erosion of Mohmara Nepali Khand and by the displaced people of Rohmoriam Mauza in Dibrugarh District [13].

Case study of displaced families helps us to understand the history of socio-economic condition of rehabilitated villages of Tinsukia District. Case study of Mr. Prem Bahadur Regmi Chetry, age 66 years old, son of Sher Bahadur Regmi

Chetry, resident of Dhekiajan village, under Margherita subdivision, Tinsukia, Assam has explained that in 1950 due to the great earthquake land of Rohmoriam area was badly affected and it changed the nature of the Brahmaputra River, its high magnitude flood eroded Mohmara Nepali Khand Gaon in 1953. According to Prem Bahadur Regmi Chetry at Mohmara Panchayat more than 500 families were living with different caste and community such as *Nepali, Ahom, Bihari, Adiwasi, Mising, Ghasi, Mogor, Rana, Thakur, Malah, Kachari, Matak* and *Manipuri*. As village had situated in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River where flood was common problem, hence all people of this area lived in *Chang Ghar*. Agriculture was the most important occupation of these people and about all people belonged to farmer family. Agriculture as the prime occupation, some people also engaged in fishing and dairy farm. But due to erosion of their land and home by the Brahmaputra River in 1953 numbers of family got land at Tinsukia District for rehabilitation. Among these families most people were belonged to Nepali community accepts few others such as Manipuri and Bihari and they Rehabilitated at two villages like- Dhekiajan and Kherjan which are situated near Digboi forest areas, Tinsukia District, Assam. The land of these areas is very suitable for the tea plantation and rice cultivation. Each displaced family had got 12 *bighas* of land by the government of Assam. Prem Bahadur Regmi Chetry an educated person of the rehabilitated Dhekiajan village are said that during the settlement of people in rehabilitated villages like Dhekiajan and Kherjan the area was covered with thick forest and so people harassed from the attacks of wild animals [14]. After resettlement they started to search new economic activities for their livelihood. Because these villages are situated in the periphery of forest area some people also have chosen wood supply activities during the early decades of rehabilitation. Most of the people are depended on tea plantation and paddy cultivation. In these responses it has found that due to the different ecological condition in their native villages and rehabilitated villages they also shifted their economic activities [15].

Agriculture was the main occupation of the people in Rohmoriam area. Due to the changes ecological condition of rehabilitated areas people also affected in their living style. Earlier at Rohmoriam area people lived in joint families, extended family and with own community. They promote agriculture with the support of their joint family but after displacement and resettlement in unwanted and inadequate land the family was divided. Majgaon (Mising village) and Goipani Mising Gaon in Tinsukia District established in 1984- 1985 by the displaced people from Rohmoriam Mauza. Both the villages established 32 household and every family got land in both villages by the government of Assam. Land comes under Majgaon provided for the household and at Goipani for cultivation. But distance between the homestead land and the agricultural land was 5-6 km so it was difficult to control on both places at the same time. Hence every family divided and settled in both places for their livelihood. (A case study) in 1984 after the displacement of a family from Rohmoriam they rehabilitated at Majgaon or Goipani Mising Gaon. The family was comprised with five sons. After displacement they divided into the five different places in lack of sufficient agricultural land in their rehabilitated village [16].

The rehabilitated villages in Tinsukia District such as Majgaon, Goipani Mising Gaon, Bijulibon, Kenia village, Sainaki Mising Gaon, established by the single community. The villages like Majgaon, Goipani Mising Gaon, Sainaki Mising Gaon and Bijulibon were established by Mising people; Kenia village and Gabharubheti Gaon established by Bihari people. The villages like Dhekiajan, Kherjan and Madhavpur were established by Nepalese people accept few numbers of Biharies and Manipuri family, although Adarsa Gaon established by the Ahom people. The above discussion shows that the erosion affected people lost their living style because earlier at their native land 'Rohmoriam' all villages were comprised with the mixed community but after displacement they started to live with their own people and consequently they lost unity among all those communities [17].

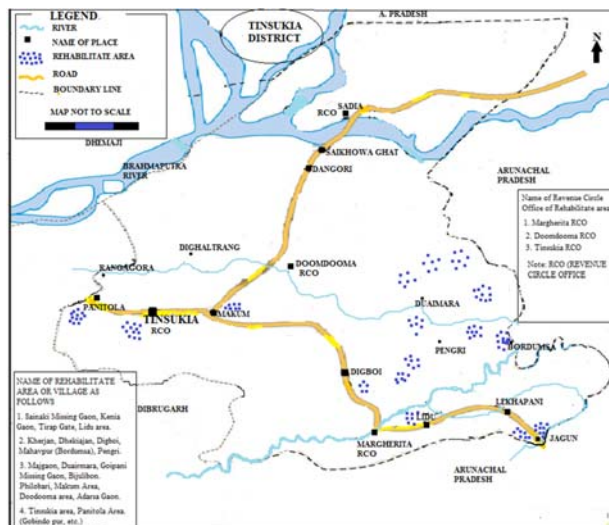
Deforestation was another important cause of displacement and rehabilitation of people. India is one of the second largest populated countries in World where according to the census 2011 the density of India has gone up 383 persons per square kilometer [18]. The occurrences of the environmental disaster such as earthquake, flood and river bank erosion many people force to leave their original land and houses. People from the erosion affected area migrate in new places to resettlement. The displaced people from Rohmoriam area have supported by the government of Assam and provided land for rehabilitation. Investigation on the rehabilitated village in Tinsukia District has found that entire rehabilitated villages had established in forest land and grazing land. The rehabilitated villages such as Dhekiajan village, Kherjan village, Madhvpur village, Adarsha Gaon, Sainaki Mising Gaon, Goipani Mising Gaon, Bijulibon Gaon and other such have situated either in forest land area or in the periphery of the forest. For cultivation and better economic support people of the regions started to occupy on the forest area as they felt necessity. It has found that the plantation of tea in Assam also resulted for deforestation. Thus deforestation in Tinsukia District is another important impact of the displacement and rehabilitation [19]. (Case study) Dhekiajan village was established in 1953 for re-establishment of displaced people from Rohmoriam Mauza. The village is situated in periphery of the Digboi forest area under Margherita Revenue Circle, Tinsukia District. During the investigation it has founded

that the peripheries of this area are covered with thick forest. The area of village is very suitable for the tea plantation and therefore to establish their livelihood people started to use the periphery land of forest area. The village can consider as the door to enter in the Forest area [20]. Adarsha Gaon situated under Margherita Revenue Circle in Tinsukia District. It was established in 1983 between the forest sites by 90 displaced families. Interview from the people states that during establishment of this village there was lack of proper road and surrounding of village covered with thick forest. Because the village is situated in the forest and high plain land the wet land is not sufficient for wet cultivation like rice. Due to the lack of proper road to communicate with local places and towns the people of village constructed *Kucha* roads after cuttings the jungles. Hence case study of Dhekiajan and Adarsha Gaon shows that displacement of people and their resettlement also impact on deforestation [21].

4. Kinds of displacement and Rehabilitation

Socio-economic impact of displacement and rehabilitation due to Natural calamities in the Rohmoriam area and rehabilitated villages of Tinsukia District has found three kinds of displacement such as non- displaced or temporally displaced people, internally displaced people and externally displaced people [22]. First: Non-displaced or temporally displaced people, those still living in pre-flood affected places of residence but they were temporally displaced during the flood. The temporary displaced people again choose their original place with the acceptance of the re-disturbance by the flood and river erosion. Second: Internally displaced, those still living in the Rohmoriam Mauza but displaced from the original residence. These types of displaced people live with little security of their livelihood. Third: Externally displaced, those still living but outside of the original region. The research on the displaced people from Rohmoriam Mauza has exposed that maximum people are rehabilitated outside of their native place [23].

A map shows the rehabilitated area, those displaced from Rohmoriam Mauza after the great Assam earthquake 1950 and rehabilitated at different parts of Tinsukia. Rehabilitated places are pointed on the following map of Tinsukia District, Assam:



Map of Rehabilitated area of Tinsukia District, sources from 'Erosion and Displacement...)' [24]

5. Effect of Erosion, Displacement and Rehabilitation

Land erosion and displacement of people changed the socio-economic condition of the erosion affected people. It affects on the economic condition of people and also creates some social problems among the society such as- health, education, occupation, living standard. At the same time due to the erosion of forest land, agricultural and homestead land which affects on the balance of environment. People resettlement in new areas also affects on the local environment such as deforestation, growth of population, growth of poverty etc.

Affect on the livelihood of the people is important result of displacement and rehabilitation. It find that the livelihood of people mainly depend on the geography and environment. After displacement and rehabilitation most of the rehabilitated people changed their sources of livelihood at new places. The rehabilitated people of Adarsha Gaon in Tinsukia District have lost their custom of rice cultivation due to the lack of wetland in their village ^[25].

On May 4, 1984 one hundred and ten land erosion affected household got housing land and the agricultural land in Baliyan Pani Era village under Chabua revenue Circle. All these families were forced to migrate in this new area due to the erosion of the Goldon Sabaru Bali Hori village of Rohmoriam Panchayat. At the rehabilitated site people started to cultivation but after few years they got threats and disturbances from the local community. On the investigation of situation it is found that due to the fear of future accommodation of the local inhabitants, people lead to discrimination with new people on the basis of caste and community. In the condition due to such threats all rehabilitated people had sold their new plots in 1998 and come in the situation of re-displacement and ultimately settle down in different parts of Assam ^[26].

During the investigation of rehabilitated villages it has found that after displacement of people due to the lack of proper land to accommodate the joint family and extended family also divided their family in the course of time. Mising people of Majgaon or Goipani Mising Gaon are the rehabilitated villages in Tinsukia District are best example for such type of problem ^[27].

6. Conclusion

Thus displaced people and their rehabilitation at new area in the different ecological conditions are affected on the social and economical conditions of the people. Geography and economy of their native land (Rohmoriam) mainly based on agriculture. From the early and medieval time and before the 1950, when the population of the area was sufficient in proportion and when there was lots of fertile agricultural land including jungle and forest land and the *beels*, grazing land, the shifting was the system of cultivation. The inhabitant of these land were self-sufficient, they eat rice, wheat, potato, pulses, vegetables, milk, fish from their field. But after displacement and resettlement in new land people failed to produce crops and food grains even for their household uses. They became dependant on the imported foods and goods. This study shows that how the displaced people became more vulnerable after settlement at the rehabilitated area. At new places some group of people failed to improve their economic condition and in search of new job they are migrated in different places.

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