IDPs and the State's Response in Assam: Question of Social Justice

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Abstract: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are one of the major concerns of the world. This paper is an attempt to unravel the critical issues related to the IDPs. Increasing hostility towards IDPs intensifies the more massive humanitarian crisis. Specific policy and political agency are required in the process of transcending marginality. However, increasing global securitization has led more emphasis to repatriation as well as humanitarian assistance.

Keywords: Displacement, Social Justice, Assam, Policy.

I. Introduction

Internally Displaced persons (IDPs) are a widespread phenomenon in the present time. Assam, a state in the North Eastern region of India, contains all the three categories of IDPs, namely development-induced, conflict-induced and environment-induced displacement. The primary concern in this context is state response towards each kind of IDPs.

Social justice stands for the mutually beneficial aspect, although it has been criticized as not being sufficiently egalitarian (Kymlicka 1990: 125-132). Social justice advocates fairness, no discrimination, and participation in policy making and implementing. It focuses on how and to what extent "the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of human society" (Miller 1999, 1). Social justices, according to Ruth Lister are multi-scalar. It means, "Injustice can be identified both below and above the nonstate. At one end of the spatial scale, feminists identify the private, domestic sphere as a site of struggles for social justice” (Listern 2010:249).

At last, it led to the idea of global justice. The utilitarian argues that social justice entails the fair distribution of pleasure and pain for the pursuit of the greater good. Derrida argues that social justice rather than something realizable in any immediate form represents the end that “to come” (Derrida 1992:27). Social justice can be read as an idea that leads people against injustice, as argued by Newman and Yeates. Arguing social justice as the process and the outcome, Richard Pozzuto states, "Collectively, we move toward social justice through critique, dialogue, and creation. Each of these processes requires thought, effort and practice” (2006:95). Thus, social justice shaped through societal obligations and also with societal relations. Here lies the question of social justice for the affected and how their grievances are tried to be mitigated differently by the authority is also a matter of concern. The current work will center on IDPs and social justice context.

II. Who are IDPs?

UN defines IDPs as the "involuntarily displaced persons” in a geographical boundary of a sovereign state. They are forcefully uprooted from their homeland and placed in impoverished situations. The United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement defines IDPs as --- "persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to, avoid the effects of armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border” (Handbook for Applying the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1999:6).

IDPs are not confined to the above mentioned causes. It can be studied under three brother themes - conflict-induced, natural-disaster/environment-induced, and human-made development-induced IDPs (Hussain 2008: 20). In many a time, IDPs are not spontaneous rather it's "organized state policy." For example in case of Ethiopia, Iraq, Burma, Zimbabwe, Bosnia IDPs are related to the state policy over the years. IDPs are virtually different from the "Refugees." Involuntary nature of movement and movement within the nation differ them from refugees. Unlike refugees, IDPs does not entitle to the special treatment from the international community. Being forcefully displaced from their homeland, IDPs are more vulnerable to pauperization and diseases than others. They are easy targets for physical exploitation, forced recruitment and sexual harassment too. Therefore, among these vulnerable groups mortality rates are high and also they undergo troubles due to the nutritional deficit. IDMC reports show...
that the number of IDPs has been increasing in India over time exceeding six lakh. However, there is no nationwide report on the issue of internal displacement.

III. IDPs and Question of Social Justice

According to the study by UNHCR in 2008, there were 42 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide. Among them, 15.2 million were refugees, and 26 million were IDPs. There was a 22 percent increase in the application for the refugee status between 2007-08. With the persistent civil warfare, the number of IDPs, refugees has been increasing over the years. Growing hostility towards these sections is significant issue of concern. Xenophobia is another major factor that has been attached to this phenomenon to a large extent. As argued by Agamben, "The separation between humanitarianism and politics that we are experiencing today is the extreme phase of the separation of the rights of man from the rights of the citizen." (Agamben 1998:133). In the context of the IDPs, the major question of concern is rehabilitation and resettlement. The response of the state in a different kind of displacement is different. Study of IDPs in the response of the context of social justice needs a review of the relevant theories. Walzer in the "Spheres of Justice" explains that a sustained account of social justice supporting critical, democratic principles on communitarian foundations. His concept of a just order is based on the shared understanding of the social goods. Walzer argues justice as “complex equality,” and it is contradictory to the “simple” egalitarian concepts. He has made two specific claims in explaining social values. Firstly, the objects that are socially valued are different for different political communities. Secondly, communities typically have pluralistic values, i.e., they appreciate a variety of social goods. In his analysis, each of the various goods associated with the correct distribution of norms. Extracting from this analysis one can argue that social justice will be implemented with the proper rehabilitation and resettlement of the IDPs, their social, economic, cultural and all other issues need to be care of.

IV. IDPs and the State of Assam

IDPs are a global phenomenon that has been growing in an alarming rate over the years. As stated by UMDP, there were 244 million international migrants in 2015. Data shows that in 2016 the record number includes 22.5 million refugees, 40.3 million IDPs and 2.8 million asylum seekers in the world. A Norwegian NGO for Refugees has said that India had a staggering 345,000 internally displaced persons in Assam alone in 2014 and at least 850,000 IDPs overall in the last five years. A report by the Asian Centre for Human Rights stated that Assam has over 3 Lakh IDPs, the highest in number during the year 2014. The report explained that IDPs in Assam are the humanitarian crisis. In the year 2017, total of 1,346,000 IDPs was recorded by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, India. Addressing the issue of IDPs, UN offers a “Thirty Guideline Principles” as directives to the respective countries for the protection of the rights, liberty and necessary humanitarian assistance to IDPs. UN High Commissioner for Refugees also works to ensure the basic standard of living of the IDPs. It wants all authorities and concerned actors in the exercise of their respective mandates, rapid and unimpeded access to internally displaced persons to assist in their return or resettlement and reintegration.

In India, there is National Policy of Resettlement and Rehabilitation, (2007) to satisfy the issue of mostly the development and conflict-induced IDPs. It directs the national authorities to develop planned strategies before the execution of forced displacement. Further, the policy includes all other kinds of internally displaced persons and tends to satisfy the basic minimum standard of living to all the kinds of IDPs to fulfill their individual, social and community interests. The major concern of conflict in the context of the IDPs is the proper resettlement. In the development induced IDPs, the authority provides minimal monetary assistance that might not come up to requirement many a time. In the conflict-induced IDPs, people in the camps are generally denied essential community development initiatives.

In contrast to these two types of IDPs, displaced people hardly had the chance to be back to their original settlement. IDPs are the most vulnerable section across the nation. The study shows that IDPs camps are over packed. No extra care for women, specifically the pregnant women and the newborn. Medical facilities are not enough. For example, in 2012 Assam violence, IDPs was not even provided warm cloth at the Sakkipara camp. People in the camps had to suffer bullets in the aftermath of the Assam conflict, 2012. The UN Guiding Principles states that "in no circumstances shall displaced children be recruited nor be required or permitted to take part in hostilities." They further add, "IDPs shall be protected against discriminatory practices of recruitment into any armed forces or groups as a result of their displacement. In particular, any cruel, inhuman or degrading practices that compel compliance or punish non-compliance with recruitment are prohibited in all circumstances.” However, Assam provides gross violation of these basic principles in the post-1998 violence. Collected account form the camps show that they are deprived of the clean drinking water. For example, in the Sakkipara camp, where the government provided eleventh tube wells, only six were in functional condition. No proper toilets in the camps set up after 1996-98 violence. To be precise, IDPs are in unsafe condition without essential amenities and securities. No element of social justice reaches them without any enabling agency.
V. Conclusion

IDPs are seemingly insurmountable situations of socio-economic marginality. Humanitarian intervention and assistance is necessary, but the recognition of the lived realities of the IDPs is the need of the hour that can lead sustainable solution across national boundaries. IDPs are the product of the present socio-economic-political condition, although a large section of IDPs is natural disaster-induced. In that context, the more extensive prospect of the political economy needs to be taken into account. The process needs to base on the idea of empowering the IDPs with the proper agency. The representation of the IDPs is required to be included in the decision making on the issue of their protection and assistance. Article 6(5) of the UN guidelines, Article 9(k) of the African Union Convention needs to be materialized.

References


