

Ethnic Conflict and Adivasi Insecurity in Assam: A Review of Reports on Violence Affecting Tea Community Settlements Commission Reports, Human Rights Reports, and Published Studies

Maria Reshmi Ekka

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science/University of North Bengal

Abstract

The sources used for this article were collected relying on various documentary sources concerned with ethnic violence and insecurities in the Adivasi communities of Assam's tea economy to analyze reports on violence and address their consequences. In particular, the sources used rely on a civil-society fact finding report on the 2014 attacks and corresponding National Human Rights Commission reports on other attacks in 2014, and scholarly articles on plantation labor, land, identity, and intercommunity relations. Together they allow addressing the questions of what violence and displacements occurred and occurred in what numbers, exploring the context and history underlying such figures, and examining what do the sources say about the state's protection, compensation, and reaction measures. The sources describe the attacks' consequences in terms of lives and property losses, injuries, displacements, and ongoing court cases, but provide different evidence and tackle different issues. Therefore, the article argues that the sources should be compared and contrasted in order to discuss their limitations on the evidence of violence, support, and state responsibilities by analyzing reports of attacks and legal proceedings. They document different aspects and some sources provide more details on violence, destructions, and displacements while others focus on the aftermath, legal interventions, and the state's role responding to the violence. As a result, the article focuses on allegations and evidence, investigations and judgments, and limits the discussion of the victims' circumstances and social categories. Moreover, the article does not attempt to quantify attacks since the sources lack sufficient data and speculates on the numbers of incidents that may have occurred in similar settlements.

Keywords: Adivasi; Assam; tea-community settlements; ethnic conflict; documentary review; displacement; human rights; accountability

1. Introduction

Reviewing the Article "Ethnic Violence in Assam State Tea-Garden Communities" Essay The tea economy of Assam was built with the help of colonial recruitment, which resulted in the formation of a settlement of workers. With time, this group of people shaped their unique local

*Corresponding Author Email: mariareshmiekka@gmail.com

Published: 27 October 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i5.301389>

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

history and institutions, their political recognition and belonging being controversial topics till now. The terms “tea tribes,” “tea community,” and “Adivasi” are used interchangeably in public, political, and academic debates. Nevertheless, “Adivasi” is the preferred term in the given source since it is used in it; hence it was adopted to preserve the authors’ original meaning.

For the purpose of this article, “insecurity” refers to both direct threats to individuals and the aftermath of violence and harassment in terms of land ownership, occupation, mobility, and access to public resources. In the source, the researchers relate the issue of land deprivation to ethnic politics, analyzing the present-day situation through the prism of colonial and post-colonial policies (Das & Hazarika, 2022). Moreover, the article examines the Adivasi identity and the colonial legacy which produced colonial labor categories resulting in recognition claims (Sa & Gogoi, 2021). When analyzing the agenda of violence, it is essential to note that the reviewed sources do not demonstrate the direct correlation between a particular attack and a specific political signal; rather, they outline the context in which violence occurs.

The conflict in Bodoland is often interpreted through the lens of migrants’ indigeneity and their relationship with land, which is partially correct since the resource has historically been central to the region. Vandekerckhove and Suykens (2008) highlight the role of land, forests, tea, and the peculiarities of the regional political economy in western Assam, discussing them as factors which affect migration and fuel ethnic tensions (Vandekerckhove & Suykens, 2008). This premise is essential for understanding the tea-community context since land tenure issues are the central ones in these communities. However, it should not be used as an excuse for any violence committed against Adivasi.

To the point of the present research, the article under review offers a source-critical comparison of civil society’s event documentation, institutional complaint processing, and academic research on the topic of ethnic violence. It points to the responsibility of both researchers and policymakers, emphasizing that while the former analyzes the circumstances in which violence emerges, the latter address immediately relevant issues. The main idea of the source is that there is a bias in reporting on the conflict as the coverage mostly focuses on immediate aftermath, with little attention drawn to long-standing post-conflict recovery, rehabilitation, restoration, and compensation processes. This fact cannot be denied; however, it would be unfair to say that these processes do not exist.

The review covers multiple reports and articles addressing the violence in Assam’s Adivasi communities. Particular attention is paid to the attacks in Sonitpur, Chirang, and Kokrajhar districts that occurred in December 2014, as well as the events which took place in Kokrajhar and Baksa in May 2014, also referred to in the National Human Rights Commission’s reports. The review’s research questions regard

- 1) The types of violence and displacement reported by the selected sources
- 2) Historical, land-related, and political causes and conditions of ethnic violence identified by the researchers

3) Post-event state and society responses, restoration, and reparation processes examined or not examined by the reviewed sources.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Colonial Labour Histories and the Construction of Adivasi Identity

The formation of the tea plantation economy of Assam under the British colonial administration relied on the recruitment of laborers from central and eastern India, giving rise to a set of communities with diverse cultural backgrounds (Das Gupta, 1986; Behal, 2014). Their working conditions, as well as the specific management and organizational policies in the tea plantations, led to the marginalization of tea-garden workers in the broader socioeconomic context.

The distinctness of the Adivasi identity in Assam is therefore the result of historical events, collective experiences, and a certain degree of politicization, which gave ethnic groups a sense of their historical role and place in society. Although the terms “tea tribes,” “tea community” and “Adivasi” are sometimes used interchangeably, the idea of each community’s uniqueness is reflected in a series of historical and political discourses (Sa & Gogoi, 2021). Moreover, debates over the Scheduled Tribe status highlight the complicated nature of the concept as well as different views on the issue (Sharma, 2015, 2018).

The colonial experience of labor migration has indeed affected the sociohistorical development of tea-community members, but it alone is insufficient to explain the particular events of ethnic violence. On the contrary, an examination of the reports and documentary evidence on the subject is required.

2.2. Tea-garden Labour, Identity, and Violence

The recruitment of labor for Assam’s tea plantations was based on central and eastern India’s workers. Sa and Gogoi (2021) explore how colonial “coolie” category affected the historical formation of tea-garden society and Adivasi identity. Indeed, colonial history is an essential component in understanding present-day marginalization, but it should not be regarded as an exclusive factor. Postcolonial institutions, political mobilization, interrelation between social groups also contribute to the situation of marginalization existing today. Studies on plantation’s management and welfare practices describe how work and living conditions are organized as an enclave (Das Gupta, 1986; Behal, 2014). Jha (1996) provides an additional background on the context of inland migration to northeast India. These articles give the historical premise; however, they do not describe the attacks that the researchers have identified.

The concept of identity is not a purely abstract one – it can affect a group’s ability to represent itself politically, receive welfare in terms of land rights or its capacity to use a particular language. Thus, the very categorization of these people as Adivasi is problematic since different tribal groups with dissimilar (though related) histories were lumped together for administrative convenience.

It is important to remember that marginalization from multiple fronts shapes the identity of a group, and not the reverse. Therefore, when analyzing the topic of violence, one should avoid

thinking about the Adivasi tea-garden community as one homogenous entity whose members all experience the same challenges. Lakra (2024) examines the history of the “tea tribes” and shows how inconvenient it was for the administration to schedule them as Scheduled Tribes, as well as how the identity politics and territorial claims of these people intersect. Sharma (2018) relates the concept of ST to the political unification of the local tribal groups, as well as the struggle for resources. Similarly, Xaxa’s (2014) paper reviews the political processes related to the Indian government’s tribal census, which is useful in the context of reviewing disparities in development, health care, and education, though it does not directly comment on the incidents under review. Harsha (2024) also covers the issue of accommodation and representation proposals, while Sharma (2015) highlights the political confrontation over ST status and its benefits. Finally, Wolf (2023) demonstrates how the discourse around labor rights and recognition campaigns intersects with the identity politics of Assam’s tea-garden inhabitants.

2.2. Land, Forests, and Territorial Conflicts

It is noteworthy that the literature review on Assam’s tea-garden labor also includes articles addressing land rights issues. Das and Hazarika (2022) explore the connections between the landlessness of the tea-garden community and the legacy of colonial governance and forest policies, as well as the consequences of independence. Vandekerckhove and Suykens (2008), in their turn, examine the characteristics of western Assam, where tea-plantation and forest industries have long held a dominant position. The authors argue that such a system necessarily entails specific features of the regional resource distribution and power dynamics.

It is also important to note that, according to Vandekerckhove and Suykens (2008), the marginalization of the local community cannot be explained solely by the presence of migrant workers or their interaction with indigenous peoples. This conclusion aligns with the analysis provided by Das Gupta (1986) on the colonial transition from peasants and tribal inhabitants to bonded labor. In his turn, Behal (2014) highlights the colonial policies that shaped the political economy of Assam’s tea plantations, which also sheds light on the resource-based confrontations between different groups.

The analysis of land rights issues helps to explain the reasons for conflicts as processes triggered by identity politics. Marginalized ethnic groups that do not possess land or view their employment as stable may adopt the discourse of territorial disputes and claim their place within the region. It is noteworthy that this assumption does not apply to all aspects of the reviewed literature; rather, it is a synthetic hypothesis that draws on the mechanisms described in the individual readings. Therefore, when analyzing the causes of specific attacks, one should refer to the evidence provided by the articles under review and not attempt to systematize the entire body of literature on Assam’s tea-garden society.

2.3. Violence, Displacement, and Human Rights Reports

The attacks that occurred in December 2014 can serve as the most prominent example of Adivasi settlement under threat. The Women in Governance–Assam (WinG-Assam) and All Adivasi Women Association of Assam (AAWAA) fact-finding team conducted interviews from 2 to 6 January 2015 and received reports of family members’ killings, injuries, houses’

burning, and displacement following the attacks on 23 December 2014 in Sonitpur, Chirang, and Kokrajhar districts.

According to the teams, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) had used the attacks to draw attention to the ongoing insurgency in the region; however, the fact-finding report serves as a civil society position piece, and its conclusions should not be mistaken for an official position (Women in Governance–Assam [WinG-Assam] & All Adivasi Women Association of Assam [AAWAA], 2015). The controversy around the attacks is also reflected in the contemporaneous reporting by Bora (2014), who highlighted the public outrage sparked by the violence. However, the public statements should be treated as information from a media outlet and should not be used as evidence in place of the fact-finding team's documentation or judicial documents.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reports for 2016 and 2017 contain the proceedings related to the attacks that occurred in Kokrajhar and Baksa districts in May 2014. The documents summarize the accusations and evidence submitted to the state government, which include the survivors' stories about forest guards' involvement in the violence. The reports also mention that the cases had been transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The NHRC report notes the NIA's submission of charge-sheets in both incidents, as well as its accusation that NDFB(S) militants had killed 36 villagers in Nonke Khagrabari with the help of forest guards (NHRC, 2017). In this regard, it is important to highlight that the documents mention the allegations against the forest guards and do not provide evidence of their guilt, as the final verdict had not been delivered. The 2017–2018 edition of the NHRC report was also reviewed to detect subsequent developments; however, the documents only provided the details of state dossiers related to individual cases and did not mention the residents' rehabilitation process or the final court decisions (NHRC, 2018).

Finally, the terminology difference between complaints, police or other agencies' findings, charges, and verdicts should also be noted. The fact-finding report contains sections that document the conditions under which the Adivasi people had to reside in the camps, including the absence of personal security, sanitation, electricity, and access to health care (WinG-Assam & AAWAA, 2015). When considering the emergency measures in such camps, the gender-specific needs for safe spaces and confidential services should be taken into account if available resources allow. It is noteworthy that the literature review does not mention any confirmed cases of sexual violence, and the separate research on gender inequalities in the tea-garden communities can be found elsewhere (Banerji & Willoughby, 2019).

2.4. Everyday Consequences of Conflict

Published research on Adivasi workers in the conflict-affected areas of Assam associate insecurity with employment, education, gender relations, and human-rights concerns. Das's study, which relied on interviews with 60 Adivasi workers in 2018, suggests that the respondents were vulnerable both as plantation workers and as a minority in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (Das, 2022). Das's study is not one of reportage but a primary qualitative study which adds context to the interpretation of documentary records of the consequences experienced by Adivasi.

Das, Ray, and Choudhury (2024) investigate the impact of conflict on the interaction between Adivasi and Bodo communities: trust and exchange, fear, the social dimensions of insecurity. Their findings highlight a caution about conflict as an event: an open but contained period of overt violence which ends at some point and is followed by a return to normal. Insecurity can be prolonged by avoidance, mistrust, restricted movement, and the memory of loss. These findings relate to the physical rehabilitation of conflict-affected areas as an insufficient response to insecurity. Across the literature, conflict experiences of marginal communities are associated with a combination of structural vulnerability and immediate violence. Historical labour marginality and land insecurity do not generate violence mechanically, but they compromise a community's capacity to withstand, respond to, and recover from threats.

2.5. Recognition, Autonomy, and Competing Claims to Representation

The literature on autonomy in the Northeast India region demonstrates that territorial institutions can simultaneously shield populations and fail to represent minorities. Singh (2008) investigates the relationships between ethnic diversity and autonomy in Assam, while Misra (2012) provides historical context for Bodoland's political settlement in the context of competing claims. Sarmah (2011) explores alternative institutional arrangements for Assam's autonomous councils.

None of the three studies establish a direct causal link between institutional design and each specific episode of violence, but they illustrate the role of representation and access to remedies in post-conflict security. Additionally, scholarship on justice claims among tea-plantation labourers demonstrate that activists have deployed different frameworks—tribal recognition, rights, and identity—to address related but distinct grievances (Wolf, 2023).

3. Sources and Documentary Method

3.1. Research Design

The type of study that was carried out falls under the qualitative documentary analysis of secondary sources. The main corpus of the documentary study used for the present research consists of (i) the WinG-Assam and AAWAA fact-finding report on the December 2014 attacks; (ii) National Human Rights Commission's annual reports for 2016-17 and 2017-18, which document complaints and the following investigative information about violence in Kokrajhar and Baksa; and (iii) published scholarship, which was used to put the documentary corpus into context. Interviews, surveys, or field observations were not carried out for the purposes of this paper. The interpretation made is therefore more interpretative than estimating prevalence, or identifying the cause of every incident.

3.2. Source Base and Inclusion Criteria

The sources were identified through report-title searches and searches using the terms "Adivasi tea community Assam violence," "tea garden land rights Assam," Bodoland tea forestry conflict," "Assam December 2014 Adivasi displacement," and "NHRC Assam Kokrajhar Baksa May 2014.". For the purpose of this revision, issuing-organisation and publisher databases were re-read on 17 October 2026, where available. Inclusion criteria comprised direct relevance to (a) the December 2014 attacks or official proceedings concerning charges

of violence against Adivasi settlements or (b) the historical, land, identity, labour, and intercommunity tensions for the contextual analysis of such occurrences. Reports of a general nature about Assam were excluded, unless they were determined to make specific contributions to either of the areas. The corpus of sources identified is small, comprising one civil-society fact-finding report and two National Human Rights Commission annual reports, with additional scholarly literature. The present analysis is therefore based on a limited number of documents, which should be considered as a purposive case study rather than a systematic database survey or a comprehensive literature review. It is thus not possible to infer prevalence rates or extrapolate beyond the cases discussed in this article as being directly relevant to the violence in tea-company settlements.

Table 1. Source Categories and their Analytical use

Source category	Material used	Analytical contribution	Limitation
Commission documentation	NHRC Annual Reports 2016–2017 and 2017–2018	Records complaints, allegations, official requests and follow-up	An annual report is not a complete incident-level investigation file
Civil-society fact-finding	WinG-Assam & AAWAA report on December 2014	Documents reported killings, injuries, house burning and displacement	Findings reflect the scope and methods of the fact-finding team
Peer-reviewed research	Sa & Gogoi (2021); Das (2022); Das & Hazarika (2022); Das et al. (2024)	Explains identity, land, labour and everyday consequences	Studies have different samples, methods and geographical coverage
Conflict and political ecology scholarship	Vandekerckhove & Suykens (2008)	Connects territorial structures, tea estates, forestry and violence	Historical analysis does not establish the cause of every later incident
Conceptual synthesis	Author's cross-source thematic coding	Identifies recurring mechanisms and policy implications	Interpretive; not a substitute for incident-level causal evidence

3.3. Analysis

The evidence identified in the documentary was sorted into five categories: (i) the event and the alleged harms; (ii) settlement, land, and livelihood vulnerability; (iii) identification of perpetrators and evidential status; (iv) state protection and institutional follow-up; and (v) relief, return, and long-term consequences. For each item, the presence, absence, or implication in the documents was determined. The research used the sources identified to illustrate the

themes, not the cases, as the documents have different objectives. Therefore, the synthesis did not attempt to summarize the findings based on the number of casualties or other figures.

3.4. Ethical and Evidential Limitations

The paper does not report injuries, deaths, or any other abuses – the allegations, investigations, and courts’ decisions are presented without any assumptions of responsibility beyond the documents. The documentary evidence is limited, as the fact-finding report only covers the resources, areas, and mandates available to the authors. Similarly, the annual reports only feature the cases that illustrate the activities of the organizations, not all the events that occurred. The research was limited by the lack of standardized documentation: if there was no database that would feature all the incidents, their aftermath, compensation, rebuilding, prosecutions, and other factors. Therefore, the article offers an interpretation of the documentary evidence and institutional response to the suffering, not the summary of all the occurrences affecting the communities. The analysis follows the ethical guidelines of social science research, as applying the principles of human rights to vulnerable populations requires the researchers to acknowledge the limitations of representing others in scholarship. In particular, the paper expands on the quote that suggests that, in general, displaced populations “must be seen as subjects with rights, and not as objects to be quantified and aggregated in political argument” (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1998).

4. Documentary Findings and Interpretation

4.1. Violence Against Settlements and the Loss of Everyday Security

The reviewed literature reveals that the violence directed against the Adivasi settlements was a double attack, targeting both people and the conditions for everyday living. The WinG-Assam and AAWAA report demonstrates this by listing the deaths, injuries, burning of houses, and displacement in three districts (2015). The damage to homes will have an adverse effect on the ability to work, study, store foodstuffs, socialization, and documents to receive compensation. Thus, it becomes possible to conclude that the December 2014 attacks led to a displacement crisis, but what is needed now is an analysis of the situation in each household to assess the consequences. The NHRC report on the May 2014 violence also demonstrates the insecurity of the Adivasi people due to the fact that despite providing protection from the attackers, the state personnel could not prevent the burning of entire villages (Das & Hazarika, 2022). Although the fact that the Commission has received reports from the state and district levels demonstrates a high level of responsibility, it cannot confirm whether the accusations are justified or all victims have received all due compensation (NHRC, 2017). To evaluate whether violence has indeed become the reason for a long-term crisis, it will also be necessary to analyze the documents of police investigations, prosecution, compensation, and rehabilitation.

4.2. Why Structural Conditions Matter

The reviewed literature contains evidence that the relationship between groups is structural. The lack of access to resources and the relative poverty of some households create a potential for confrontation when local disputes arise (Das & Hazarika, 2022). Vandekerckhove & Suykens (2008) also argue that the plantation system and forest management policy are factors

in tensions as they form the ethnic-specific resource base for certain groups. This rules out the possibility to consider the problem in the framework of “insider” and “outsider.” The analysis of conflict must be based on the assessment of resource allocation, settlement, political organization, and the state’s position in relation to the different groups. It is wrong to attribute the attack to the denial of Scheduled Tribe status as a label and an attempt to exclude the Adivasi from the category of tribes. The problem is a more comprehensive one, as the evidence shows that the ethnic conflict was manifestations of a wider set of institutional interactions in which access to representation, resources, and protection was different. The most accurate formulation of the essence of the difficulty is that insecurity grows out of the combination of material deprivation and ethno-social stratification against the background of weak institutional control.

4.3. The Afterlife of Displacement

The reviewed literature contains evidence of the long-term impact of violence on the lives of the Adivasi. Das et al. (2024) list the consequences of attacks by presenting victims with insufficient assistance, which has led to distrust of the state. Das (2022) argues that the experience of conflict affects the work, social life, and even political behavior of people. Such evidence helps to understand why returning to the settlement can be considered not only a return but also a beginning of a new life, as well as the need for a more comprehensive assessment of the situation than at the level of material losses. It is unfortunate that the reviewed literature does not provide more information on the current situation in the affected Adivasi settlements. Data on the number of displaced families, those who have resumed living in their homes, received compensation, and the state of police investigations are missing. For future research, it would be important to collect statistics on attacks with information on the date, place, victims, property damage, displacement, and legal consequences. It will also be necessary to conduct in-depth interviews with the victims to find out the details of the attack, living conditions before and after displacement, and their needs.

4.4. Gender and Differentiated Vulnerability

The issue of the differential impact of violence on women and men needs to be considered separately because the reviewed literature contains evidence of this. The fact-finding research highlights the number of women and children among the victims and the lack of services in the camps (WinG-Assam and AAWAA, 2015). Oxfam’s report demonstrates that in plantation labor, women perform the heaviest work for the lowest pay and suffer more due to unpaid care work (Banerji & Willoughby, 2019). Together, these pieces of evidence show the need for a victim-centered approach to studying the conflict, paying attention to the unique needs of women and girls and protecting them from potential violence and exploitation. However, these are only illustrations of the general trends, which cannot be extrapolated to all Adivasi women since the literature reviews do not provide information on the prevalence of various forms of violence.

4.5. Synthesis

The reviewed literature provides evidence for each of the four points and, thus, forms a comprehensive basis for a study of Adivasi insecurity. First, Adivasi society has historically

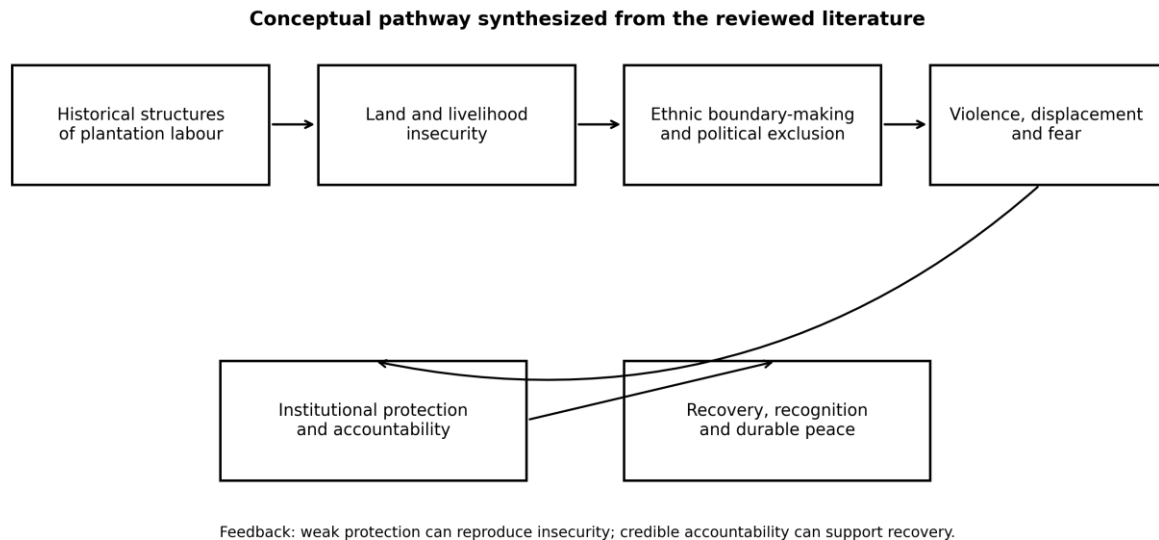
been vulnerable due to its role in the plantation system. Second, this group of migrants' experiences anxiety due to precarious working conditions and unstable land ownership. Third, the problem of targeted attacks persists with attacks on entire villages, resulting in many victims and significant material losses. Fourth, the state's response to attacks is limited in many aspects, including law enforcement, criminal prosecution, compensation, and reorganization of social life. The sources examined in this study identify four key issues related to the conflicts in the tea-industry plantations: the historical context of marginalization of Adivasi population; insecurity due to the lack of protection, livelihood and political voice; attacks resulting in casualties, injuries, property damage, and displacement; and the absence of protection, prosecution, compensation, or redress. These issues cannot be generalized across all tea-community settlements since the reports and research papers on this conflict are different in nature, address different geographic areas, and have various objectives and conclusions. However, it should not be assumed that all of these reports demonstrate that one issue was more prevalent than the others or that it could be considered the primary cause of others. Therefore, none of the sources analyzed can be used as conclusive evidence for the entire body of reports concerning the conflict in tea-industry plantations.

Table 2. Evidence Matrix: Recurring Themes Across the Reviewed Sources

Theme	Evidence in reviewed sources	What can reasonably be concluded	What remains unverified
Attack and displacement	WinG-Assam & AAWAA (2015) report killings, injuries, house burning and displacement in Sonitpur, Chirang and Kokrajhar	The December 2014 violence affected settlements and generated displacement	Complete household-level displacement and return outcomes
Institutional response	NHRC (2017) records complaints and requests for reports after incidents in Kokrajhar and Baksa	Concerns about protection and accountability reached a national human-rights institution	Final findings and outcomes for each complaint without underlying files
Land insecurity	Das & Hazarika (2022) analyse landlessness and colonial/postcolonial land relations	Land relations are relevant to understanding vulnerability and ethnic unrest	The share of individual attacks directly caused by a land dispute
Identity and exclusion	Sa & Gogoi (2021) analyse the historical formation of Adivasi identity	Belonging is shaped by both colonial history and postcolonial social institutions	Uniform experiences across all tea-community groups

Everyday consequences	Das (2022); Das et al. (2024) address work, social relations, fear and interaction	Conflict effects can persist beyond immediate physical violence	Comparable longitudinal measures of trauma, schooling, income and return
-----------------------	--	---	--

Figure 1. Analytical framework linking structural conditions, violence and recovery



5. Accountability and Recovery in the Documentary Record

The relevant legal and normative framework comprises the following instruments: The Plantation Labour Act, 1951 lays down welfare measures for plantation workers and the Forest Rights Act, 2006 provides recognition for particular forest rights of eligible forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers. The latter should not be routinely allocated to any proposed or existing settlement without reviewing entitlements and administrative records in that particular locality. For internally displaced persons, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement serve as a non-binding regional framework on protection and assistance, return and reintegration. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights could be used as general reference to non-discrimination, rights to security, cultural participation and remedies (Government of India, 1951, 2006; United Nations General Assembly, 1966, 2007; United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1998). Similarly, these standards should be applied alongside with broader evidence on the disadvantage in tribal areas without assuming that the Indian state's experience is entirely applicable to every Adivasi settlement in Assam (Xaxa, 2014).

Firstly, for protection, preparedness planning should be settlement-specific with early warning, evacuation routes, rapid response and effective coordination with local authorities and community representatives. The 2014 report explicitly recognizes that attacks on households can lead to not only casualties but also displacement and should therefore include response capacity such as shelter, food, health services and security for belongings including documents

(WinG-Assam & AAWAA, 2015). This recommendation is supported by the finding that ordinary inhabitants felt most secure when their voluntary return was preceded by assurances of security (WinG-Assam & AAWAA, 2015).

Secondly, rehabilitation measures should go beyond immediate response and be evaluated through systematic follow-up. Government agencies should establish a publicly accessible registry of affected households and report on compensation payments, restoration of housing, return, livelihood, schooling and unresolved cases with confidentiality for the individuals involved. The same principles of accountability and non-discrimination are mandated by international human rights law for victims of violence and in particular, for internally displaced persons (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). World Bank guidelines on involuntary displacement also promote the idea of post-conflict restoration with due process for every household though it is to be noted that these are recommended for development-induced resettlement and not formally binding on states responding to attacks (World Bank, 2004).

Thirdly, while clarifying alleged charges, it is critical to make a distinction between submitted demands, formal accusations and proven violations. The case file of the National Human Rights Commission represents a thorough analysis but public follow-up is necessary to document progress on individual cases and ensure redress to the victims. Civil society can play a role in supplementing state records with particular attention to methods and limitations of disclosure.

Fourthly, restoring access to land and livelihood should be a conflict prevention measure. It does not imply that territorial disputes are the sole driver of ethnic clashes. However, providing tenure security, accessible remedy mechanisms, protection against coercion and equal access to public services can reduce situations where livelihood is being used as a proximate trigger of hostilities. Lastly, it is important to combine community-based reconciliation mechanisms with institutional response. Peace-building at the local level will be persistent and sustainable only if inhabitants are assured of reduced risk of further attacks alongside due process for personal redress.

6. Conclusion

The selected reports and studies reveal that the Adivasi insecurity in Assam is not a simple result of a number of violent incidents. The fact-finding report on the December 2014 attacks contains reports of deaths, injuries, house burning, and displacement. The NHRC annual reports contain complaints; their institutional follow-up related to various isolated incidents in 2014. Scholarship on land, identity, labour, and everyday intercommunity relations can give context to these records, but without determining the responsibility of particular parties or the final outcome of all cases. The documentary record reviewed here has more information on immediate violence than on the subsequent return, compensation, and rebuilding of households at a later date as well as the final justice outcomes. This is a limitation of the material available for this review, not evidence that rehabilitation or the legal proceedings did not happen.

The documentary evidence was found to be stronger in representing immediate violence than following-up on long-time outcomes. No report or publicly available information was found that could serve as comparable evidence for households' return, in a financial or other sense, compensation, rebuilding of houses, and final verdicts in the cases. This imbalance in the

evidence presented is itself informative, as it allows concluding that the attacks were widely reported and visible. However, the aftermath of the violence is not well represented. One possible direction for future research would be to use documented cases of violence as starting points for investigating public rehabilitation efforts and tracking the cases through courts with the removal of personally identifiable information.

References

- Banerji, S., & Willoughby, R. (2019). Addressing the human cost of Assam tea: An agenda for change to respect, protect and fulfil human rights on Assam tea plantations. Oxfam. <https://doi.org/10.21201/2019.4870>
- Baruah, S. (1999). *India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Behal, R. P. (2014). *One hundred years of servitude: Political economy of tea plantations in colonial Assam*. Tulika Books.
- Bora, B. S. (2014, December 28). The killing fields of Assam. *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/kaleidoscope/the-killing-fields-of-assam-23325>
- Das Gupta, R. (1986). From peasants and tribesmen to plantation workers: Colonial capitalism, reproduction of labour power and proletarianization in North East India, 1850s to 1947. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21(4), PE2–PE10. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4375248>
- Das, A. K., Ray, S., & Choudhury, A. (2024). Conflict and communication in everyday life: An exploration of intercommunity conflict in Assam, India. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 42(2), 223–240. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21441>
- Das, D. (2022). Work life experience of Adivasi (indigenous) workers in tea plantation industry on conflict-ridden areas in India: A qualitative study in Assam. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 22(2), e2446. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2446>
- Das, P., & Hazarika, R. (2022). Claiming land rights: Politics of space and identity—A study of the tea garden community of Assam. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X221137236>
- Government of India. (1951). *The Plantations Labour Act, 1951 (Act No. 69 of 1951)*. India Code. <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/>
- Government of India. (2006). *The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006*. India Code. <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/>
- Harsha, S. (2024). Adivasi identity and accommodation in Assam. *Journal of Contemporary Politics*, 3(2), 56–59. <https://doi.org/10.53989/jcp.v3i2.47>
- Jha, J. C. (1996). *Aspects of indentured inland emigration to North East India, 1858–1918*. Indus Publishing Company.

- Lakra, B. R. (2024). 'Tea Tribe' or 'Scheduled Tribe'? Vexed Adivasi identity in Assam. *Sociological Bulletin*, 73(4), 398–408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380229241287342>
- Misra, U. (2012). Bodoland: The burden of history. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(37), 36–42. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41720137>
- National Human Rights Commission. (2017). Annual report 2016–2017. Government of India. https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/NHRC_AR_EN_2016-2017.pdf
- National Human Rights Commission. (2018). Annual report 2017–2018. Government of India. <https://www.nhrc.nic.in/publications/annual-reports>
- Sa, S. S., & Gogoi, N. (2021). A journey beyond colonial history: Coolies in the making of an 'Adivasi identity' in Assam. *Labor History*, 62(2), 134–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2021.1877263>
- Sarmah, J. K. (2011). An alternative formulation for autonomous councils in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(35), 23–25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23017900>
- Sharma, C. K. (2012). Immigration issue in Assam and conflicts around it. *Asian Ethnicity*, 13(3), 287–309.
- Sharma, D. P. (2015). Demand of 'Tea Tribes' for Scheduled Tribe status in Assam: A review. In S. Goswami (Ed.), *Troubled diversity: The political process in Northeast India* (pp. 104–121). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199453337.003.0006>
- Sharma, I. (2018). Tea tribes of Assam: Identity politics and search for liberation. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53(9), 74–78.
- Singh, M. A. (2008). Ethnic diversity, autonomy, and territoriality in North East India: A case of tribal autonomy in Assam. *Strategic Analysis*, 32(6), 1101–1114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160802404588>
- United Nations Commission on Human Rights. (1998). Guiding principles on internal displacement (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2). United Nations. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/guiding-principles-internal-displacement>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1966). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. United Nations Treaty Collection. <https://treaties.un.org/>
- United Nations General Assembly. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

- Vandekerckhove, N., & Suykens, B. (2008). 'The liberation of Bodoland': Tea, forestry and tribal entrapment in western Assam. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31(3), 450–471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400802441961>
- Wolf, A.-L. (2023). 'No justice – no rest!': How activist conceptions of justice influence categories of collective identification among tea-plantation labourers in Assam. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie/Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 148(1). <https://doi.org/10.60827/zfe/jsca.v148i1.1259>
- Women in Governance–Assam, & All Adivasi Women Association of Assam. (2015, January 19). India: Mass violence and displacement of Adivasis in Assam in December 2014: A fact-finding report (2–6 January 2015). South Asia Citizens Web. <https://www.sacw.net/article10411.html>
- World Bank. (2004). Involuntary resettlement sourcebook: Planning and implementation in development projects. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/>
- Xaxa, V. (2014). Report of the highlevel committee on socio-economic, health and educational status of tribal communities of India. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.