



# The Transition From Mizoram Repatriation To Permanent Settlement In Tripura: The Case Of The Bru (Reangs) Displaced Crisis And Its Resettlement Issues.

1.Himabati Reang

Research Scholar, Dept of Political Science  
Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya

2. Dr. Manshi Sharma

Faculty, Dept of Political Science  
Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya

## Abstract

The Bru-Reang Displaced crisis of North-East India is a two-decade-old which emerged out from the ethnic strife between the Mizo and Bru populations in Mizoram, consequently leading to the exodus of over 30,000 people to Tripura. From settling in relief camps in Tripura to the series of attempts of repatriation to Mizoram and the changes that occurred along the way to finally be given permanent settlement in Tripura involves the path of much event issues and problems that attracted the notice of news outlets, government officials, and ministries in the country. The paper seeks the causes of unsuccessful repatriation attempts taken, and illustrating the complexity of permanent settlement solution, with Mizoram and Tripura's states responsibility in handling the situation are closely evaluated in this paper.

With the 2020 Quadruple Accord, initiated by the central government and negotiated by the two states governments of Tripura and Mizoram, the Bru dispute was supposed to have been obstacle free from any further difficulties. But the several challenges and complexities faced during the implementation phase caused the permanent resettlement to be postponed beyond the expected period. The study also assesses the living circumstances, social-economic integration, and Bru population adaption in many recently founded settlement colonies. The study and descriptions collected from interviews with displaced Bru representatives, field observations, media reports, papers, and scholarly sources help to offer a thorough knowledge of the problem from many dimension perspectives.

**Keywords:** Bru displacement crisis, ethnic conflict, Mizoram, Tripura, repatriation, permanent settlement, socio-economic integration.

**I. Introduction:** The Bru Displaced Crisis refers to the forced displacement of the Bru (or Reang) community from Mizoram to Tripura due to ethnic conflicts and tensions. The crisis has gained enough of concern in the national media and the intervention of Central government in solving and dealing the crisis. The Displaced crisis originated in 1997 when violent clashes erupted between the Mizo and Bru communities, leading to the exodus of thousands of Bru people from Mizoram (Das, 2020)<sup>i</sup>. Due to attack on minority Reang tribes by Mizo villagers, a number of Bru (Reang) families from Western Mizoram migrated to Northern Tripura from October 1997 onwards. The number of such Bru migrants who are

sheltered in six relief camps set up in Kanchanpur District of Tripura is about 30,000 to 37000 persons with 5000 families. The figures about population and families varies in several reports. The primary cause of the conflict was the demand for political representation by the Brus, which was opposed by Mizo nationalist groups who considered them outsiders (Chakraborty, 2019)<sup>ii</sup>. As a result, nearly 37,000 Brus took refuge in relief camps in Tripura, where they lived in harsh conditions with limited access to basic amenities (Hussain, 2018, p. 56)<sup>iii</sup>. The Brus migrated to Tripura in series of waves due to ethnic tensions in Mizoram. The first major influx occurred in 1997 numbering 30,000 consisting of 5000 families following violent conflicts, leading many to seek refuge in Tripura. Subsequent migrations took place in 2009(459 families) and 2010 as tensions persisted, further displacing the Bru community (MHA, Bru Repatriation Report, 2022)<sup>iv</sup>.

The Bru-Reang displaced crisis is a complex one involving ethnic strife and shared responsibility between Tripura and Mizoram. Though early refuge in relief camps, the repatriation process to Mizoram proved prolonged and failed. A quadruple agreement in 2020 helped the Bru-Reang displaced crisis to be resolved; nevertheless, the host state and community still face continuous difficulties adjusting to and embracing suggested permanent settlement sites. Focusing on the responsibility of the two states, this paper investigates how Mizoram and Tripura handle the Bru Displaced Community crisis. The main twist was that Tripura was assigned the permanent Settlement, as consequence of Bru repatriation failures to Mizoram, so giving them permanent homes they are not from. Many factors, demonstrations, and choosing of permanent settlement sites impede the process of permanent settlement. Permanent settlement of the Bru still presents difficult work requiring field report investigations.

**1.2. Review of Literature:** Various sources have documented the Bru displacement crisis, including journalistic reports and academic papers. While media narratives report on tracks of Bru agitations, repatriation issues, and permanent settlement efforts since 1997 are often fragmented and opinionated based. However, they provide a foundational basis for analysis. The in-depth studies on the Bru crisis are rare to trace, though some works have examined cause of ethnic conflicts, challenges of Bru in relief camps, and repatriation challenges in detail.

Bijukumar (2022) in *“Enigma of ‘Brus’ in Mizoram: Displacement, Repatriation, and Livelihood”* explores the challenges faced by the Bru community in their repatriation and settlement process. The study emphasizes ethnic contestations with the Mizo community, prolonging the repatriation process.<sup>v</sup> Similarly, Roluahpuia (2018) in *The Bru Conundrum in North East India* critiques the state's handling of the conflict, the politicization of identity, and the repeated failures of repatriation, while also presenting the Mizo perspective on the crisis<sup>vi</sup>. Chakraborty (2018) analyzes the humanitarian crisis surrounding Bru refugees in Tripura, highlighting their prolonged displacement and difficult living conditions<sup>vii</sup>. Sarkar (2019) in *Failed Repatriation of Bru Refugees* examines why multiple government initiatives failed to repatriate Brus from Tripura to Mizoram. However, the factors behind repatriation failures need wider perspectives<sup>viii</sup>. The landmark event of 2020 Bru Permanent Settlement Accord marked a shift from repatriation to permanent settlement in Tripura, drew national media attention. The events and record details are in numerous reports forms Newspapers, and Press Information<sup>ix</sup>. All these events occurred since the Permanent settlement requires compilation and analysis from single unit study. Bhattacharya (2022) in scroll narrated about *Bru Still Waiting for Land Even After 25 Years* based on the ongoing struggles in newly established settlement colonies through field observance. Since the Quadruple historic accord, the recent scholarly studies on the settlement process remain scarce<sup>x</sup>.

Majority of the past studies focus on one ended community perspective, which represents either the Brus' grievances or the Mizo's' viewpoints, without analyzing the broader responsibility of the states Mizoram and Tripura, and the task of central government in fulfilling the demands of the Brus. The present study examines the entire repatriation process, their transition to permanent settlement, with the local support and the associated local agitations. It further assesses the absorption of Bru-displaced people, their struggles post-settlement, and the future implications of the accord, offering a comprehensive account of the Bru crisis.

### 1.3. Objectives:

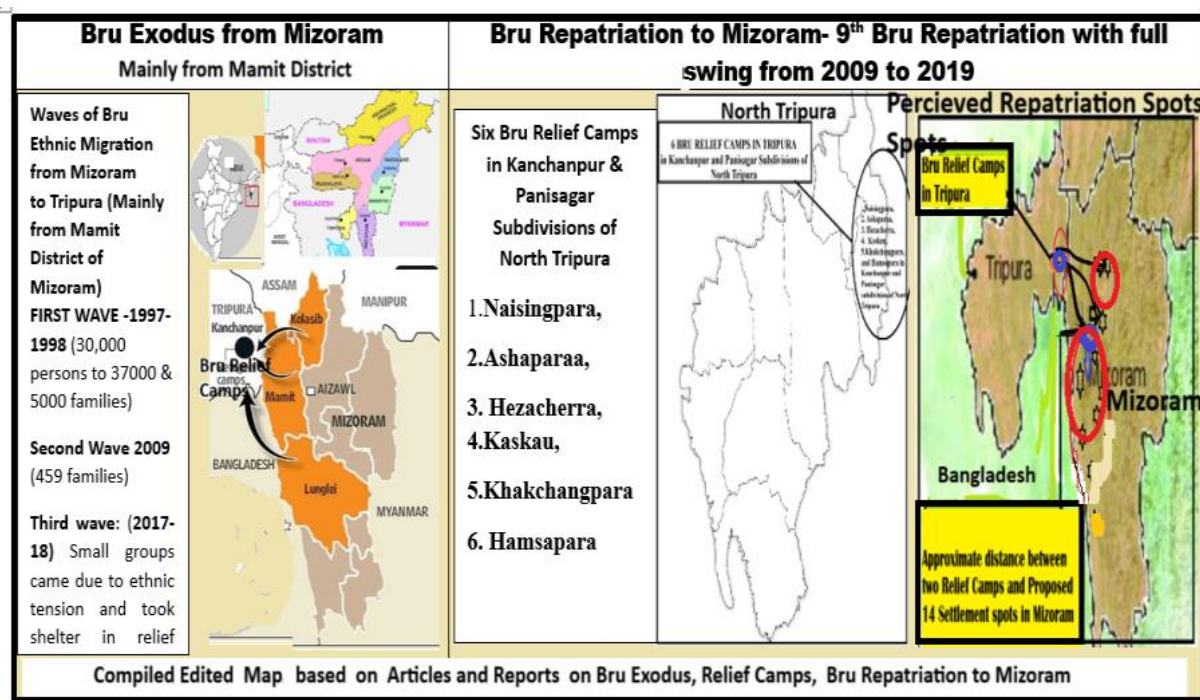
- To assess the failures of the repatriation process to Mizoram and its inducing decision shifts behind permanent settlement in Tripura.
- To address the aftermath issues of permanent settlement and its challenges ventured during the resettlement process.

**1.4. Methodology:** The main nature of the study is descriptive. Therefore, a chronological report of the Bru Displaces crisis, accompanied by events and issues that have come across since its inception in 1997 to date, was looked into. The views of Mizoram scholars and the Bru Reang community were compared and contrasted in order to figure out why repatriation doesn't work and how to encourage people to move to permanent settlement. We analyzed and contrasted the perspectives of the two states in dealing with the crisis, as well as the sentiments of the host native communities in accepting and absorbing the displaced population.

With regard to collection of information, data and references, the field visit observance was conducted in old relief camps and new permanent settlement spots in order to have the glimpses of the status of resettlements issues and their problems associated. We primarily employed a qualitative approach and an ethnographic method, supplemented by several sets of investigation questionnaires. The information was collected through in-depth interviews with Bru representatives' leaders and government officials, with the aim of presenting a broader representation of the Bru displaced crisis. It is to note that the identities of the individuals interviewed were kept confidential to protect their privacy and navigate the political context. Primary data was collected through observation and interviews, while secondary sources like electronic resources, books, newspapers, magazines, journals, articles, research papers, manuscripts, and organizational reports were used.

**2.Results & Findings:** The section attempts to find about Bru displaced crisis which took more than two decades to settle down. The tales and tragedies which impacted the lives of Displaced Bru community who had been languishing in the relief camps without basic human amenities. The study will find out number of repatriation initiatives taken for Mizoram, and its reasons behind failures. The inducing shift in permanent Settlement to Tripura and it enquires the challenges and hurdles for the resettlement in various spots. Here are the findings of the study. The Figure Map 1 display Bru Exodus from Mizoram, and Repatriation attempts taken from relief camps of Tripura based on report article Bru-crisis.

**Figure Map 1:** Bru Exodus from Mizoram and Repatriation attempts taken from Bru relief camps of Tripura.



*Source: Compiled edited based on news articles clips and reports*

**2.1. The Bru Repatriation initiations to Mizoram:** The Central Government has been attentive to the cause of Bru-Displaced crisis responding to cries and agitations by Bru-Reangs who took shelter in make shifts reliefs camps in Tripura. Since, their onset, the Tripura Govt has been supportive to the cause of survival to large displaced crisis. The minimum ration food supply and basic amenities was served since their migration in the State. The Ministry of Home Affairs has been extending the following assistance/grants-in-aid to the Government of Tripura since 1997–98 for the maintenance of Bru migrants, sheltered in the relief camps of Tripura, and to the Government of Mizoram since 2004–05 for rehabilitation and resettlement of Brus in Mizoram. Its report claimed that the ministry has been providing each family housing assistance of Rs 38,500, cash assistance of Rs 41,500, free ration to each adult and minor member for one year, reimbursement of the transportation cost incurred by the Government of Mizoram, and blankets and utensils to each Bru family (MHA, North-East Division, 2022)<sup>xi</sup>.

On the other hand, the Central and State governments of Tripura and Mizoram are actively involved in the repatriation process of Brus to their native homeland in Mizoram. So, the central fund packages and provisions with other grants are released from time to time. The Ministry of Home Affairs has been providing grants-in-aid to the Government of Tripura for the upkeep of Brus residing in different relief camps and to the Government of Mizoram for the rehabilitation and resettlement of Brus. Since 1997, and setting foot of Bru-Displaced People in North Tripura at various camps, the Government tried several attempts for repatriation. Between 1997 and June 2018, Bru representatives signed nine different agreements with the Centre and the state governments of Mizoram and Tripura to ensure the community's repatriation. The repatriation was conducted in batches. However, proper plan and settlement spots in Mizoram were not properly visioned. The Mizoram government would rehabilitate the displaced people in the interior parts and bordering states of Mizoram.

In June 2018, an agreement was signed between Bru leaders, the Central Government, and the state government of Mizoram aiming to repatriate Bru families from relief camps in Tripura back to Mizoram. The proposed rehabilitation plans included resettling these families in various locations within Mizoram, specifically along the Mizoram-Bangladesh-Tripura border, the Assam border, and in the southern regions of Mizoram, encompassing Mamit, Kolasib, and Lunglei districts (*Indian Express*, 2020)<sup>xii</sup>.



**2.1.1. Repatriation phases from Tripura's Relief camps to Mizoram:** The Indian government has made nine attempts to repatriate the Bru (Reang) community from relief camps in Tripura back to Mizoram since their displacement in 1997. The first repatriation effort began in 2000, and the ninth commenced in October 2019. According to the report by Home Ministry Affairs, Govt of India(mha.gov.in) on Northeast Resettlement of Bru migrants reports states that repatriation of Brus to Mizoram was started in 2010 and till 2014, approximately 1622 Bru families (8,573persons) were repatriated in six batches and resettled in Mizoram. On 3rd July, 2018, an agreement was signed between Govt. of India, Govt. of Mizoram, Govt. of Tripura and Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF) for repatriation of 5,407 Bru families comprising 32,876 persons residing in temporary camps in Tripura. As a result, 328 families comprising of 1369 persons returned to Mizoram under the agreement up to 30.11.2019<sup>xiii</sup>. The Table 1 charts the phases of repatriation of Bru-Reangs from Tripura's Relief camps to Mizoram settlement spots.

**Table 1:** Phases of repatriation of Bru-Reangs from camps to Mizoram

Period year	Families repatriated	Populations/ Individuals	Phases/ Batches	Initiated by
2010-2014	1622 families	8573 persons	Six batches	Central & State Govt Mizoram & Tripura
2018-2019	328 families	1369 persons	Three to four batches	Govt. of India, Govt. of Mizoram, Govt. of Tripura and Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF)
Total	1950 families	9942 persons		

**Source:** Ministry of Home affairs (mha.gov.in)<sup>xiv</sup>

**2.1.2. Repatriation phases and events during 2010 to 2014:** The repatriation process of Bru (Reang) refugees began in November 2010 and continued until May/June 2011, with around 800 families repatriated to Mizoram. This included self-repatriation. In November 2009, around 459 Bru families were displaced from Mizoram and Tripura due to violence. However, further repatriation was stopped due to protests by certain Mizo NGOs demanding rehabilitation of around 83 Mizo families displaced from Sakhan Hills of North Tripura. In July 2012, a rehabilitation package of Rs.1.50 lakh was disbursed to each of the displaced Mizo families. The State Government of Mizoram prepared a movement plan for repatriation of 669 Bru families in the 4th Batch in April-May 2012. Rs. 7.87 crore was released in June 2012 as an advance for the 4th phase of Bru repatriation. However, resistance and mis-information campaigns by some Bru leaders prevented the repatriation, resulting in only seven families being repatriated back to Mizoram. The State Government of Mizoram & Tripura has been urged to fix a new time frame for early completion of the Bru process.<sup>xv</sup>

**2.1.3. Period of repatriation phases 2018–2019:** Following a four-year pause since 2015, the last phase of repatriation began in 2018-19. Seeking to bring back 32,876 Bru people to Mizoram by September 30, 2018, the Centre reached a tripartite agreement in June 2018 between Bru and the governments of Mizoram and Tripura. But the Bru-people, who wanted to stay in Tripura, resisted this repatriation and so they were mostly unsuccessful. The Brus also worried over inadequate social security and grant policies in Mizoram. While many thousands of people lingered in Tripura, some 5,000 Brus gradually returned to Mizoram. Concerns about ethnic conflicts, demands for autonomy, and security issues all delayed successful repatriation. A series of Nine attempts were attempted to return Bru-displaced Tripura residents back to their birthplace in Mizoram, however numbers of repatriation have been unpredictable due to community resistance, security issues, and ethnic clashes. The 2020 settlement agreement changed the focus from Mizoram repatriation to a permanent stay in Tripura<sup>xvi</sup>.

## 2.2. Eventual Shift to Permanent settlement of Reang (Bru) In Tripura:

The repatriation process of 2018 was unsuccessful, despite the collaborative efforts of the governments of Mizoram, Tripura, and the central government. To achieve the goal of repatriation to Mizoram, officials implemented strict measures by halting food supplies to relief camps, anticipating that the Bru Reang would be compelled to leave once their essential food provisions were terminated. Evidence of such reports exists in various newspapers from that period. In 2019, the Tripura government applied pressure on the Brus to return to Mizoram by halting ration supplies, a strategy aimed at promoting their repatriation (Sarkar, 2019)<sup>xvii</sup>. Nonetheless, the Brus opposed deportation, indicating discontent with the grants and rehabilitation initiatives provided in Mizoram (Chakraborty, 2018)<sup>xviii</sup>. Numerous Bru families expressed concerns regarding their safety and subsequently requested permanent settlement in Tripura, referencing their historical presence and significant socio-economic integration within the state (Das, 2020)<sup>xix</sup>.

The Bru community organized protests and hunger strikes in response to the cessation of ration supplies to relief camps, garnering support from the indigenous tribal communities of Tripura (Sarkar, 2019). The deficiency of food and essential resources exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, resulting in increased political pressure on the government to address the situation (Chakraborty, 2018). The Bru community garnered significant support from the Tripuri and other indigenous Kokborok-speaking tribes of Tripura, who expressed solidarity with their situation by engaging in protests and offering food assistance through charitable initiatives (Chakraborty, 2018). Solidarity transcended political affiliations, with diverse tribal groups, irrespective of party alignments, voicing dissatisfaction regarding the ration cuts imposed on the Brus (Das, 2020). The extensive tribal support bolstered the Bru cause and intensified pressure on the government to reevaluate its repatriation policies (Sarkar, 2019).

In 2020, the royal scion of Tripura, expressed significant concern regarding the inhumane conditions experienced by the displaced Bru population. During his visits to the affected areas, he noted that many displaced Brus originated from Tripura, having been displaced during the construction of the Dumboor Dam in 1976 (Deb Barman, 2020)<sup>xx</sup>. Supported by a significant indigenous population and holding political influence in Tripura, Manikya asserted that the Brus were "refugees in their own country"<sup>xxi</sup>. He questioned why Tripura, historically a haven for international migrants, could not provide land for its own displaced citizens. The royal scion Manikya played a crucial role in promoting the permanent settlement of the Brus in Tripura and was instrumental in the signing of the Bru-Reang Agreement in January 2020 (Press Information Bureau, 2020).<sup>xxii</sup>

**2.3. Findings on failure of repatriation and prolonged Permanent Settlement:** In Tripura, the displaced Bru crisis spans around 1997 to 2019. Following escape from ethnic violence, the Bru people sought safety in six relief camps in Tripura's North District (Chakraborty, 2018). For more than two decades, their situation remained unsolved as several repatriation attempts (2009, 2010, 2018) failed due to opposition from the refugees citing security concerns and lack of livelihood possibilities in Mizoram (Das, 2020). Poor sanitation, hunger, and lack of educational and employment facilities defined the camps (Lalzirliana, 2010).<sup>xxiii</sup> Citing concern of ethnic persecution, the Brus mostly opposed returning despite agreements between the Mizoram government, Tripura government, and the Centre (Sarkar, 2019). Despite agreements between the Mizoram government, Tripura government, and the Centre, the Brus largely resisted returning, citing fear of ethnic persecution (Sarkar, 2019). This led to continued negotiations and discussions on permanent settlement in Tripura. The Mizoram Bru Displaced People Forum (MBDPF) demanded the state government fully implement the rehabilitation package before the refugees move to Mizoram. Earlier, it had submitted a 14 point-demand to the MHA. The demands included, among other things, allotting five-hectares land to each family, undertaking special development plan for the backward tribals and providing adequate security to the repatriated displaced Bru.

**2.3.1. Bru discontent and opposition to repatriation:** From studies of Bru- displaced representatives and knowledge of the genealogy of Bru- Mizo disputes from events and reports, the narrative of the Bru resistance to repatriation and dissatisfaction with Mizoram administration is generalised. According to the narrative, the Bru leadership in Mizoram has long argued that their second-largest ethnic group, the state, has been systematically denied constitutional rights and basic public facilities. The Reang Peoples Union

(RPU) filed a memorandum to the Mizoram government in 1989 asking for Reang programming on All India Radio, job reservations, and Legislative Assembly participation. This was their political articulation, but later they alleged that desired settlement site among other demands were not met by repatriation agreements.

Different studies and publications have recorded the problems of repatriation. For instance, the Economic and Political Weekly has looked at the complexity of the Bru–Mizo dispute and clarified historical and sociopolitical elements causing the current problem. Furthermore, emphasized by The Indian Express are the difficulties the Bru people have, including their displacement and protracted delays in the repatriation process. These sources offer insightful analysis of the several dimensions of the conflict and the urgent necessity of a thorough and sympathetic solution. Bru refugees' repatriation has seen notable delays mostly related to the community's worries about fresh violence and issues about insufficient rehabilitation policies (Indian Express, 2018a)<sup>xxiv</sup>. Citing security issues, many Bru families, uprooted since the ethnic violence of 1997, have indicated a preference for relocation in Tripura over returning to Mizoram.

Many have turned away without official guarantees from the Mizoram government ensuring their safety and attending to particular needs, such resettlement in a small region within Mamit District. The group has pushed over time on being resettled together rather than scattered among several suggested 14 villages. They have also objected to the Young Mizo Association (YMA) monitoring returnees based on the 1995 electoral roll, a practice they consider compromises their rights and security (Indian Express, 2018b). Given their fundamental needs remain unfulfilled, this circumstance has put the Brus in a difficult position; they are caught between the uncertainty of repatriation and the great survival hardships they encounter in relief camps without enough government support.

### 2.3.2. Confrontations from Certain sections of Mizo Community:

The Bru repatriation to Mizoram faced resistance from Mizo organizations, which set conditions for their return, fearing demands for an Autonomous District Council (ADC) and insurgency threats. Roluahpuia (2018) noted that the Mizoram government complied with pressure from groups like the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), who opposed a separate ADC. Protests in 2011, 2012, and 2015 threw still more havoc on the process<sup>xxv</sup>. In Enigma of "Brus," Bijukumar, V. (2022), explored the predominance of some Mizo areas over minorities in Mizoram. YMA and MZP carried out an identification process in Mamit District in 2011 to confirm Bru residence; some Brus claimed maltreatment<sup>xxvi</sup>. Arguing that Brus departed Mizoram voluntarily, Roluahpuia (2018) discounted these assertions as overblown and politically swayed. Supporting repatriation, YMA and MZP opposed the Brus's demand for Kashmiri Pandit-like status in 2015. Still many Brus stayed in Tripura. The researcher noted that some Mizos saw Mizoram as only for their own people and objected to Bru being included on voting lists. Comprising YMA, MZP, Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), and Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP), the Coordination Committee of Mizo NGOs asked that Brus shun violence before returning.

**2.3.3. State dealings of Mizoram and Tripura on Bru-crisis:** The Union government has frequently promised to repatriate 36,000 tribal refugees to Mizoram, although some sources claim the state government has showed little interest in resettling the Displaced Bru group. Brus, a minority ethnic population, were stereotyped, humiliated, and impoverished by Mizos, according to the Displaced. Peer Mizo community pressure organization affected Mizoram's state government's repatriation strategy and Brus settlement groupings. Joint civic organizations in Mizoram wrote a memorandum in 2006 opposing the state government's intention to arrange the Brus into villages, stating that it might produce demographic imbalances and threaten Mizo security and harmony<sup>xxvii</sup>. In 2019, the NGO Coordination Committee, a group of civil societies and student groups in Mizoram, urged genuine Bru families to return to the state to maintain demographic balance and security (Northeast Now, 2019)<sup>xxviii</sup>.

The Mizoram Government began implementing the 2005 MoU with the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) to repatriate displaced Brus (Bhattacharya, 2011)<sup>xxix</sup>. The first repatriation roadmap was in 2009. Local opposition hampered repatriation. The death of a Mizo youth in Bungthum hamlet by suspected Bru militants in November 2009 led to demonstrations, delaying the procedure (Fresh Exodus



Deepens Bru Crisis, 2009)<sup>xxx</sup>. Civil society groups urged the government to use the 1995 election roll to identify initial settlers and guarantee only genuine voters were repatriated (Lalthazuala, 2015)<sup>xxxi</sup>. Thus, the protracted presence of Bru refugees in Tripura's relief camps has caused law-and-order and internal security issues for the state government of Tripura. Bru refugees and Kanchanpur residents clashed in October 2016, worsening repatriation operations. The Union and Mizoram governments began repatriation to address Brus human security issues.

According to the Young Mizo Association (YMA), the Brus departed Mizoram and drove several Mizos from Sakhan Hill Range villages in Tripura, such as Sakhan Tualsen and Upper Dosda, escalating tensions. Some local Reang community members who share affinity with Mizoram brus around the Bru relief camps in Tripura complained that the Bru relief camps and Bru displaced people's behavior interfered with their livelihoods. The community sympathized with their situation. This claim grows among Mizos and Bengalis in Kanchanpur around North Tripura relief camps. The Bru community was accused of breaking into local farms and homes and stealing produce. According to reports, the Brus operated in groups, making them hard to stop. The Reang community said that in their circumstances, many would act that way and worse, and the government must fix them as soon as possible so they can adapt to mainstream culture. The government must address all these issues and seek repatriation to Mizoram for Bru displaced there, and Mizoram should shoulder the burden of its permanent residents.

**2.4. The 2020 Bru Accord Permanent Settlement:** Signed in New Delhi on January 16, 2020, a quadripartite agreement addresses the Bru (Reang) population's displacement. Under Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the agreement sought to provide a permanent solution for more than 34,000 Bru refugees living in temporary relief camps in Tripura since fleeing ethnic violence in Mizoram in 1997. With terms for housing land, financial assistance, and integration into state social programs, the agreement gave the Bru people the chance to permanently relocate to Tripura. The resolution of the humanitarian crisis was much aided by the cooperation of central and state governments as well as by the active participation of Bru community leaders, Royal Scion of Tripura. Proposed for Bru (Reang)'s permanent residence in Tripura was a package of financial aid valued at roughly ₹656.00 crore. Every family would get a fixed deposit of Rs. 4 lakh, cash aid of Rs. 5,000 monthly, free rationing for two years, house building help of Rs. 1,50,000, a 30x 40 square foot plot of land, and free transportation to the resettlement site (Indian Express, 2020)<sup>xxxii</sup>.

**2.4.1. Mixed reactions from the Local communities and Parties:** The permanent settlement of the Bru (Reang) community in Tripura, India, marked a significant milestone in addressing one of the country's longstanding internal displacement issues. The initiative received commendation from various quarters, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi referring to it as a "special day," highlighting the government's commitment to restoring peace and stability in the region. Union Home Minister Amit Shah played a pivotal role in this endeavour, emphasizing the successful resettlement of approximately 38,000 Bru migrants and the restoration of their dignity and livelihoods (The Statesman, 2024)<sup>xxxiii</sup>.

However, the settlement faced criticism from opposition parties within Tripura. They argued that the Bru community should have been repatriated to Mizoram, their original home state, instead of being granted rights and provisions in Tripura. These critics contended that the responsibility for addressing the concerns of the displaced Brus lay with the Mizoram government. The resettlement also elicited mixed reactions from local communities in Tripura. While many indigenous groups, including sections of the Reang community in Tripura, expressed sympathy and welcomed the displaced population, concerns were raised about the long-term implications of settling a large group in an already densely populated state. Protests erupted in parts of northern Tripura against the resettlement plans, reflecting apprehensions about resource allocation and demographic changes. (Indian Express, 2020)<sup>xxxiv</sup>

**2.4.2. Aftermath of permanent settlement process of Bru since 2020 Accord:** The 2020 permanent settlement accord sought to resolve Bru community displacement by helping them to establish permanent residence in Tripura. It included particular resettlement schedules including land allocation, financial aid within a month, physical verification within 15 days from the signing, and physical verification within, but the COVID-19 epidemic and national lockdowns threw off these plans, resulting in delays in land distribution, polls, and the general resettlement process. The unparalleled difficulties of the epidemic most likely hampered the quick application of the Bru Accord's clauses, so influencing government operations and mobility as well as to be carried out within 15 days of agreement signing to name beneficiaries.



Numerous difficulties beset the Bru permanent settlement process, which postponed its start. Land conflicts, legal clearances, and local resistance caused delays for the settlement. Further complicating land distribution were environmental issues over ecologically sensitive areas and forest reserved. While logistical obstacles exacerbated by COVID-19 limited infrastructure development and resource transportation, local opposition through demonstrations and legal challenges slowed the process.

**2.4.3. Challenges in the initiation of Permanent settlements:** Initially, the Bru community anticipated resettlement in and around the Kanchanpur subdivision of Tripura. In September 2020, Bru organizations proposed converting three existing relief camps into permanent resettlement villages and suggesting five alternative sites, including Phuldungsei village near Bethlingchhip peak on Jampui Hills. These proposals aimed to ensure resettlement areas were closer to established infrastructure and markets, facilitating better integration and access to services. Officials conducted verifications to facilitate this process. However, the proposed settlements faced vehement protests from local communities, including Bengali and Mizo groups. These protests escalated into road blockades and strikes, notably organized by the Joint Movement Committee (JMC), a coalition of local organizations. On November 21, 2020, a protest in the Panisagar area turned violent, resulting in the death of a fireman, and a civilian. The unrest led to significant tensions and challenges in the resettlement process (Indian Express, 2020)<sup>xxxv</sup>.

The Govt of Tripura is facing challenges in identifying suitable sites for permanent settlement, particularly those distant from essential amenities like markets. Opposition to the resettlement was spearheaded by the Joint Movement Committee, which represented the Bengali group Nagarik Suraksha Manch, and the Mizo Convention. The groups initially demanded that the resettlement be sent back to Mizoram to settle their political issues (Bhattacharya, 2020)<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

**2.5. Shift in Settlement spots from Kanchanpur to other Districts of the State:** The violent demonstrations and local resistance in Kanchanpur subdivision, including road blockades and the sad death of a fireman during the Panisagar protest in November 2020, compelled the authorities to rethink the first resettlement plans. The government decided to move Bru settlements to other Tripura districts in order to reduce tensions and guarantee more seamless implementation after strong opposition from Bengali and Mizo residents. New resettlement sites were thus found in several districts, including Dhalai, North Tripura, Unakoti, Sepahijala, Gomati, and South Tripura, so diversifying the settlement sites to minimize local resistance and distribute the Bru population more evenly (Times of India)<sup>xxxvii</sup>.

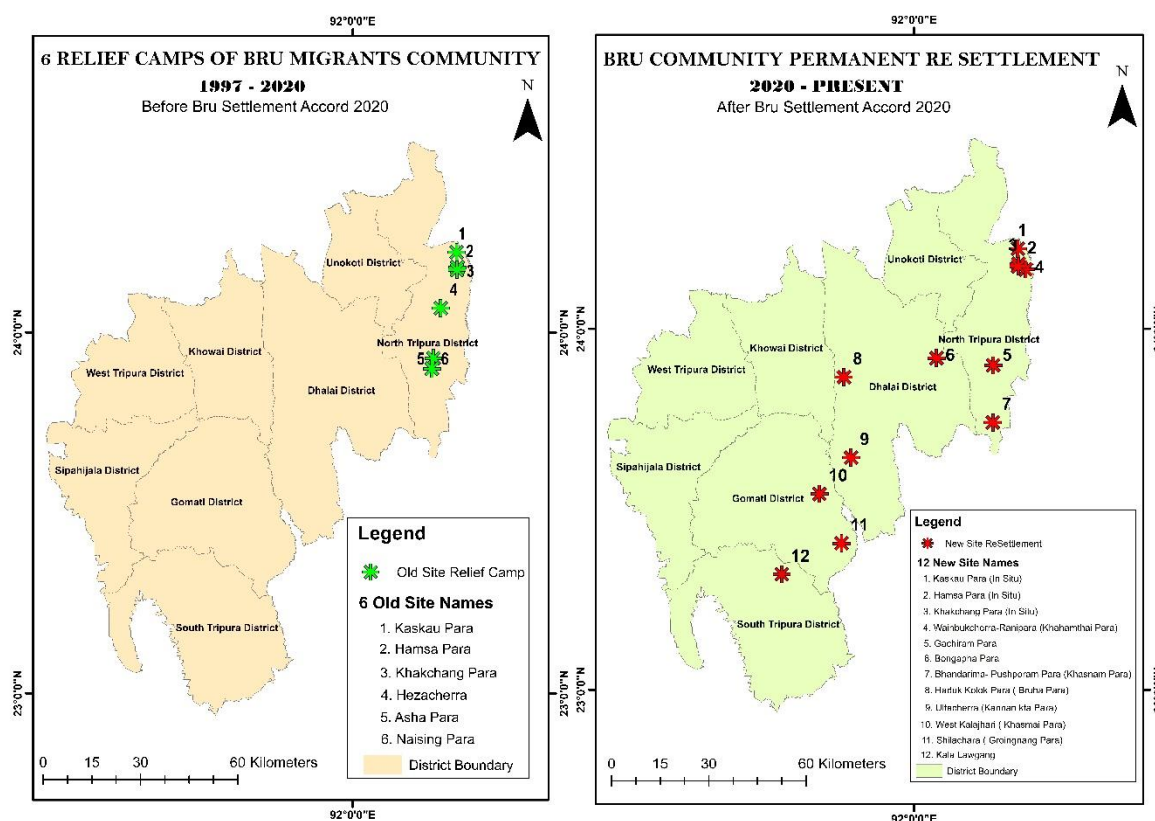
The government of Tripura held several meetings with regard to permanent settlements of Tripura. In 2022, the ministry of Tripura Directorate of Information & cultural affairs officially notified about the permanent resettlement of Bru (Reangs in Progress) and identifications of spots and plan route for the permanent settlement from then existing six reliefs camps of Tripura. Initially, the Tripura government has identified 12 locations for the Bru resettlement out of which the process is now going on in 8 locations. More one or two locations would be finalized in consultation with the Bru leaders, he added. The Tripura government in the press release in 2020 identified 18 locations in eight districts to resettle the displaced Bru community. The "District Magistrates of the state's eight districts have identified 18 locations to resettle the Brus. However, the government will examine if the lands are suitable for their permanent settlement. The twelve spots identified for Permanent Resettlement of Bru migrants are presented through the Table 1.

**Table 1. Proposed Identified settlements in Tripura**

Sl	Spot Location	Area	District
1	Bongaphapara	L.T Valley	Dhalai
2	Haduk kolok para	Ambassa	Dhalai
3	Kaskau (In Situ)	Kanchanpur	North Tripura
4	Wainbukcherra-Ranipara	Panisagar	North Tripura
5	West Kalajhari	Amarpur	Gomati
6	Bhandarima-Pushporampara	Kanchanpur	North Tripura
7	Hamsapara (in situ)	Panisagar	Tripura
8	Khakchang (in Situ)	Panisagar	North Tripura
9	Ultacherra	Gandhacherra	Dhalai
10	Gachirampara (Nasingpara)	Kanchanpur	North Tripura
11	Shilachara	Korbook	Gomati
12	Kala Lawgang	Santirbazar	South Tripura

**Source: Government of Tripura, Directorate of Information & Cultural Affairs.** (2023, July 16). *S-3516* [Press release]. Agartala<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

**2.5.1. Bru grievances over Scattered and faraway Settlement spots:** Elvis Chorkhy, former leader of the Bru community, expressed dissatisfaction with the decision to grant only two settlements in the Kanchanpur sub-division, despite initial plans for four settlement points. The Bru Displaced Youth Association (BDYA) reported that after the resettlement agreement was signed, the state government initially granted permission for six locations in Kanchanpur but later reduced this to two. Emphasizing that the Bru people, who have lived in Kanchanpur since 1997, are reluctant to move to other regions like South Tripura, the BDYA asked the government to release the last four sites identified under the subdivision. They also expressed worries on the relocation of senior citizens who have been living with them (Bharadwaj, 2022)<sup>xxxix</sup>. The Figure 1 display the settlements spots scattered in different districts of Tripura.



**2.5.2. Official hindrances over settlement allocation problems:** Particularly with regard to land allocation and local opposition, the Bru people's resettlement has presented potent difficulties. Sometimes the Forest Department has objected to suggested resettlement locations, claiming invasion of reserved forest areas. For Bru rehabilitation, for instance, a plan to reroute 25 hectares of forest land in the Manu-Chailengta Reserve Forest was under close examination because of worries about invasion of protected forest land (Indian Kanoon, 2021)<sup>xi</sup>. Legislative approval is needed for such communities inside reserved forests, which complicates and delays the process (EastMojo, 2021)<sup>xli</sup>.

There have also been claims of suggested Bru resettlement sites overlapping with local communities' ancestral territory. Local people worried about losing their traditional territories have staged demonstrations resulting from this overlap. For example, fearing the loss of their ancestral land to Bru migrants, the Joint Movement Committee—which consists of local groups protested against the state's rehabilitation plan in Kanchanpur (The Wire, 2020)<sup>xlii</sup>. Although authorities have intervened to handle these demonstrations, such conflicts have complicated and delayed the resettlement process even more.

### 2.5.3. Issues with Proposed Permanent Settlement Spots:

Particularly in Kahamtaipara, the suggested permanent settlement sites for Bru migrants create several difficulties for the resettlement initiatives of the community. The crowded conditions and limited space between communities make many Bru migrants reluctant to build their homes (Indian Express, 2021). Though authorities have not yet addressed these issues, residents have asked for the site's expansion. Furthermore, the allocated areas are sloping ground with loose soil, which begs questions regarding house stability during monsoons. The poor connection of the site to the closest main road makes the transportation of building

supplies more difficult since vehicles find it difficult to enter the area. Furthermore, inadequate to support the community's traditional slash-and-burn farming, known as jhum, which is essential for their survival is the small land allotment. The access road to the site is badly built and features a narrow, rocky hillside path. Lack of basic infrastructure on the site, including a drainage system and water pipelines, forces residents to manually carry water over difficult terrain. The COVID-19 epidemic and later lockdowns have further hampered building progress, so affecting the availability and transportation of building materials. Some families, resolved to establish their homes in the resettlement area, have started building despite these difficulties (Indian Express, 2021)<sup>xliii</sup>.



**2.5.4. Obstacles to Settlement Process as posed by the Pandemic COVID 19:** The Bru settlement process in India was much disturbed by the COVID-19 epidemic. Nationwide lockdowns limited travel, stopped land surveys, administrative processes, and physical validation. Health safety rules restricted field operations, so postponing infrastructure development and the distribution of necessary resources. While financial limitations resulting from pandemic-related economic slowdowns affected funding for resettlement projects, supply chain disruptions affecting the transportation of building materials and relief supplies affected Besides, the epidemic raised health issues in relief camps, which caused more delays in relocation initiatives.

Bharadwaj (2022) based on a scroll article reported building projects at Kaskaupara, a resettlement site in Panisagar subdivision of North Tripura, were hampered by challenges in sourcing building supplies and planning meals under lockdowns. A youth Bru migrant reported that despite difficulties, some families were able to start building their homes. In Kahamtaipara, too, the allocated plots were on sloping ground with loose soil, which left houses vulnerable during monsoons. Inadequate road connection made moving building supplies even more difficult. The pandemic also delayed the building of necessary infrastructure including drainage systems and water pipelines, thus residents had to physically carry water across difficult terrain<sup>xliv</sup>.

**2.5.5. Livelihood hurdles at the New Settlement Colony:** The shift in new settlement colony is expected to solve all related to Bru crisis displaced and with the government officials successful in the mission. However, for the new settlers in the colony, it doesn't mean the absence of issues. The new settlements have many to fill up. The agitations by Bru community from certain settlement spots gives lingering issues of displaced crisis and their unmet demands. The community is encountering several problems in the settlement spots. While the problems and grievances vary from settlement to settlement. Certain grievances are common to the settlement spots.

The resettlement of the Bru (Reang) community in Tripura has been marked by significant challenges, including the absence of formal village committees, lack of agricultural land for jhum cultivation, inadequate access to drinking water, and space congestion. The lack of village committees has led to administrative difficulties and a lack of representation in government, which drives ongoing community advocacy from without. Many families are still awaiting the promised agricultural land, which fuels demonstrations and roadblocks on highways (Sentinel Assam, 2024)<sup>xlv</sup>. In places like Kahamtaipara, lack of pipelines and appropriate drainage causes water scarcity, which forces people to get it from far-off sources. Resettlement sites' remoteness separates the community even more, so limiting market access and economic possibilities. Congestion in some towns also raises safety questions including fire hazards and emergency access issues (The Indian Express, 2024)<sup>xlvi</sup>. The community still wants village committees established to enhance administration and handle urgent problems<sup>xlvii</sup>.

**2.5.6: Current state of the permanent settlement process:** A total of 6,959 Bru (Reang) families of 37,136 persons were to be permanently settled across 12 sites in four districts of Tripura according to the resettlement deal. The Ministry of Home Affairs North East Division reports that, as of December 31, 2023, 6,302 Bru families had been settled in 11 identified locations, with 6,002 houses built and all beneficiaries receiving direct financial support through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). The Hindu (2024) claimed that the last group of resettled Bru refugees is being transferred to the 12th settlement colony in Laungangsom, Santirbazar subdivision, South Tripura district<sup>xlviii</sup>. Reiterating the government's commitment to enhancing living conditions by guaranteeing access to safe drinking water and education facilities, Union Home Minister Amit Shah visited the Bru settlement camp at Bruhapara in Dhalai district in December 2024 to evaluate resettlement progress. Families are still being moved to the colonies and under construction<sup>xlix</sup>. The government is working to create village committees and supply voter cards, Aadhar cards, and basic documentation like PRTC to be included into the forthcoming ADC elections in Tripura.

### 3. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS:

**3.1. Assessing Mizoram Repatriation Failures:** The repatriation failures of Bru to Mizoram are attributed to multiple factors and stakeholders. Brus often struggled with cooperation in repatriation programs, feeling insecure and dispersed in Mizoram's resettlement spots. The state government was influenced by pressure groups of the Mizo community, which prolonged the settlement process. The Mizo community treated Brus as native people of Tripura, but they were apprehensive about their migration due to shifting cultivation. Some Mizo scholars believed that the Reang Revolt in Tripura during the monarchy induced some Reangs to migrate into Mizoram.

The Brus in Mizoram claimed to have existed in pockets of Mizoram since time immemorial. After Independence, the divisions of Assam caused splits in communities inhabiting in different states. Today, Brus are spread in Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, and even Bangladesh. Local support from Reangs, who hold the second largest tribes of Tripura, created confidence among the Bru community. The larger Tripuri and Kokborok speaking community also supported their cause. The Government of Tripura and ruling Party need to be careful in dealing with the Bru crisis, as it will affect the system and working of the government.

The younger generations born after ethnic conflicts have deep attachment to the State of Tripura and relief camps, and do not favour returning to Mizoram. Ethnic violence between the Reang-Mizo community in Sakhon, Tripura, led to discontent among the Mizo community and disrupted the repatriation process. The Mizo community was vigilant about the numbers of Bru displaced communities and took measures to identify the true Bru Displaced community of Mizoram. These factors hindered the smooth functioning of repatriation phases, leading to failures inducing shifts to Permanent Settlement in Tripura.

**3.2. Inducing Implementation of Permanent Settlement in Tripura:** The shifts in Permanent resettlement involve several circumstances in which Bru migrants want resettlement in Tripura rather than the specified locations in Mizoram. The Brus were dissatisfied with the grants and the requisite legislative power-sharing in Mizoram, which other non-tribal groups possess. The Brus are receiving financial support for a limited duration, along with help for rehabilitation and land area stabilization, which is expected to end soon. In this setting, their situations appear unlikely to change significantly. Furthermore, security worries and the remnants of groups including Bru and Mizosa in Mizoram prompted them to request permanent settlement in Tripura. Conversely, the Brus' efforts for permanent settlement in Tripura are unlikely to succeed, despite their protests, due to the substantial backing they have received from the predominant ethnic tribes of Tripura, particularly the Tripuris. In a context characterized by subtle disputes between minority tribes and the majority non-tribes in Tripura, the tribe's endeavour to increase their demographic presence, thereby actively participating in the political arena and government formation.

Tripura, known for a significant influx of immigrants during the partition of India and during the 1971 Liberation War, has seen the tribal population diminish to merely 31%. Consequently, indigenous tribes perceive that accepting a smaller population relative to a significant influx of immigrants effectively enhances their numerical strength. The indigenous tribes of Tripura are greeting the Brus and backing their cause, which asserts that they were previously displaced from the Gumti Hydel project in Tripura, resulting in the relocation of a significant number of Reang individuals to Mizoram. The Brus of Mizoram are also considered familiar, as they share a similar affinity with the Reangs of Tripura, who are the second largest tribe in Tripura. All these elements have facilitated the Brus in their transition to Permanent Settlement.

**3.3. Issues and Aftermath of Permanent Settlements:** The Challenges brought forward before Bru permanent settlement are basically based on Dispersal of groups in several Districts of Tripura, instead of concentrating lone in North Tripura and certain subdivisions of Kanchanpur and Pecharthal. There are other reasons that the two communities Bengali and Mizo protested; were basically due to Mizos displaced from Sakhon in 2009, and Bengali displaced from ethnic conflicts during the insurgency period of 1990s in Tripura are not receiving the similar attention and Grants, as the Brus have received from the State and Central government. There are pressures to the Government of Tripura, that the displaced communities from the ethnic conflicts are could have been rehabilitee in the same pattern as Brus of Mizoram. There are several allegations that State government have not stood for the cause of genuine Permanent Residents of Tripura and understood their cause. The issues and challenges are occasionally politically motivated and

oriented. The Brus resistance to dispersal of groups in other districts and complains about the settlement colony with regard to suitability and fulfilling the grants, are the general expected issues during the process of Permanent settlement.

**3.4. Future Livelihood of the settled Brus in Tripura:** The Complete process of permanent Settlement will be over by another year or two from 2025. The financial and rations will be stopped. The Brus who have been used to rations and other government aids since 1997 will face dependent crisis, and will need to stand completely on their own. While discussing the Bru representatives' leaders and MLA from Kanchanpur Subdivisions during the visit in last end of 2024, where Bru first took their refuge opined that the real livelihood will start once the grants cease<sup>l</sup>. This is true that the Bru will face challenges in the way to come for livelihood, if their ways are not hardworking and built economic independence by themselves. With regard to tribes' integral part with forest and Jhum cultivations in their livelihood. it comes to realization that the absence of designated land for jhum cultivation not only threatens the community's food security but also undermines their cultural heritage and traditional way of life. Addressing this concern is crucial for ensuring the sustainable resettlement and well-being of the Bru community in Tripura. In this context, the newly settled Bru started agitations for the access to Jhum cultivations besides their house premises<sup>li</sup>.

**3.5. Issue of community identity & Denizens and the absorption to the main stream society of Tripura:** The Brus, frequently mentioned in media, are regarded as members of the Reang community in Tripura, as there is no officially recognized Bru tribe among the 19 ethnic tribes of Tripura. The majority of Reangs in Tripura utilize the surname Reang, whereas displaced Brus possess several surnames, leading to ambiguity over their potential adoption of the Reang identity. Certain Reangs promote an expansive Bru identity that includes both Reangs and the Brus of Mizoram, despite the term "Bru" lacking historical acknowledgment. Transitioning from Reang to Bru identity necessitates legal action inside Tripura's Legislative Assembly.

The settled Brus confront preconceptions as "refugees," a designation they repudiate, contending that their displacement within India does not qualify them as refugees. They encounter difficulties assimilating into mainstream Tripura society, experiencing opposition from residents, as evidenced at Groinang Para, Gomati District, when demonstrations branded them "Sanarathi" (refugees)<sup>lii</sup>. Notwithstanding the 2020 Quadripartite Agreement conferring permanent residency, they foresee ongoing marginalization and potential ethnic strife akin to that in Mizoram. According to Bijukumar, V. (2022), the Bru resettlement issue underscores wider concerns of denizenship, encompassing legal, socioeconomic, and cultural difficulties. These encompass constrained rights, unemployment, substandard living conditions, identity issues, and limited political representation. Land disputes, insufficient education, and limited healthcare access intensify their integration challenges, highlighting the necessity for inclusive policies to provide stability and equitable opportunity.

**4. Conclusion:** The Bru displacement crisis encompasses various facets related to comprehending Internally Displaced Persons and addressing refugee rehabilitation issues in India. The Bru displacement problem is one of the oldest of its kind, with almost two decades of its population residing in temporary substandard settlements in the past two decades. Despite the Permanent Settlement being established in 2020, marking the end of 23 years under the Bru Accords, evidence persists of ongoing issues regarding relocation and assimilation into mainstream life. The study examines the progression of the Bru community since their inception in Tripura, focusing on numerous relief camps, their repatriation narratives to Mizoram, and the transition to permanent settlement in Tripura. We examined and analysed the reasons for repatriation failures through the lens of Bru-Mizo disputes in both the State of Mizoram and Tripura. The ethnic local responses from the states of Tripura and Mizoram shaped the strategy regarding the Bru displacement situation. In all these circumstances, the Bru displaced people endured delayed permanent settlement that could have been resolved far earlier. A substantial influx of Bru ethnic migrants into the State of Tripura greeted the repatriation efforts to Mizoram. The intricacy of addressing ethnic disputes and the implications of dual state policies, along with the pivotal role of central government arbitration in resolving issues related to displaced individuals, pose significant challenges.



The comprehensive and investigative character of the study, tracing the chronological events of Bru's path from repatriation to permanent settlements, positions the Bru issue as a distinctive case in the history of managing internally displaced individuals in India. The sensitivity of the Mizo and Bru ethnic groups, which dwell in cross-border states, influences the policies of pressure groups in determining the relocation process of the Brus. The 2020 Quadripartite, anticipated to resolve the over two-decade-long Bru conflict, is not devoid of challenges. The community continues to confront persistent challenges and issues. We have analysed the diverse ethnic reactions in the state of Tripura to the Bru rehabilitation and the community's advocacy for Bru settlement. The integration of the Bru community with the local populace and the factors affecting residents and future livelihood issues in the State of Tripura are analysed. The study overall illustrates the experiences of an ethnic minority within a predominant ethnic group. The Brus of Mizoram and the Reangs of Tripura possess limited political influence and do not wield dominant power in any state. In such scenarios, the Bru causes are frequently overlooked, and their requests are disregarded. It is important to highlight that the Bru Displaced situation has garnered significant attention and support from central governments, which has not been afforded to other displaced communities in the North-East. Central governments addressed their matter uniformly, adhering to the stipulations for Kashmiri Pandits. The study, however, lacks a comprehensive examination of livelihoods and urgent challenges through a series of questionnaires in field and household surveys.

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