

Conflict Induced Internal Displacements in India: An Overview

¹Tajamul Maqbool & ²Aijaz Ahmad Turrey

¹Doctoral Student, Centre for Studies in Society and Development, Central university of Gujarat.

² Doctoral Student, Centre for Studies in Economics and Planning, Central university of Gujarat.

Abstract: *Through the twentieth century there has been a significant growth in the frequency of armed conflicts across the globe. These conflicts have not only led to widespread death but extensive displacement, fear and economic devastation. The most affected of these conflicts are those who get dislocated from their native places under unbearable violent conditions. By the end of 2016 there were 40.3 million people living in internal displacement because of conflict and violence in the world. This number has nearly doubled since 2000 and has increased sharply over the last five years. India is no exception to it. India is a diverse country with people living with different cultures and religions. Though India got independence in 1947 from the British but it could not end the internal conflicts within the country. On the one hand there were celebrations of independence but on the other hand there was large scale displacement of people based on their religion from both the nations. There have been cases of conflicts and violence in many states of India after independence, which led to the displacement of people who were either in minority or weaker sections of society. It has been also very difficult in India to estimate the number of Internally Displaced Person (IDP) as the country lacks any central government agency which can be given mandate to deal with the issues of IDPs. The paper will try to look the conflicts and violence within the country post-independence and the communities who got displaced due to these armed conflicts and violence.*

Key Words: *Partition, Violence, Armed Conflict, Displacement, IDPs.*

Introduction

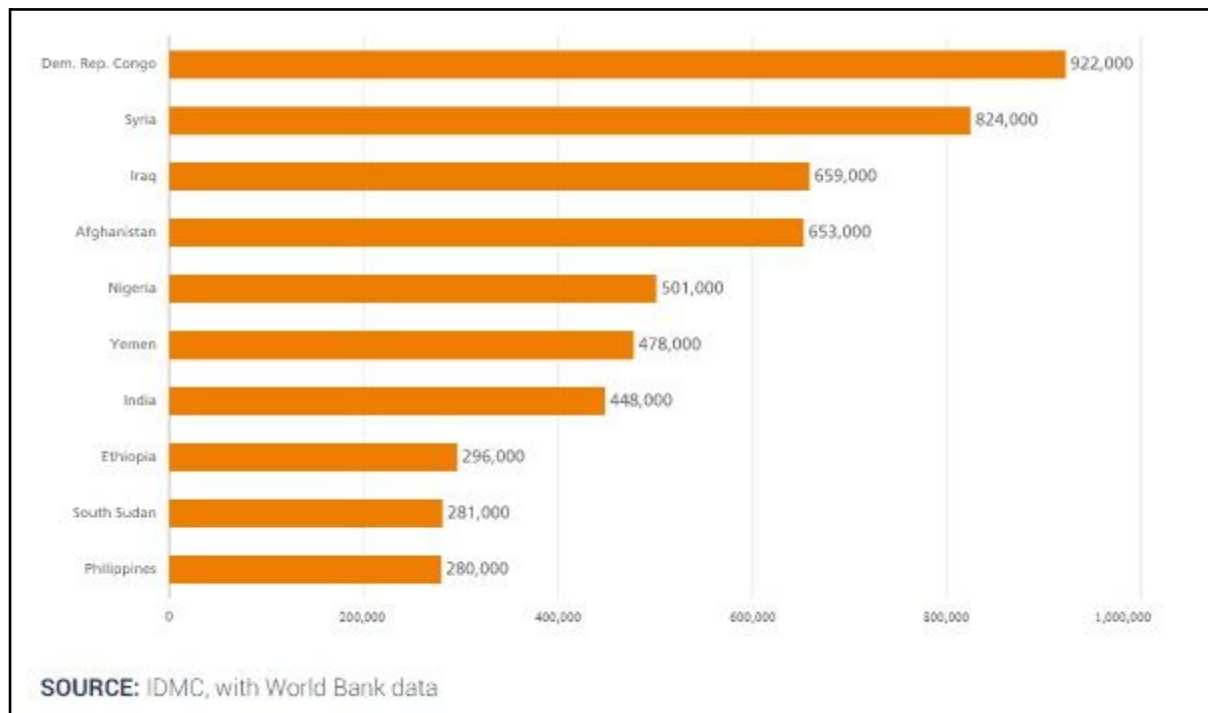
Since the end of World War II, there has been large scale of displacement of people all over the globe due to the armed conflicts, ethnic strife and therefore there have been human rights violations. In the 1990s, there has been an increase in the number of IDPs and a decline in the number of refugees, as compared to the earlier period. The reasons for this trend are increased border controls, limited opportunities to cross international borders, decline in the tradition of hospitality and the institution of asylum. In several cases many states either

closed their borders or adopted restrictive policies for refugees which in turn led to their decreasing number and raised the number of internally displaced persons. There have been problems within the categories of IDPs. Firstly, those who are unable to cross over the national borders to escape violence are doubly disadvantaged. Secondly only those persons are treated and counted as internally displaced persons who have got displaced due to conflict and persecution while millions of people have been uprooted by natural disasters, but their statistics are missing (Cohen et al, 2006).

For the first time the IDPS were counted in 1982 and their number was estimated as 1.2 million in eleven countries. Since then various methodologies were developed to estimate their numbers. Among the various efforts to monitor the IDPs, in 1998 the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by UN on the recommendations of the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) to collect data on IDPs more accurately. Rising numbers of IDPs over the years have made this problem difficult to ignore. On the other hand, the Western governments were much concerned with the increasing numbers of IDPs as most of them were taking refuge along their borders. According to the report of IDMC, at the end of 2014 there were 33.3 million displaced people due to armed conflicts and frequent human rights violations and about 22 million people were displaced by natural or man-made disasters (Ferris, 2014).

By the end of the 2016, there were 6.9 million new conflict induced displacements and total of around 40.3 million people were living in internally displaced conditions due to conflict and violence in the world. There were ten countries around the world with most of the new displacements due to conflict and violence in 2016. The Democratic Republic of Congo had largest number of IDPs, estimating around 922,000 while Philippines had least number of new IDPs with 280,000. India with 448,000 new internally displaced persons due to conflict and violence was ranked 7th among the ten countries (GRID, 2017).

Figure 1.1

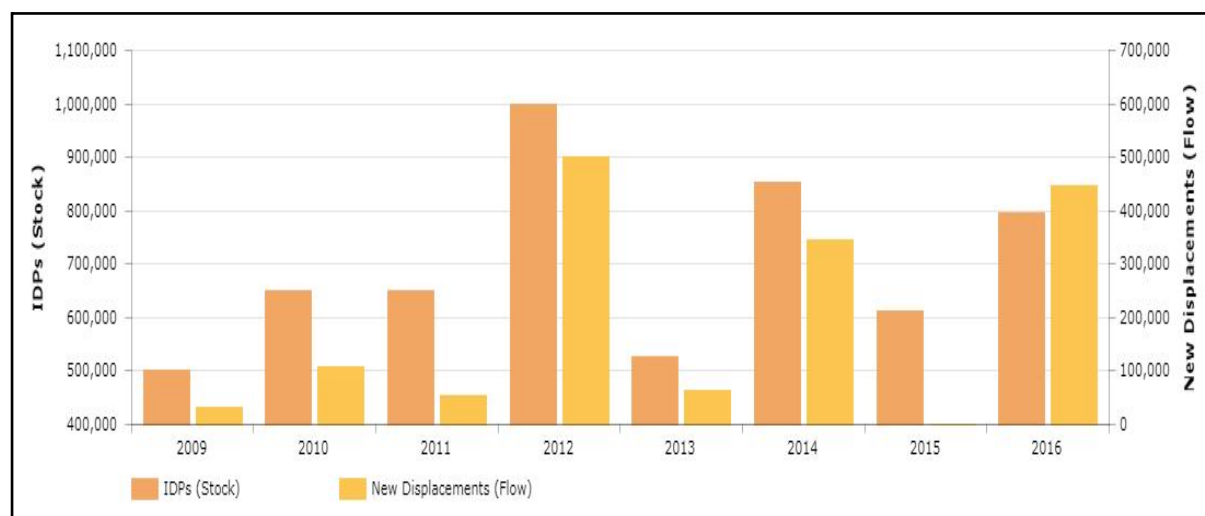
Countries with most new displacements by conflict and violence in 2016

Though India was successful in freeing the Nation from British rule and achieved their independence in 1947, but the country got partitioned into Pakistan and India on the basis of ethnic and religious nationalism. The creation of two independent nations on the basis of religion had larger impacts on the people of both the nations. On the one hand there were celebrations of independence but on the other hand there was large scale displacement of people based on their religion from both the nations (Talbot & Singh, 2009). The process of displacement does not stop at partition but continued in both the countries. India had witnessed continued armed conflicts and issues of communal violence even after independence. These conflicts and localised violence has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee away from their homes and settle in other places as a displaced community. It has been also very difficult in India to estimate the number of internally displaced persons as the country lacks any central government agency which can be given mandate to deal with the issues of IDPs (IDMC¹, 2010).

¹Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre was set up in 1998 at the request of the international community to fill an important knowledge gap on the global scale and patterns of internal displacement.

Figure 1.2

Conflict and violence displacement figures in India from 2009 to 2016



Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC): India (1 January - 30 June 2017)

India is the largest country in South Asia with population nearly 1.3 billion. At the end of April 2015, it was reported that the country had a displaced population of about 616,140 (IDMC, 2015). The main reasons for displacement in India have been said to be frequent disasters, conflicts, communal violence and development projects. Apart from these, the socially excluded groups such as scheduled castes and tribes along with religious minorities have been mostly a prone to displacements (Lama, 2000).

India was affected by conflict and shelling along the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir in the first half of 2017, and by smaller communal conflicts and clashes. Around 22,000 new displacements were recorded in the first half of 2017. Major events included the displacement of thousands of people in Rajouri district in mid-May after Pakistani shelling and Indian retaliation along the line of control (IDMC, 2017).

Other events include the evacuation of 7,000 boarding school students from Darjeeling in West Bengal in June in response to violent protests demanding a separate Gorkhaland state. In Patan district in Gujarat, an unspecified number of people, all of them Muslim, were displaced in March after homes were set on fire in Vadavali village following a fight between Hindu and Muslim students (IDMC, 2017).

The conflict induced displacement in India will be divided based on regions which will provide us a detailed account of displacement of people region wise and the causes of displacement in each region.

Regional or Group Displacements in India

(a) Jammu and Kashmir

Most of the displaced population in India is concentrated in its State of Jammu and Kashmir, where more than 251,000 people were forced to migrate to other parts of India. The main reason for displacement in Jammu and Kashmir is the conflict, which popularly is known as 'Kashmir conflict' in the mainstream media, between the Indian forces and the militants who seek either Independence from India or accession to Pakistan. Since 1989 more than 90% of the Kashmiri Pandits left the Valley and majority of them started living in camps in Jammu city where as some got settled in New Delhi (Malhotra, 2007).

The clashes along the Line of Control (LOC) between the Indian army and their Pakistani counterpart have led to the displacement of thousands of people from nearby villages. Also, due the plantation of land mines and building of fencing along the LOC by the Indian army had displaced at least 15,000 people from 22 surveyed villages. The people were separated by the fence which the Indian army have erected five kilometres away from the LOC from their land, education and livelihoods (Shekhawat, 2006).

Apart from the Kashmiri Pandits and border displaced persons there were displacements in other districts of the state such as in Doda, Rajouri and Poonch. These people are mostly nomadic tribes consisting of Gujjars and Bakerwals and are Muslims by faith. Their exact numbers have never been known as the government never has shown any seriousness towards these people. Sometimes their displacement is temporary but continuous. The region has been affected by both the insurgent groups as well as the security forces. The women of this region have suffered a lot in absence of their male counterparts. The region has been neglected by the media as the people living in these areas are generally illiterate and inaccessible (Jamwal, 2004).

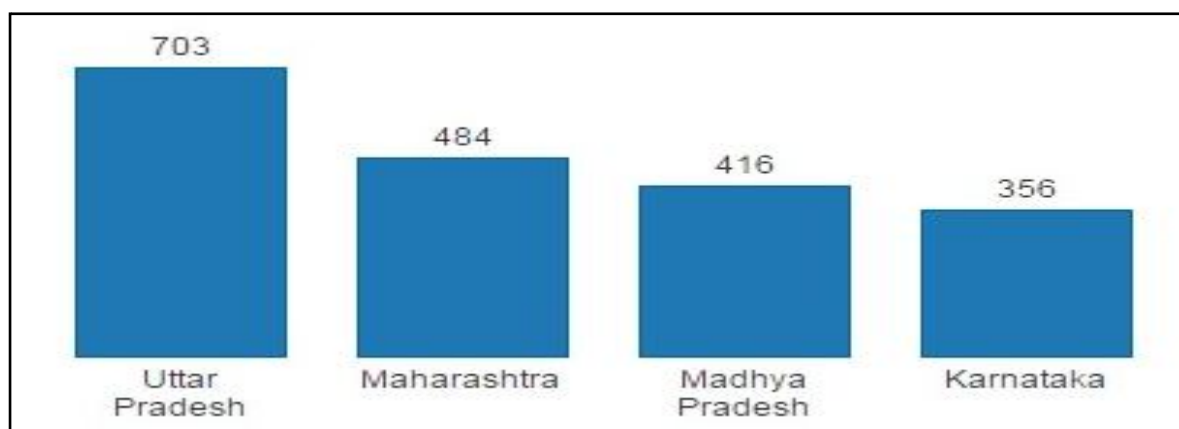
(b) Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra

Uttar Pradesh is home to around 200 million people and is most populous state in India. Between the years 2010 and 2014, the state witnessed 703 cases of religious conflicts resulting in death of 176 people and injuring about 2,007 people (Sethi, 2015).

In September 2013, as the country was getting ready for General Elections scheduled for the following April, large-scale communal violence engulfed Muzafarnagar and Shamli districts of western Uttar Pradesh. A BBC report described the violence as ‘the worst in India in a decade’. By the time the violence had abated later that month, 52 persons lay dead, over 60 had been grievously injured, and scores of houses, destroyed in fires, across 14 villages in the two districts. This was the official count—many instances of deaths, injuries, sexual violence, and destruction of property remain uncounted to this day. The violence mostly targeted Western UP’s Muslims, especially the ones from poorer backgrounds. Additionally, the violence affected 74 villages in Muzafarnagar and Shamli, and surrounding districts, as Muslim families here, especially where they were in minority, led fearing violence, in the tens of thousands, resulting in one of the largest violence-induced displacements in the country in recent years. Estimates vary but a figure of 50,000, at its peak, has been widely accepted (Hassan, 2015).

Karnataka witnessed the most religious conflicts per million population, 5.8, between 2010 and 2014, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 5.7. Uttar Pradesh, which saw the highest number of communal incidents in absolute terms during this period, ranked sixth in incidents per million population at 3.5. Madhya Pradesh saw the highest number of deaths from communal violence per million population at 0.9 during this period, followed by UP at 0.8. Maharashtra followed UP with the second-highest number of religious conflicts between 2010 and 2014 at 484. The state also ranked second in deaths and injuries from communal violence at 70 and 1,462, respectively (Sethi, 2015).

Figure 1.3
Top 4 States by Communal Incidents, 2010-14



Source: <https://scroll.in/article/760506/which-states-are-indias-communal-tinderboxes>

(c) North East

North eastern region of India is a geographically as well as politically isolated area, consisting of seven States, which are often called as 'seven sister states' include Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram. The region is the home to about 200 out of 430 groups with different ethnicities. The region is surrounded by China, Burma and Bangladesh and has only one single road which connects it with rest of India. It has resulted in huge number of in-migration from these neighbouring countries, which has resulted in ethnic conflicts over resources especially land. The major factor of the ethnic conflict in the region is the right to self-determination rather than religion. Unlike in other parts of India, where conflicts arise mainly between Hindus and Muslims on the basis of religion but in North East region religion does not play any role in displacement. For example, in Assam where Santhals and Bodos clashed with each other were Hindus and Christians. On the other hand, Hindus and Muslim Bengalis were regarded as Bengalis first, rather than Muslims and Hindus. The most affected states in terms of the displacement in the north east region are Assam, Manipur and Tripura. And the major eight ethnic groups (Mizos, Nagas, Bodos, Chakmas, Paites, Bengalis, Reangs and Kukis) were engaged in conflicts over land or strived for succession. The north-region is melting bowl of different ethnicities comprising of various racial stocks, speak different languages and have varied socio-cultural tradition, which has resulted in fighting for geographical space to preserve their ethnicity.

This preservation of ethnicity has resulted in demand for homelands which in turn has resulted for conflict induced displacement (Pukhan, 2013).

In 2014, the state of Assam had the largest number of IDPs over 300,000 in just four of its districts-Kokrajhar, Aulajuri, Chirang and Sonitpur. More than 18,000 people in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Assam were displaced in 1993 as a result of conflict between Bodos and in-migrant Muslims from Bangladesh. The ethnic violence between the Rabha and Garo tribes in Assam and Meghalaya forced at least 50,000 people to flee from their homes (Albuja et al., 2012).

In 2008 The All Assam Students' Union launched a state-wide agitation against the illegal immigrants which forced 14,000 Muslims to take shelter in relief camps. At the end of 2009, about 47,000 people were displaced by the conflicts between Bodo-Muslims and Bodo-Santhals in Assam. And the number of displaced populations has been increasing year after year as a result of conflicts between various ethnic groups (IDMC, 2010).

Like Assam, Manipur has been victim of ethnic conflicts and there has been continuous fighting between Indian army and the local militia. More than 2,000 Kukis from at least 25 villages were forced to leave their places by the massive army offences. An operation known as, 'Operation Summer Rifles' was launched in 2009 by the Indian army, state police and the Paramilitary Assam Rifles against the insurgents, leading to displacement of more than 2,500 people in Manipur. As a counter-insurgency measure more than 3,000 people were displaced from the floating islands on Loktak Lake in Manipur by the government authorities in 2011. The Naga-Kuki conflict in 1992 followed by Meities-Pangal clash in 1993 in the state of Manipur displaced thousands of people from their native places (Albuja et al., 2012).

(d) Central India

The central India has witnessed significant insurgent activities since independence which has resulted in large scale displacement of people from their native places. The states affected by these naxalite movements include Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. The region is rich in mineral resources and has led to armed conflicts over these resources which subsequently have resulted in displacement people mostly tribals in the region. By 2005 the Naxalite groups had

influenced at least 155 districts in 15 states of the country which affected at least 300 million population of the country. These Naxalite groups control almost 20% of the forest land of the country and their influence continues (Mandal, 2009). The Government of India had laid many operations to flesh out these insurgent groups but have not been successful so far. An operation called 'Operation Green Hunt' was launched in 2009 against the Naxalite Insurgents in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. This operation led to the displacement of at least 100,000 tribal people to the State of Andhra Pradesh from Chhattisgarh between late 2009 and early 2010. Apart from those displaced before 2009, there were 40,000 IDPs living in camps within Chhattisgarh and in Andhra Pradesh. In West Bengal more than 8000 people were displaced within the State. In 2005 Salwa Judum was formally set up by the government with the aim to suppress the Naxalite movement in the central India. The group which means 'peace hunt' was actually a vigilant force which was supposed by the government security forces which was used to remove the Naxalite sympathisers. This group with the help of government security forces raided villages, tortured people, made arbitrary arrests and detentions which forced the villagers to flee their homes. In order to prevent the Naxalites from recruiting the local people, the Salwa Judum group forcibly relocated thousands of villagers to government run camps which were located either near police stations or paramilitary police camps. In camps the villagers were subject to attacks by the Naxalites (IDMC, 2010).

(e) Gujarat

The 2002 'Gujarat riots' between the majority Hindus and minority Muslims took away the life of more than 2000 and displaced at least 250,000 people (CCT, 2002)². The violence started in February 2002 after Muslims were alleged of burning a train in which 59 Hindu pilgrims were burnt alive. The violence hit more than 150 town and 100 villages with Muslims being the most affected. Some small Hindu business owner also suffered from economic losses as their business units remained closed during the period but Muslims lost almost everything (HRW³, 2015). According to one of the reports on communal violence in Gujarat, the violence left at least 1,169 dead of which most were Muslims. Some 200-300

²Concerned Citizens Tribunal (CCT) was established in 2002 by prominent citizens of the Country under the chairmanship of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer to highlight the human rights violation after 2002 Gujarat riots.

³Human Rights Watch is a nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organization established in 1978. It defends the rights of people worldwide.

women were victims of sexual abuse during the violence, more than 600 children became orphans and about 900 women became widowed (Badigar, 2012). The status of the most Muslim Displaced families is not known, while a report in 2007 claimed that about 5,000 displaced families are residing in the makeshift camps in Ahmedabad and Sabarkantha regions of Gujarat. According to the report of the 'Centre for Social Justice'- an Ahmedabad based socio-legal Non-Governmental Organisation claimed that there were 3,964 Muslim families who got displaced due to the violence in 2002 and are living in 86 settlements established across the state. The report further claims that out of the total displaced only 30% have received assistance from the government. Some of the families in camps were threatened to vacate the land on which camps had been constructed, as the same was declared as agricultural land by the government. Most of the displaced Muslims families do not want to return to their native places because of the fear psychosis (Crisis State Research Centre, 2010).

On 25th of March 2017, a fight between Hindu and Muslim students resulted in displacement of almost 140 people; all belonging to Muslim community after 5000 people attacked Muslims residents and burnt their homes in Vadavali village in Patan district in Gujarat (Al Arabiya, 26 March 2017). Another 500 Muslims were displaced on the next day of the violence as the people from neighbouring villages burnt at least 80 to 100 houses (The Citizen, 4 April 2017).

(f) Displacement of Dalits

Though India claims that it is a secular state but in reality, it is a Hindu nation, where the minorities always suffer for one reason or the other. The tragedy of the nation is that its Hindu population is divided into four Varnas, where Brahmins are at top and Dalits or untouchables at the bottom of the hierarchy. This system of caste division has been responsible for the displacement of thousands of Dalits within their country. Though the government has made various legal and constitutional rights for these downtrodden people but at the ground level, these have failed to get results. The unfortunate for the Dalit IDPs is that there number is unknown as government has not been sincere with them and no steps have been taken for their protection (Global IDP, 2001).

Conclusion

Though India celebrated its 70th Independence Day, the real freedom is yet to be achieved. Armed conflict and communal or ethnic violence have continued to cause massive displacement in India. There are always cases of violence and conflict which force the weaker sections of the society to move away from their native places in order to save their lives. The problems and issues of internally displaced people in India are rarely highlighted. The country needs to amend its policies in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles for protecting internally displaced people. The consistency of the existing data on IDPs and lack of a central governing body for protecting them are problems that need to be addressed. How the Government of India deal with the issues of conflict and violence and subsequent displacements is a challenge for the nation?

References

- Albuja, S. et al. (2012). Global Overview 2011: People Internally Displaced by Conflict and Violence. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). Norwegian Refugee Council, Geneva.
- Badigar, S. (2012). A 'Normal' Anomaly: Displacement due to Communal Violence in Gujarat. *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. Xlvii(3), 42-47.
- Briefing. (2010, June 3). Steps Towards Peace: Putting Kashmiris First. *Crisis Group Asia* No.106, 1-14.
- Cohen, R. et al. (2006). *The State of the World's Refugees: Human Displacement in the New millennium*. Oxford University Press: New York: 153-175.
- Ferris, E. (2014). Ten Years After Humanitarian Reform: How Have IDPs Fared?, Project on Internal Displacement, *Brookings-LSE*. Washington, D.C.
- Global IDP. (2001). Profile of Internal Displacement: India. Norwegian Refugee Council. Project on Global IDP. Retrieved from <http://www.idpproject.org>

Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID). (2017). Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). *Norwegian Refugee Council*, Geneva.

Hassan, S. Survivors of Mass Communal Violence in Muzaffarnagar. *India Exclusion Report 2015*, 189.

Human Rights Watch. (2015). World Report 2015: India. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/worldreport/2015/country-chapters/india>.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2017 Report. Retrieved from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/country-profiles/Mid-Year-update-2017/IND-conflict.pdf>

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). (2010). *National and State Authorities Failing to Protect IDPs*. Retrieved from www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/india/2010/national-and-state-authorities-failing-to-protect-idps

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). (2015). *Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence*. Norwegian Refugee Council. Geneva.

Jamwal, A. B. (2004). Auditing the Mainstream Media: The Case of Jammu & Kashmir. Calcutta Research Group. Kolkata. Retrieved from <http://www.mcrs.ac.in/mediareport2.htm>

Lama, M. P. (2000). Internal Displacement in India: Causes, Protection and Dilemmas. *Forced Migration Review*, Vol. 8(5), 24-26.

Malhotra, C. (2007). Displaced People from Kashmir: Some Observations. *Indian Anthropological Association*, Vol. 37(2), 7-81.

Mandal, M. (2009). Internal Displacement in India: Status, Conditions & Prospects of Return. *Refugee Watch*, Vol. 33, 33- 47.

Phukan, M. D. (2013). Ethnicity, Conflict and Population Displacement in Northeast India. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (AJHSS)*, Volume 1(2), 91-101.

Sethi, A. S. (2015, October 08). Which states are India's communal tinderboxes?. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/760506/which-states-are-indias-communal-tinderboxes>

Shekhawat, S.(2006). Conflict and Displacement in Jammu and Kashmir: The Gender Dimension. *Jammu: Saksham Books International*: 108.

Sinha, P. (2017, April 3). Gujarat Prepares for Polls: Villagers Flee In Terror, Love Jihad Graffiti on Walls. *The Citizen*. Retrieved from <http://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/1/10322/Gujarat-Prepares-for-Polls-Villagers-Flee-In-Terror-Love-Jihad-Graffiti-on-Walls>

Student clashes leave two killed, 14 hurt in home state of India's Modi. (2017, March 26). *Al Arabiya*. Retrieved from <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2017/03/26/Hindu-Muslim-clashes-leave-two-killed-14-hurt-in-home-state-of-India-s-Modi-.html>

Talbot, I., & Singh, G.(2009). The Partition of India. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*.