

Women and Forced Migration

-A Compilation on IDP and Refugees

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Preface

Refugee Watch began its journey from 1998 onwards. From its inception the gender dimension of forced migration informed much of its understanding. Since *Refugee Watch* was one of the first periodicals on the problem of forced migration in South Asia to some extent it helped to shape the discourse on the issue. In this way the gender dimension of displacement became an intrinsic theme that was taken up in almost all issues of the periodical. Till date over twenty-six issues of the periodical have been published. To commemorate this landmark we have selected some articles on refugee and displaced women appearing in previous issues of *Refugee Watch*. The publication will highlight the often ignored simple fact that women and their dependents form the majority in most given situations of displacement. Yet in terms of rehabilitation and care women often take the back seat. There is a plethora of examples where women face severe abuse in times of displacement. Yet researches show that it is the woman who often acts as the linchpin of the family and community even in times of displacement and bring back some semblance of normalcy. This publication celebrates such special contributions that many women have made in times of displacement. It also brings forth the hope that research on the gender-dimension of displacement will continue. This is crucial because to understand the phenomenon of forced migration one has to understand its gender dimension, without which the understanding will remain flawed.

That modern states are built on gender difference is an accepted theoretical premise among most social scientists today. There are many social commentators such as Etienne Balibar who argue that the fissures in the “modern political community” emerge from the “practical and ideological sexism as a structure of interior exclusion of women generalized to the whole society,” which leads to the “universalization of sexual difference.” Women in such situation become both subjects of the state as well as its *other*. The nation building projects in South Asia has led to the creation of a homogenised identity of citizenship. State machineries seek to create what they perceive as a unified and national citizenry that accepts the central role of the ruling elite. This is done through privileging a certain type of citizenship, and such citizens are usually men, who belong to the majority community; and profess to accept monolithic cultural values that deny the space to others of difference. Such a denial has often led to the segregation of minorities, on the basis of caste, religion and gender from the collective we. In such a scenario one way of marginalising women from body politic is done by

targeting them and displacing them in times of state verses community conflict. As a displaced person a woman loses her individuality, subjectivity, citizenship and her ability to make political choice. Only a few scholars and activists have dealt at length on this problematic and there are hardly any South Asian monograph that has focussed on this issue. The recognition that forced displacement is a gendered phenomenon is a fairly recent understanding.

This collection highlights the range of women's experiences as of displacement appearing in different issues of *Refugee Watch* in form of articles, notes, reports and researches. These articles challenge the notion that refugee women are mere victims. These writings try to portray the different roles that women play to cope with displacement. Mario Gomez, a Sri Lankan social scientist, had commented that refugee women are first to address the question of income generation and many other coping mechanisms precisely because it is their responsibility to put food in the mouths of their family and fight for their survival. Yet rehabilitation and care is hardly ever built on a premise of gender sensitivity. *Refugee Watch* has raised its voice against the marginalization of voices of women refugees from policy decisions.

In comparison to women's experiences of refugee-hood women's experiences as internally displaced is even lesser known, particularly in the context of South Asia. This is because the states of South Asia refuse to acknowledge that the situation of IDPs poses a special problem. After all these IDPs retain their citizenship, and the fact that states have to acknowledge that as citizens the displaced women are severely deprived shows that these states are now unable to cater to needs of their own citizens. The IDPs are forced to live within a system that has displaced them in the first place. As IDPs women are doubly disadvantaged. They have to contend with a State, which has displaced them and as women they have to continue living within their own patriarchal systems that devalue their special roles in society. Again policies of relief, resettlement and rehabilitation do not acknowledge this; and state policies are termed as gender neutral when they are actually gender insensitive. In this age of globalisation the development paradigm of States has occasioned the displacement of thousands of women who are abused, beaten, trafficked and their dignity violated repeatedly in the name of development and prosperity. Yet the displaced women survive and try to live with zest. This understanding underpins much of what has been published in *Refugee Watch* and what is contained in this collection.

Paula Banerjee

The Internally Displaced

Internally Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka*

Joe William

Introduction

Throughout the years since 1983 in which military conflict between the Sri Lankan security forces and the Tamil militant groups has been the order of the day, we have witnessed a never-ending saga of a people forced into nomadic existence fleeing the areas of active conflict in search of a more secure and settled existence. Initial displacement of persons was a result of anti-Tamil campaigns in the southern parts of Sri Lanka in 1958, 1977, 1978 which forced many Tamils to leave their homes in the Sinhala dominated parts of the country and move to the north and in the plantation areas in the late 1970s. Many of these people from the central highlands of Sri Lanka settled in the Vavuniya and Kilinochchi Districts of the Northern Province. Muslim and Sinhalese people living in Tamil majority areas have also been forced to leave due to threats against them.

According to official figures, over 60,000 persons have lost their lives due to civil war. The number of displaced persons as on 31 December 1996 was reported to be 782,706 persons. Out of this number children under 5 years numbered over 75,000. The numbers displaced in Jaffna peninsula were 199,000, Vanni 429,000 and the East 56,000 persons. The other large concentrations of displaced persons are the Muslims totaling some 52,500 persons in Puttalam. Some persons have now spent more than eight years of their lives as displaced persons, living in extremely difficult, stressful and inhuman conditions. The question of *Internally Displaced Persons* (IDPs) in Sri Lanka is one of the main challenges for the humanitarian and human rights communities.

Categories of IDPs in Sri Lanka

The IDPs can at present be categorized under different headings to get a clearer understanding of the problem and the extent of resultant suffering, namely:

1. internally displaced persons living in government controlled areas in the North and the East;
2. internally displaced Tamils living in the North and East in territories held by the militants;
3. internally displaced Muslims from the North;

4. internally displaced persons in border areas between the Government and LTTE controlled areas;
5. returnees from India.

Internally Displaced Persons living in government controlled areas in the North and the East

Jaffna Peninsula

The North East war has escalated to unprecedented heights since April 1995. Although the government promised a quick and decisive victory over the LTTE, events have proven otherwise. The intensified military operation against the LTTE witnessed the government forces capturing the Jaffna town in December 1995 with the claim that their writ now ran over an area considered to be the heart of the separatist movement. It caused the most serious displacement of population from the Jaffna town and its environs-a huge and largely unacknowledged crisis for the northern Tamils.

Formerly the home of more than 8,50,000 persons, the current estimated population there is between 450,000 to 500,000 persons of whom nearly 200,000 persons are IDPs. The strength of security forces personnel in the peninsula is estimated to be between 38,000 to 40,000 persons which includes 330 women and 2,300 policemen. Visitors to the peninsula consider it to be an armed encampment with military fortifications with extensive military and police checkpoints. The Jaffna peninsula can be divided into three areas from a military standpoint, namely, security zones, cleared and uncleared areas. Civilian movement into the security zone is prohibited while travel between cleared and uncleared areas is permitted during the day subject to intensive security checks at checkpoints which are at times located a hundred meters from one another. A daily curfew is imposed between 2000 hrs to 0800 hrs the next day. People make their way back from 1700 hrs to ensure that they make it home before dark and through the several checkpoints. Other matters of serious concern not only for the IDPs but to the civilian population are, personal security, physical & psychological isolation from the rest of the country, lack of essential supplies and their high prices, lack of electric and its infrastructure. A demographic shift has taken place with the upper and middle classes abandoning the peninsula with no intention of returning. Most of the productive work force between the age group of 18-40 years have left the peninsula. There are periodic attacks by the LTTE cadres operating in the peninsula and the security measures implemented as a result seem to have deepened civilian resentment toward all parties involved in the conflict. However, there are genuine and very serious concerns about violence against women and extra-legal activities of the security forces,

particularly “disappearances” which are still fairly common. Travel in and out of Jaffna is restricted with the need for extensive clearance to arrange travel and severely limited air and ship capacity.

The East

The strategic and political importance of the East has meant large-scale miniaturization of the area which in 1990 saw the dislodging of the LTTE from towns and major trunk roads. The East has thus remained a shifting patchwork of “cleared” and “uncleared” areas where the general situation has been very unstable. Contrary to the belief that the LTTE was a weakened force after their loss of control of Jaffna and other areas in the North, they continue to be strong and effective in the East and control most of the territory north of Trincomalee to the South of Batticaloa. The area is so large that the armed forces are stretched to even protect the roads during the day. The LTTE no longer attempts to hold defensive positions. They are free to be an effective guerilla force again.

The other specific factor in the East is its ethnic mix. The Eastern province, particularly the Batticaloa continues to be extremely volatile, with tensions running high between the LTTE, Tamil civilians and the Muslim community. Civilians continue to suffer from bombing and shelling or are caught in crossfire in the event of direct confrontation.

The people in the East are subjected to frequent round-ups and security checks. The military are holed up in virtual prisons every couple of kilometers along the road to Batticaloa. These encampments are situated in the middle of the roads causing all traffic to be diverted around the camps. This offers an excellent opportunity for the military to harass and extort civilians who pass by: The military control the roads by day and remain in the prisons at night and the LTTE roams free in the countryside. There does not seem to be any incentive for the senior staff of the military to end the conflict. They have the money they want, the power and perks they need, they answer to no one and yet they have no civil responsibility and no accountability. They are better off in this situation than if they had ruled the country directly.

Vavuniya - The Gateway to the North

The capture of Jaffna and Kilinochchi and the link up to Mannar from Vavuniya, the town of Vavuniya as the gateway to the North, has become a hub of many activities. Civilians leaving LTTE-controlled areas of Mallaitivu and Kilinochchi wishing to travel to Jaffna or to other parts of the island have to transit through

Vavuniya. More people are leaving the LTTE-controlled areas and moving into “secured areas” with Vavuniya playing a key transit point. With the shrinking of areas under LTTE control, and possibly the inability of the militants to continue to ensure basic needs of food, medicines and adequate shelter, the first hurdle to move away from the LTTE-held territory is perhaps cleared more easily than it was possible in the past. Coming into Vavuniya the IDPs face the second phase of their ordeal to move from the theatre of conflict.

Civilian life in the Vavuniya district continues to be hampered by the on-going war. There has been a permanently displaced population of nearly 55,000 persons since 1990. In addition thousands of civilians who crossed over from militant-held areas to Vavuniya since military operations in 1995/96 have been ‘interned’ in transit camps. They live in these overcrowded camps on a daily dole of US \$ 0.88 cts per adult and US \$ 0.50 per child under 12. At present there are over 16,000 persons who are detained in Vavuniya, some of them for over three months. There are no restrictions placed on those who want to travel to Jaffna. They are transported free of cost overland to Trincomalee and from there by boat to Jaffna. Of the others, four categories of persons are permitted to leave the transit camps, they are: those seeking medical treatment which cannot be obtained in the Vavuniya Base Hospital; government servants returning to or from Jaffna; those holding documentary evidence for travel abroad for jobs, or a guarantee from an immediate member of family living in the South who can provide a valid reason acceptable to the authorities for the visit; and the undergraduates who wish to pursue further studies.

The persons who cannot meet the above criteria are not IDPs in the strict sense of the word. Those who crossed over to Vavuniya are not all destitutes but people with their own means of livelihood but everyone is made to suffer many indignities. They want freedom to move to the homes of their relatives in Vavuniya or to proceed to places like Colombo. Their fundamental freedom of movement is violated. As Sri Lankans, the only wrong they have done is to have been born Tamils.

Tight security measures adopted by the military has led to physical checks at several barrier points, frequent combing operations, and round-ups, arbitrary and unfair arrest, and disappearances of youth have brought into focus gross violations of human rights. Current regulations, which prevent free movement of civilians out of war-affected areas or war zones, are counter to international humanitarian law.

Internally Displaced Tamils living in the North and the East in territories held by the militants

In the Vanni and other contested areas in the North and East described by the Sri Lankan military as “uncleared areas” the Government maintains a skeleton administration and provides basic services. The LTTE has established a de facto parallel administration, which increasingly organizes and controls civil and economic life.

The civilian population in LTTE controlled areas have endured nearly seven years of economic blockade, briefly lifted during the peace talks in late 1994 and early 1995 but reimposed by the present government after the breakdown of talks on 19 April, 1995. The lack of regular and efficient transport facilities in these areas coupled with the restriction on fuel, medicine, building materials and other necessary amenities of life place a serious impediment to the displaced population. The economic embargo enacted by the government and the lacks of electricity have caused serious problems related to education and employment. Many skilled labourers like masons, carpenters, welders and painters have neither the raw material nor the demands for their labor.

Towns like Vavuniya and Batticaloa are heavily fortified with bunkers, barricades and sentry posts looking more like fortresses but the scenario 10 kilometers away into LTTE held territory is entirely different. In LTTE controlled areas, civilians move freely even late in the night. Farming goes on, despite the ban on fertilizers, with people making maximum use of daylight hours.

The recent capture of the land route from Medawachchiya and Vavuniya to Mannar, just prior to a what would have been a successful paddy harvest has not only meant financial loss to the farmers who cultivated their fields under very difficult circumstances but also displacement of an estimated 20,000 persons within the LTTE-controlled territory in the Vanni.

Internally Displaced Muslims from the North

The Muslims of the Northern Province have also suffered as a result of the conflict in the region. They were believed to have held a neutral position. The LTTE forced the Muslims living in the North to leave the area within forty-eight hours in October, 1990. Many of them continue to live in welfare centres in the adjoining districts of the North in Puttalam, Anuradhapura and Kurunegala even after over seven years.

Internally Displaced Persons from border villages

The rise of Tamil nationalism had its impact on the border areas. The vulnerability of the border areas was one of the reasons why early militancy was concentrated in these areas. Internal displacement affects the Sinhalese as well. Although small in numbers, the Sinhalese living within or in border villages in the East and Northwestern provinces claimed by the LTTE as being part of Tamil Eelam fled in fear when some of these villages were attacked and have been victims of the ethnic warfare as well. The LTTE massacred civilians including children in several border villages heightening tensions in the non-conflict areas. Compared to other internally displaced persons, they are in a better position because they are living in areas that have a regular system of transport and communication. Those who become displaced due to violence, carry with them the psychological wounds and scars which continue to affect their lives. Many families have faced the atrocities carried out by the militants which defy all norms of civilized human behavior.

Returnees from India

The situation in Sri Lanka illustrates the blurred distinction between refugees and the IDPs. The only difference is that the returnees managed to make their way to Tamil Nadu and the former did not have adequate resources to do so. Returnees and IDPs often return to the same village and face similar problems in starting a new life. UNHCR has, therefore, extended its mandate to enable it to assist some IDPs who, in fact, comprise the majority of beneficiaries under the micro project programme which targets the communities where returnees are resettling, rather than individuals themselves.

On the reverse, the trickle of refugees making the hazardous nightcrossing to India continues. These include some who were repatriated by the UNHCR on two previous occasions. The current numbers reaching India in the latest period of exodus has reached nearly 10,000 adding to the nearly 60,000 living in India as a result of previous refugee flows. No significant flow of refugees has been reported since the recent drowning of over 100 persons when the overcrowded trawler taking them to India capsized off the coast of Mannar.

Vulnerable Institutions and Groups

Basic services and institutions providing food security, water, medical assistance, employment and education have become progressively vulnerable and subject to collapse. Consequently the population of particularly the North-East has suffered widespread psychological debility, physical illness and war-related injuries.

Some specific vulnerable groups are:

Children

Children are for the most vulnerable, most powerless and most innocent victims of war. It is not surprising that fifty percent or more of the victims of conflict in Sri Lanka are children. Bombing and shelling can rarely identify civilians from combatants. Unrestrained attacks on communities provoke huge flights of survivors in search of sanctuary inside and outside the country, the majority of victims often being children. The manipulations of food and relief supplies have been a significant tactic of war, and Sri Lanka cannot, unfortunately be entirely absolved in this respect. Combined with a lack of clean water and adequate health care, this will take a terrible toll on children unless this issue is addressed without delay. There is insufficient capacity to cater to the educational needs of displaced children. Among the displaced, one comes across children, in particular, who for ten years of their lives - a lifetime for many of them - have not known a settled existence, a home, family, a village, a community. They feel no sense of belonging anywhere, to no community, no group.

The widespread recruitment of young people under 18 years of age as LTTE cadres for frontline duty appears to be common practice endorsed by the movement's leadership.

Women

Even though it is difficult to gather any information about the numbers of women among the displaced, because gender-specific data is not available on an island-wide basis there is no doubt among the IDPs that women remain more vulnerable than men. Internally displaced women face serious security risks. Many have suffered from sexual violence and psychological atrocities and have lost close family members. Many internally displaced women have become the sole supporters of their families because they have lost their husbands. High numbers of female-headed households exist in the north and east. Such families are economically and psychologically vulnerable even in normal times.

Less paddy to harvest, less fish to process, reduction in the already limited economic opportunities, and the deterioration of the social safety net continue to cause extreme hardship to women. The ways in which displacement affects women is multi-faceted. In the first instance, the experience of leaving their homes and villages, the familiar environment and the support structures creates a vacuum in their lives, which is hard to replace. In the second instance,

the experience of living in very crowded and cramped quarters with hundreds of strangers places them in an unfamiliar and very stressful new environment.

The ways in which women have adapted to their new circumstances have had both their disturbing and exciting aspects; in some instances, the breakdown of family structures has had a disastrous impact on the lives of women, while in others, women have drawn on their latent resources to transform the most stressful of circumstances into something from which they can derive a feeling of dignity for themselves. In welfare centres, one of the ways in which women have attempted to preserve their sense of themselves and of 'home', which is the focal point of their existence as they know it and define it, is to mark off their space within the camp in a clearly recognizable way; inside every welfare center you visit, you find hundreds of small enclosures, spaces of 10 feet by 6 feet, marked off with bricks,- with cardboard boxes, with lengths of cloth, plastic and even jute.

One of the consequences of extended life in welfare centres in terms of disastrous impact on women in particular has been the breakdown of traditional and accepted forms and patterns of human and familial relations. The vacuum created by the absence of such patterns and norms has led to situations of conflict and tension affecting entire camp population.

Men without access to regular employment

Two areas of major male-dominated economic activities, which have suffered as a result of the armed conflict, are farming and fishing. Restrictions placed on fertilizer inputs into LTTE-held areas, inaccessibility to farming lands in government-controlled areas have meant that many males have lost their capacity to be gainfully employed. The ban on fishing in the Northeast coast, has left thousands of fishermen and their families virtually destitute. A few who ventured to sail beyond the permitted distance from the coast have often paid for it dearly with their lives. Male persons hitherto the income-earner if not the sole breadwinner in the family are often denied access to employment and income. This leads to outbursts or irrational and violent behaviour and alcoholism, and a general dehumanization.

Men are further victimized because they are the main targets of arrest and harassment by the security forces both inside and outside the camp. This "disemboweling" of men in the context of displacement is a factor that very clearly leads to a deep sense of frustration and tension within them and it is then played out in various manifestations of aggression and violence, primarily towards the women and children in their families.

The old and the infirm

In the northern coastal belt, as well as in the small islands in the North, and during the military take-over of the Jaffna peninsula a fair section of people, particularly the handicapped, the sick and the elderly stayed behind in areas occupied by the armed forces. They stayed back because they could not join the others due to their inability or they were totally unprepared for such a situation. These people have remained cut off from their immediate family members. Even though they get assistance from the government in the cleared areas their day-to-day needs are often looked after by church related organizations. The task of looking after this group of persons under the abysmal living conditions in LTTE-held areas is more difficult as they have to be moved from place to place along with the fleeing civilians.

The sick

Internally displaced persons face a number of medical problems during the process of displacement and in camps also where health care is limited. One serious consequence of internal displacement is exhaustion and illness. Those among the displaced population most in need of urgent or regular medical care are frequently denied such assistance. Ironically, only the sick and displaced persons falling under the control of a party to the conflict become entitled to medical care.

There appears to be a general unwillingness to permit adequate provision for Northeastern medical institutions to deal with injury, disease and sickness in accordance with internationally accepted standards of competence and compassion. This issue should be addressed more from a medical angle than from a security one.

Recommendations

The problems facing the IDPs in Sri Lanka are thus complex and numerous. Some specific interventions on behalf of the IDPs should focus on the following issues:

- the violation of the rights of internally displaced persons where their right to adequate shelter, food security and medical provision are under continual threat in Sri Lanka due to military pressures;

- the need to sustain dignified life, to strengthen the efforts of local institutions to relieve suffering & build self-reliance, and to assure that the first step is taken toward reconstruction, rehabilitation & development.
- to widen the humanitarian space and seek humanitarian access to reach those in need on all sides of the conflict; and
- to encourage human rights groups to become more active in the defence of the IDPs, to disseminate knowledge of basic human rights norms in order to empower the displaced persons to understand their rights and help them articulate their concerns when these are violated.

War and its Impact on Women in Sri Lanka*

Kate de Rivero

Oppressive power relations, sexual assault, attack and disappearance of family members, and the general insecurity on the streets, lead to an overall loss of freedom for women. Women in refugee camps can be particularly exposed to violence, due to the lack of space and security, and their freedom is often, confined: “In Refugee Camps due to restricted area of movement it is difficult to find a place to change clothes, or to have a space to sleep. So their freedom is very restricted in the camps.” Women from all three communities, Singhalese, Tamil and Muslim have been affected and have their different stories to tell.

In Muslim displaced communities, for instance, the loss of freedom of women has come hand in hand with the adoption of more conservative cultural practices as a way of reasserting a religious and ethnic identity. Many women have found that since they have been displaced and living in the camps, there are more cultural restrictions on their clothing and their freedom of movement compared to when they lived in the North of the country.

One of the main obstacles for women to work for peace is this lack of freedom: said one, “So now she has walked out of the house, on to the road for peace, but what are the obstacles? First of all lack of self-confidence in her talents. Even the media portrays her as a weak human being - so as a result she comes to the conclusion that she lacks talents. We tend to think that politics is beyond them. As a result of the war they have no security outside the homes - and the war situation has also contributed to her inability to work for peace lack of education means there is no awareness for achieving peace. The language problem is an obstacle preventing her to go to higher planes. Only a few women are in decision-making bodies. Who decides whether we continue with the war or have peace talks? They are mostly men - responding to a framework and structure done by men for men. In religious institutions the women do not have proper representatives. So in the public plane they have fears and misgivings and other problems that lead to diffidence. Also sexual harassment makes it difficult to raise their voices. When you look at all these factors - we are able to see our own ideas. We can see the direct link between these problems and the prospect of peace in this country. One of the sentences written about peace was that peace means equal rights for women -

this is because they have always experienced within the house that there is no peace because there is no equality.” These and other findings were made when thirty nine women from all regions of Sri Lanka, representative of the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities came to discuss their experiences and different points of view on the 17 year-war in the country. The meeting was organised and facilitated by the National Peace Council, as part of the World Bank sponsored Needs Assessment Study on Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation.

Peace means different things to different people. What did it mean for these women? “Peace means a democratic environment in which feelings and rights will be respected”, was the definition of peace, made by the thirty-nine women. Most of the women had some direct experience with war, either currently in the North East or in the South during the JVP uprising. Many expressed that it was the first time they had the chance to discuss their experiences and points of view related to the war with women from other communities.

All women at the meeting agreed that women could build peace and even that women were reconciliatory by nature: ‘We are the only possible peace emissaries because we have the spiritual power - even the women can push the men forward and give them strength... as women are responsible for the maintenance of the family if we share our experience with other people we hope it will bring peace...’ Some said that they were prepared to be rejected by their families in the name of peace, because if the war continued then their families could be killed and the loss would be definite. In this sense advocating for peace was seen as an extension of their role to protect and nurture the family.

*Who decides whether we continue with the war or have peace talks?
They are mostly men - responding to a framework and structure done by men for men.*

This very personal motivation to struggle for peace was manifested in the definition of peace created which included the ‘respect of feelings’. In this sense peace is not only to protect the family, but also to be respected as women and as individuals. One of the facilitators tore up a piece of paper. Some women cried out as they thought it was the paper with their sentence on peace, which had been destroyed. Coincidentally it was the male facilitator who tore up the paper. Once it was clear that their sentence had not been destroyed the women explained their reaction: “I thought there was an

individual here totally against peace... if somebody wants to destroy the fruit of your efforts you must struggle against them resist...You can also imagine how painful it is for you if somebody murders a child..."

This incident clearly illustrates the importance and very personal aspect of peace for the participants. The women repeatedly expressed that their rights, role and identity were primarily defined by men - ranging from the family (directly through fathers and husbands), to the State (through legislation, the justice system and political representation) and even culture, tradition and religion. They explained that women are considered mentally, physically and emotionally 'soft', they have little power, are oppressed and thus easily abused. Their role (as defined by men in their family and the culture) is to have children, look after the family, and to stay in the house. Their identity is defined in relation to the men in their family: "you are the wife of someone or the daughter of someone - we do not have an identity, we are not taken as a full person."

Any power relation at work, in the home, or anywhere else, can be a potential situation of abuse for women, as they have little power to protest or seek justice, particularly due to the social stigma attached at being abused or raped. Many of the ways the war affects women are not new. For example, sexual harassment or physical abuses are not new to women: "sexual harassment is always present in society", but these dangers are intensified during the war and may be used as a weapon against women. Women are more likely to find themselves in a situation where abuse can take place because the war imposes a level of social control which can expose women rather than protect them (such as the many checkpoints women have to go through or the conditions in the refugee camps).

In war women are also more likely to encounter situations where someone wants to exercise power over them due to the tension and level of violence in the environment. They particularly made mention of soldiers who respond to a 'herd instinct' and take chance of 'any opportunity' to abuse women. In war it is also easier to justify such abuse, simply as one of those "inevitable" consequences of war, as the soldiers 'are in natural need of sexual activity.' If physical and mental abuse of women exists even in a society without war, the disappearance and killing of family members is a direct consequence of war. As a woman's role has been primarily defined to take care and 'nurture' the family and home, then the attack and disappearance of family members directly cripple her role and her identity as wife and mother:

“women lose their children, women become widows... we have never gained anything by the war as mothers and wives”.

Most of the war related experiences were related to the loss of a family member. In comparison to men, women are mostly the survivors - men the direct victims or the disappeared. As survivors they have to find ways of coping with the pain and of restructuring their family unit and lives. One woman described how she was in a new town when her husband was taken away. Even though she was alone she went to the streets and started investigating what had happened to her husband in order to find him again. After nine months her husband was finally set free, even though he was so damaged by the torture that he was unable to work. However, the primary concern of the woman was to find her husband, even though it meant that she had to do things she had never done before, (like deal with the army, police forces, write to MPs and even the president, etc.) which though were carried out for very personal reasons also has some implications concerning a woman's participation in the public sphere.

The impact of war on women is on the one hand a very personal and painful experience, (the death/disappearance of a loved one, sexual assault, daily harassment at checkpoints, etc.) and on the other hand has a long term social impact whereby the conditions and prolonged suffering force women to take steps and responsibilities that traditionally did not form part of her 'role'. One of these steps is the public role of women (women spending more time outside the home, women organising themselves, women protesting, etc.) Other changes, which were mentioned, include the increased participation of women in the armed forces as well as the LTTE cadres.

This places great pressure on women as many of these new steps are socially unacceptable, and women run the risk of being stigmatised and marginalised by the family and community: “People are totally against women being involved in activities like the search for peace... I don't think so many people will like us coming forward... it is difficult to go on the roads because of the way society looks at us... we are unable to go out of the house...there is a social stigma against widows.” Women's role and responsibilities can also change from being the 'nurturer' to also being the breadwinner - or from being inside the house, to outside the house. One way or another women begin to participate in the 'public sphere' - be it as the breadwinner of the family, as a mother searching for her son, or even as a combatant.

Shattered Lives, Shattered Homes*

Harteleigh Richard

Artillery damage

The civilian populations of both India and Pakistan are suffering from the conflict in Kashmir. One of the primary weapons in this conflict is artillery fire. Artillery shells aimed at villages cannot discriminate between civilian and military targets. Many of the border villages are the only known and reachable targets for both sides. Whether intending to or not both sides are destroying civilian property and killing noncombatants. Artillery shelling has moved tens of thousands of civilians off their lands and out of their homes. They have left behind their livestock and standing crops in the fields, their main means of livelihood.

History

This is not the first heavy shelling that has occurred in the region. Kargil and Dras have been subjected to heavy artillery fire for two and half years now. This time too at first, people took it as normal until it did not cease and damaged every building in Dras¹ The firing in some villages is far worse than it was even in 1971 war. Mr. Abdul Gafoor of Dras said, "For me, 1971 was the worst experience but 1999 has crossed all the limits."²

Economy

The economy of people of the Kashmir and Jammu region has been badly affected by the shelling. What little tourism, which used to reach Kargil, has been made impossible. ³ Many tourist packages have been cancelled, even to places like Srinagar that is 200 km from Kargil. Hotels are reporting cancellations. Journalists flocking to the area are not making up the difference. Citizens are angry at the Indian government's decision to close Srinagar airport and disrupt the flow of tourists to the valley. According to citizens in Srinagar "this is what really hurts the average Kashmiri." Beyond tourism, many businesses have been destroyed or had to be shut down. In some areas, some businesses have been closed for two years. One man had started a Bakery to pay for his son's education but two years ago he was forced to close down. For two years there has been no Bakery and no schools.

Future problems

Civilians forcibly displaced from their lands face a very bleak future. The incessant firing keeps small farmers from cultivating their lands causing future food shortages and suffering. Farmers have been forced to leave behind their livestock and in some cases it was reported missing by CNN. Some farmers set free the animals they were forced to leave behind, as they believe it is cruel to lock up an animal and not take care of it. The men are able in some cases to go back to their land to tend to the crops and livestock in the pauses between shelling. Meanwhile, their families stay with the local residents.

Many people of the hill region lead seasonal lives. During the summer months they sow and harvest their fields, tend to their cattle, gather firewood and store food for the winter. This is the second coldest place in the world where winter lasts until May. 35 families have moved from villages in the hills to Gagan geer where they stay without drinking water, sewage facilities, and rations. If these people do not return within a month to prepare for the winter then they will not be able to return until May 2000.⁵

Food shortages will also occur for the people of the Ladakh region. The one lane highway into the region is being used to move in military supplies and even those are under heavy fire. The majority of drivers are Sikh people who are not as experienced as Army drivers in moving under heavy fire. The Srinagar-Leh highway is only open a few months a year during which time the people of the Ladakh region have to receive all their supplies.⁶ The Indian Army strictly controls the number of vehicles that can travel on the highway. All these factors will contribute to severe shortages of supplies and hardship for the civilian population.

Anti-refugee sentiments

Over 40,000 people of Kargil, Dras, and Batalik have migrated. The plight of the migrants is made worse because of the lack of essential supplies. Some relief is probably available in Srinagar for the migrants but they have not been able to make their way because of heavy firing on the highway. Villagers who have stayed behind in Leh have had to face anti-refugee sentiments of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA). The LBA wants to guard the ethno-religious particularity of Leh and has made its feelings clear to the Deputy Commissioner. The Minister of State for Ladakh Affairs, Mr. Koushak Togdan Rimpooche, echoed equally negative sentiments against the Muslim refugees.⁷

Trauma

Apart from the clear loss of property, there is the trauma suffered by civilians caught up in a warlike situation. The Kashmir people have an increasing death rate and a decreasing birth rate. The birth rate has recently dropped because the shelling causes trauma resulting in premature births. In the case of Mohammed Sahgir's family his wife gave birth prematurely under conditions of heavy firing. Still weak from giving birth she and her husband had to flee at night along a mountain path. The uncertainty and stress experienced by the families take a very heavy toll, particularly on the children. They are unable to sleep at night. Often they have no shelter from the cold winds and in some cases the blazing sun.

Money and aid for families of soldiers not civilians

Despite the hardships faced by civilians in terms of food shortages and loss of property, livestock and lives, little attention is paid to helping the civilian population. A number of reports in the media of both countries discuss the increasing number of displaced people and civilians killed. But when it comes to giving aid, the focus is on the fighting soldier, not the civilians who have been affected. The Indian papers publicise the setting up of funds in aid of soldiers as for example "The Kargil Fund" by The Telegraph, to help the families of soldiers who have died. There is a similar fund set up by the telecom company AirTel to contribute to the "Army Central Welfare Fund." While these are all commendable initiatives, there is no mention of need for humanitarian relief for the families of civilians who have died in the conflict or money to help the thousands of refugees displaced by the Kargil war.

The Government is not providing aid

Reports are not reassuring about the government will or capacity to respond to the scale of the humanitarian disaster produced by the Kargil conflict. Who is to compensate for the loss of civilian lives and property and provide food and shelter for the refugees? One refugee feels "There is little or no compensation for the losses we have suffered as a result of the shelling," said Mohammed Sadiq. "The government has said it will compensate us 20,000 rupees (\$400) if someone is killed. That's what we pay for a cow."

The Indian papers report that local villagers are providing shelter and succour to the refugees. The Indian *Telegraph* reported that villages like Mingee, Trespone, Churamil, Sankoo, Pannikhar and Tresgam have become refugee camps. The state government had promised the civilians who fled to Mingee, tents and food, but nothing has arrived.¹⁰ The refugees from the Chhamb sector also are being

taken care of by the neighboring villages. No one is advising the people displaced from the shelling where they should go to find a safe haven. At the time of writing, there are no government run refugee camps for the displaced of this war in Jammu. Apparently, the Jammu government does not want to set up camps. "It would send the wrong signals"¹¹ according to Jammu district administration. Mr. Tara Chand echoed the feelings of many refugees when he said that the Government has made no arrangements for food, tents, and water for the 1,50,000 villagers displaced by the conflict. He based his statement on his visits to many of the villages where the refugees are staying.¹² Several political representatives have visited the border villages to assess the situation of the migrant people. The displaced people expressed great dissatisfaction with the district administration. Mr. Sat Pal Sharma made an appeal to the state government to move the people to safer areas and to provide them with medical assistance, shelter and other basic commodities. Mr. Sharma observed that the migrant peoples had not been provided medical facilities, drinking water or other necessities.¹³

Token aid from the Government

In Khargam village arson wiped out the homes and property of more than 31 families and left 23 cattle dead. The Housing and Urban Development Minister Ansari has said that the government will give Rs 50,000 to sufferers including their free ration and Rs1000 in cash relief. The government will also help in rehabilitation by providing free books, uniforms and scholarships for education.¹⁴ The Deputy Commissioner of Kargil said that they are providing free food rations.¹⁵ Rs 500,000 has been promised to the villages of Dras, Dha, Bema, Hanu, Batalik, and Turtuk. Already the village of Turtuk has received Rs 2,80,000 with Rs 200 for each migrant and a maximum of Rs 1200 for each family. 115 Speaking for the state government Mr. Umar Abdullah promised said that the state Government would aid the refugees displaced by the conflict.¹⁷ He announced the forming of a committee to look after the people in the border areas.¹⁸

Army occupation of villages

The army has converted some villages 'into temporary camps to store arms, weaponry, troops and ammunition.¹⁹ This makes these villages targets for the Pakistan army. In Zebenmisi's case her village of Pandrass was asked to give a few rooms to keep the weapons out of the rain. Three families moved out of their homes and the school was also given. That was not enough because soon more soldiers came and so did the shelling. Eventually the villagers were asked to leave for their own safety.²⁰

Huriyat activities

Huriyat supporters held a march with 400 people to deliver a memo to the UN Secretary General and the leaders of the G-8. Their message was to let the Kashmir people decide their fate for themselves.²¹ The Huriyat Conference was criticized by a former MP “for their statement that the migration had taken place due to shelling by the [Indian] army.”²² The Huriyat also claims that the Indian Forces and Special Task Force personnel are arresting young men, beating them, and molesting women. Morning and evening praying have also been restricted according to the Huriyat. The Huriyat claims that this occurred in Gandepora and Bandipora.

Forced labour

Women have been forced to cross the border to bring supplies to the infiltrators. These women work as porters with men to bring ammunition, weapons and other essential commodities to infiltrators camped on the icy heights of the Dras region. Indian security forces found the women after they had crossed into Indian Territory during an artillery attack. The women said their lives were threatened if they refused to carry the supplies. The Huriyat have reported that “surrendered militants” of Shopian, Balapora, Shadimarg, and Malangpora are forced to go to the army camps. They are asked to take supplies to the forces fighting in Kargil.²³

Profile of displaced peoples on the Indian side of LOC

4000 residents left the northern Kashmiri district of Akhnoor fleeing Pakistani mortar and artillery. 13 June 1999 Toll Mounts as Kashmir battle intensifies. *The Indian Express* 260 families from the Palanwala area, of Akhnoor sub-sector following intense Pakistan shelling. 13 June 1999 Military exercise triggers panic in Jammu. *The Hindu*. People migrated from Gagriyal, Hamipur, Sighra, Bhudwar, Garad, pargwal and Samithan villages of Palanwala to Narian area increasing the number of migrant families to 1,151. The state government is providing shelter in schools in Narian, Kaleeth, Chak Mallei and Salannuli areas and giving free rations and other items said Sub-division Police Officer. 13 June 1999 Military exercise triggers panic in Jammu. *The Hindu*.

Profiles of displaced peoples on the Pakistan side of the LOC

The villages of upper and lower Neelum Valley are being fired upon and vehicular traffic is impossible. The villages of Chaprar, Bajwat, Sucheetgarh,

Zafarwal and Suragpur and Shakargarh sectors of Sialkot have been shelled. 18 June 1999. Two women killed in Indian firing. *The Dawn*.

India ordered 90 villages on the other side of the LoC to evacuate. Families departed 300 villages when the announcement came over the mosque loud speakers. Similar evacuations took place in 24 border villages in the districts of Bahawalnagar and Rahimyar Khan that borders Rajasthan. Many evacuees are staying in state run schools where there are food and drinking water shortages.⁸ The refugees are also being supplied with food from the villagers. Villagers Shifting From Areas Near Border. 15 June 1999 *Dawn*

Azad Kashmir has received shelling that killed civilians and destroyed home in the districts of Bagh, Athmuqam sector of Neelum Valley, Leepa Valley in SE Muzaffarabad, Bhimbher, and in Abbaspur and Hajira sectors. 52 families moved from Leepa valley, 36 families from the Battal and Sehr village and 16 families from Tatta Pani. 28 June 1999 Three killed in Indian firing.

Notes

- 1 Kargil, Dras turn into ghost town. *The Hindu*. 5 June 1999.
- 2 Caught in the crossfire. *The Hindu*. 27 June 1999.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 J-K Seeks Central Aid Over Refugees. *The Indian Express*. 10 June 1999.
- 5 Shells of anger rain at Kargil refugee camp. *Monitor*. 19 June 1999.
- 6 A highway that's the lifeline for soldiers in Kargil. *The Times of India*. 22 June 1999.
- 7 Caught in the crossfire. *The Hindu*. 27 June 1999.
- 8 Kashmiris falling victims to 'post-traumatic syndrome.' *The Hindu*. 7 June 1999.
- 9 Villagers flee fighting along Kashmir border. *Dawn* 9 June 1999.
- 10 Beneath the bloom, ravages of war. *The Telegraph*. 7 June 1999.
- 11 Chhamb villagers stay glued to radios. *The Indian Express*. 15 June 1999.
- 12 Mr. Tara Chand flays Govt for ignoring migrants. *Daily Excelsior*. 19 June 1999.
- 13 Various Political Leaders visit border villages to assess situation. *Daily Excelsior*. 20 June 1999.
- 14 Rehabilitation plan for Khargam villagers. *The Kashmir Times*. - 19 June 1999.
- 15 Kargil, Dras turn into ghost town. *The Hindu* 5 June 1999.
- 16 Rs 2.80 lakh relief for migrant families of Turtuk already. *Daily Excelsior*. 20 June 1999.
- 17 J&K Govt. to Help Migrants. *The Hindu*. 15 June 1999..
- 18 Caught in the crossfire. *The Hindu*. 27 June 1999.
- 19 Panic... and patriotism. *The Hindu*. 27 June 1999.
- 20 Shells of anger rain at Kargil refugee camp. *The Monitor*. 19 June 1999.
- 21 Hurriyat. *Kashmir Times*. 19 June 1999
- 22 J-K Seeks Central Aid Over Refugees. *The Indian Express*. 10 June 1999.
- 23 Hurriyat condemns excesses. *The Monitor*. 15 June 1999.

Kargil - Life in the Times of War*

Soma Ghosal

Dhan Bahadur and Lakhiram Tutu play cricket in a grimy yard surrounded by drums of tar and logs of wood. They are both labourers employed by the army. These people belong to the bunch of 'outsiders' who risk their lives for their wages. The urge for survival makes these Nepali porters scale icy heights amidst heavy shelling to bring back a paltry sum for the heavy loads that they carry. War has brought more work for these porters albeit at the cost of losing their lives. As Ashok Lama, a porter with the Indian army admits, "Every evening, I think that perhaps I will not return from the next trip and now I have learned to live with this fear. I feel that I have overcome death." The story is the same for three other outsiders who have braved the shelling for the sake of survival. Balwinder Singh alias Billu, runs the Dogra Dhaba and has stayed on to earn the living for his family. Mehsoz, who hails from Bijnore district of Uttar Pradesh, has a hair-cutting saloon in the Kargil market. He too has stayed on as the war means a booming business for him. A vegetable vendor and a chicken seller, both hailing from the Kashmir valley have also stayed on. As Abdul Rashid Bhat, who has been selling vegetables and fruits in the area for the past three years, puts it that though back home they were forced to down their shutters due to militancy, here they could not do the same. "If it is destined that we die here, let it be like that, but we have decided to carry on." But for most of the locals it is the beginning of an end.

Trouble in Kargil

Once known for polo, archery and a variety of folk dances, Kargil is a small district in the lap of rocky mountains situated in the northeast of the Kashmir Valley, 205 km from Srinagar, Kargil district was carved out in July 1979 after the district of Ladakh was bifurcated. The district, spread over 14,036 km, is generally devoid of any natural vegetation and has barren and rocky mountains all around. The population of the district is seven persons per square km as against the average of 59 persons per square km in the state. Kargil has two tehsils- Kargil and Zaskar- with seven blocks. They are Drass, Kargil, Sankoo, Tai-Suru, Zaskar, Shargol and Shaknar Chiktan. Drass, Kargil and Shaknar Chiktan are on the border, making them even more vulnerable. Kargilis are said to be the descendants of Mongol, Dard and Mon races, and had long remained under the cultural and religious influence of Tibet. A majority of the population of this 'Purik' area had been Buddhists before Islam came in the 14th century. Now the majority of Kargilis are orthodox Shia Muslims. Kargil, in fact, is the

only Muslim-dominated district of Jammu and Kashmir, which has not been still affected by militancy. There are six ethnic groups living in Kargil- Balti, Ladakhi, Purki, Zanskari and Dard Shin around 99 percent of the district's population is scheduled tribe. Soon after the partition of the country in 1947, Pakistan had occupied the entire Skardu, Kargil and Drass, right up to Zojila. However, the Indian troops had pushed them back in November 1948 and taken over Drass and Kargil. Kargil has a diverse tribal culture and its tribal dances are distinct.

After the border war erupted in Kargil, the residents were shifted to Sankoo, Mingi and Silmos areas. Over 450 people have been sheltered in government camps in the Gagangir village near Sonmarg. Relief could have been quicker if the Srinagar-Leh highway was open, but heavy shelling had rendered that impossible. For a number of migrants taking refuge in the Leh district, a hostile Ladakh Buddhist Association demanding a separate Leh purely on the basis of religion, posed another hurdle to immediate relief. The minister of state for Ladakh Affairs in the Farooq Abdullah government has also echoed the anti-Muslim sentiments against the refugees. The indiscriminate shelling in the last two and half years has devastated life in the sector. The recent fighting has brought the region's day-to-day life to a halt. Shops have been closed, district administration offices shifted out, educational institutions moved to makeshift premises and the tourism industry badly hurt.

The trouble in Kargil has also affected the other border regions. Heavy exodus has been reported from Kupwara, Uri, Gurez in Kashmir and R.S. Pura, Akhnoor, Poonch and Rajouri in the Jammu region. The hamlets along the LOC in Pallaswala have also seen a steady flow of migrants. The number of migrants from the area has reached around 1,151. There has been heavy migration from about 30 villages in the Chhamb sector. Migration has been steady along the border villages in Punjab. About 80 to 90 per cent villagers have been reported to migrate from 166 villages along the border in Gurdaspur, Batala, Amritsar, Majitha and Tarn Taran districts. A number of small villages along the border with Pakistan live on the edge of constant fear and untold hardship. Indiscriminate heavy firing from across the border has forced the farmers to leave nearly 500 acres of paddy uncultivated this year. Chamalia's sarpanch, Bahadur Singh says that though they had a good rabi crop this year, only a few could harvest the wheat. The beginning of the Kargil episode and intensified shooting from across the border forced them to leave their harvested crops in the fields. They also allege the government apathy as they are not given adequate compensation or rations as per their due the story is much the same for the hapless civilians across the border. The only point of difference is the active role played by the Pakistan government in exhorting the people to face the enemy with determination. About 60,000 civilians have been displaced since hostilities broke out according to a Dawn report. Wagah, Bhasin, Nathwala and Sehjpal are some of the border villages that have seen a steady exodus.

Added to this is the trauma of migration, the problem of acclimatization to an entirely different milieu, overcrowding, poor housing facilities, loss of privacy and malnutrition. With vacant looks in their eyes, the bloom on their faces marred by dust, these 'refugees' hope for an early end to the war when they can return back home to put together the shattered pieces of their lives.

Relief activities

Crisis often brings out the best and the worst in people. In the case of the Kargil conflict it is perhaps a display of the finer aspects of humanity. The local people had accommodated their displaced brethren who could not be put in tents due to adverse climatic conditions. As Mr. Akhoon put it, the cooperation of the people with whom the migrants are staying is something unprecedented. "We have tried to accommodate as many as possible in our homes," said an elder at Mingi. "But it has been such a sudden flood. We are finding it difficult to cope." The administration too has been grappling with the sudden crisis. Mr. Akhoon has already moved Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross to send their representatives to Kargil. The sudden flow of population has put a severe pressure on the supplies. The Food and Supplies Minister, Mr. Ajay Kumar Sadhotra, visited Kargil amid heavy shelling and took along with him a few truckloads of rations.

A long wait

Mingi is crowded with people, most of them migrants, with their trunks and hold-alls strewn on the street. The migrants are mostly the elderly and children, driven from the comfort of their hearth. Over 450 people have taken refuge in Gagangir village near Sonmarg. Some have put up with their friends and relatives in Srinagar and other places. As the migrants sit huddled in their camps the only thought that haunts them is their desire to go home. The ongoing conflict, worsened by a renewed spate of militancy in the region has left them distraught. Despite efforts on the peace front with India agreeing to a safe passage to the infiltrators, people are still weary of returning home. Schools, hospitals and businesses are still shut in many hamlets in the war zone. As Muhammad Hussain, a farmer says, he was unable to cultivate anything this season. "God knows how we will live this year," he says. Haji Muhammad Hussein, who owns an apricot orchard near Kargil feels that the governments of the two countries should reach an agreement not to target civilians, given the frequency of shelling from both sides of the border.

Added to this is the trauma of migration, the problem of acclimatisation to an entirely different milieu, over-crowding, poor housing facilities, loss of privacy and malnutrition. With vacant looks in their eyes, the bloom on their faces marred by dust, these 'refugees' hope for an early end to the war when they can return back home to put together the shattered pieces of their lives.

The Tsunami Situation in Tamilnadu*

Bimala Chandrasekar

The Tsunami that struck the coastal districts of Tamilnadu on the 26th of December 2004 has devastated the coastal communities by killing thousands, destroying houses, boats, fishing gear, agricultural lands, salt pans and wiping out millions of livelihoods. It is estimated that a total of 8,90,885 persons have been affected in these 13 districts. The death toll is 7,960 and many thousands are still in the missing list. The women and children constitute three fourth of the total dead. The consequence has rendered a large number of families homeless, has left many as widows and widowers, children as orphans and physically and emotionally shattered people. Although the fishing community was the worst hit, the livelihoods of other coastal communities are also equally affected by this disaster.

Rescue and Relief

- Immediately after the disaster the relief operations were in full swing. There was overwhelming response from people within and outside the State. There was unprecedented NGO, Corporate, Government and Donor Coordination in providing Relief.
- The tough task was to remove dead bodies, transfer survivors to the temporary camps, and provide first aid, food and clothing. The T.N. Government moved fast by deputing its Senior IAS officers to the areas to take charge of the rescue and relief operation.
- Some lessons learnt from the Past Disasters were applied to address this great human tragedy, particularly with reference to NGOs collective called Coordination committees.

Overall Issues in Relief

- Uneven Distribution of Relief. There has been a lot of report on the discriminatory nature of access to relief in the affected areas. (caste, class and religion.)
- Narrow Definition of 'Affected Communities' – Initially the prime focus was on the Fishing community and the lost livelihood of non-fishing community was not considered. However later there has been some modification in this.
- 'The Desire to help' overtaking 'Desire for help' in many areas, as a result of this a dependency on relief climate has been created.

- While addressing the basic needs of people in affected areas the insensitiveness to local culture and situation has been reflected. Example: improper dress like jeans and only sarees without undergarments, vegetarian food supply etc.
- Impact of VIP tourism and flooding of NGOs has an adverse effect.

Magnitude of the Disaster

It is unbelievable and scary to listen to those who witnessed swelling of the sea that swallowed the fishing community who were on the sea shore in search of livelihoods, throwing their fishing boats over their settlement; killing the children who were playing on the beach, and swallowing the senior citizens who went on a morning walk, and so on so forth. Many of those affected report that their past has been washed away and the future look very uncertain.

Whatever assessments are given with regard to damage or the death toll, they are only estimates and actual loss is immeasurable as the information regarding causalities keep changing, information on the extent of physical damage is still unreliable, and the amounts of funds committed by the NGOs and donor agencies for relief and reconstruction have not been clearly established yet.

Disaster Management Operations in Tamil Nadu

Although the shock has began to fade, especially through explaining, day in day out, to the scores of NGOs, government officials and others since the day of the disaster, the horror still remains. Not many children are to be noticed in these fishermen settlements. Many are still in the relief camps expecting the government to come out with a rehabilitation package. The NGOs, donor organizations and some corporate houses are busy planning the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. By January 2, most families in Tamil Nadu had got the government package of a dhoti, saree, two bed sheets, 60 kg rice, 3 litres kerosene, Rs.2000 for purchase of provisions and utensils; and Rs.2000 for putting up a hut as a temporary measure. Orphanages have been opened.

Coordination Action

Hundreds of NGOs have landed in the affected districts collecting data and many of them providing relief materials too. The challenge does not seem to be in mobilising resources to carry out the relief and rehabilitation work rather it is only the coordination that is very much required. NGO Coordination Unit is functioning at the district level in the Collectorate campus at Nagapattinam. It

mainly serves as a place for information exchange on matters pertaining to works undertaken by different NGOs. It was indicated that there are about 467 NGOs working in the area alone. The relief aid pledged and poured in look more than sufficient. But one thing that is definitely wanting is proper coordination and non-duplication of efforts.

Some of the Issues need to be addressed

- *Relocation*: Where will the fishermen villages be located? 200 or 500 metres away this is an on-going debate.
- *Housing*: There is a debate to provide houses in places of safety, ie beyond the 500 metres. Some of the houses are slightly damaged, which require small repairing only. The government wants them to abandon those houses and relocate in the given sites. Similarly, there are also families whose houses, although are in the same area, have not been damaged.
- *Property Right*: Some of the fishermen want to be relocated at a safe distance from the sea, however they want the coastal zone to be kept as common resources but the Government wants it to be public.
- *Livelihoods*: It is true several fishing boats (Catamaran, Maruti Catamaran, Mechanized trawl boat, Mechanized gill net boat) have been damaged. But, now most of them want to have a fiberglass boat or at least a Maruti Catamaran free.
- *Orphaned Children*: The government has categorically indicated that they will be taking care of the orphans. In fact, in Nagapattinam orphanage has been opened and functioning.

Source: Directorate of Social Welfare, Tamilnadu.

How is this disaster different?

- The narrow coastal strip was directly affected in a very concentrated way.
- There was not much awareness and understanding about the most affected community (fishing community) with its many unique practices:
 - Obsession with sharing everything equally
 - Role of traditional Panchayats in these communities.
 - The economic role of women and their status.

Rehabilitation Process

The construction of temporary shelters, providing ration and livelihood support were the challenges. Logically this phase should be taken over by the permanent housing and other sustainable support, however even after nearly four months many of the affected families are stuck in the camps.

The livelihood support has been extended to fishermen who have lost boats and nets, and the need assessment for other sectors is going on. However a

lot of thinking needs to be done in this regard. There has been an attempt to address the issue of education mostly by the NGOs through the education centers, play school, amusement centres and Balwadis. Uniforms and books have also been given to these children.

The women seemed to be very much out of the ambit of this rehabilitation process. They are not recognized as workers who need compensation for the loss of livelihood. The needs of lactating and pregnant women remain unattended. Overall the health needs of women and children remain a neglected issue.

Concerns in Rehabilitation

- No Comprehensive Rehabilitation Policy
- Supply Driven not demand driven.
- Lack of State level Government coordination
- Coordination among various govt departments
 - Differences among collectors
- State vs. Central Govt issues slowed things down?
- Lack of clarity and transparency about the CRZ among the NGOs and also the government has slowed down the housing initiatives.
- No town planning approach
- Artificial / Unrealistic / Political deadlines: e.g. Temporary shelters by 14th Jan, Pongal
- Unrealistic expectations created?

GO – NGO Coordination: Lessons

- *The Government*
 - Beyond a point: 'burden of proof' is on the victims
 - Will listen to civil society, but not necessarily accept
 - More reactive than proactive; but sensitive to media reports
 - Will not retract orders; will find other ways to make amends
 - Will not experiment – tendency to play it safe
 - Reluctant to formally induct NGOs on committees
- *The NGOs*
 - Lack of early / authentic survey data's.
 - 'First on the ground' NGOs have distinct advantages
 - Outside NGOs have tendency to be overly 'obedient'
 - Romantic notions of local material etc. have limitations
- *Future Needs*
 - Developing a relief code.

- Monitoring the finance of Tsunami relief and rehabilitation.
- Facilitating affected people to articulate and represent their needs.
- Lobby for devolution of power and allocation of resources for the Panchayats.
- Form strategic alliances of NGOs and other civil society organizations to demand policies and programmes sensitive.
- Developing decentralized warning systems.

Gender specific issues

- In a situation like this women's safety and their needs becomes low priority for the community and the State.
- Lack of security into the gendered nature of displacement (relief camps and temporary shelter).
- Lack of adequate health care to women based on their specific needs.
- The very neutrality of the state and NGO approach to security and livelihood has hindered any interventions that sought to ensure women's safety.
- Lack of women's representation in the committees of decision-making – relief and rehabilitation.
- Lack of reflection on the effect of Tsunami on women. Women are not seen as workers.
- Male dominated camp administration (Sanitary napkin, under garments distributed by men).

Recommendation

- Both state and non-state agencies working with the affected need to be made aware about the gender specific and special needs of women.
- All service delivery programmes designed for the internally displaced should also be sensitive to women's needs and concerns and adopt a right-based approach. Women in displaced communities must be brought into a consultative process, be made a part of decision making, implementation and monitoring of relief and service delivery as well as medium and long term reconstruction and development.
- The physical security of women and their children will be far greater in communities that are well known to them and where they have a strong social resources relocating women to unfamiliar areas will also have negative implications for their psychosocial and emotional status in their aftermath of a terrible natural disaster. For example women who are able to access familiar religious sites, markets, hospitals, relatives, friends and other resources will be far less vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and psychological distress.

- Decisions about relocation must recognize women's livelihoods which are often different from those of men and which may be linked to the physical environment and social context of their original community.
- Special attention must be made to land rights, housing and shelter benefits, creation of employment, reestablishment of livelihoods, training and livelihood support for women taking into consideration the specific needs of widows, women supported household, women with disability and aged women.
- It is absolutely necessary that women become a part of the structures of administration put in place to deal with displacement and other problems faced by those who are affected by Tsunami at every level, from the village level to right up to the state and central operations. In particular it is critical that women become an integral part of the committees at district and state level.
- Gender sensitive guidelines must be issued to officials to ensure that women and girls are guaranteed safety and security from gender based violence.
- Women's groups and community based groups should be supported to work with displaced women and to build closer relationships that may pave the way for more open discussions regarding the issue of violence as well as more constructive interaction with officials and important decision makers.

Gender, Media and the Tsunami*

Ammu Joseph

[Can there possibly be a gender angle to the tsunami story? Certainly, says Ammu Joseph, pointing out that women from economically and socially deprived communities usually bear the brunt of disasters, thanks to the gender dimension of social inequality and inequity.]

"We journalists are simply beachcombers on the shores of other people's knowledge, other people's experience, and other people's wisdom. We tell their stories."

- Bill Moyers,

host of the public affairs series "NOW with Bill Moyers," on the US-based PBS television network, speaking at Harvard Medical School in December 2004, after receiving the annual Global Environment Citizen Award presented by the Center for Health and the Global Environment

Among the many questions this thought-provoking quotation raises are: who are the people whose stories we tell, what aspects of their stories do we choose to highlight, when and where do we look for stories, how do we tell the stories we find, and why do we tell some stories but not others? More specifically, now, as beachcombers on the many shores devastated by the recent tsunamis, whose experience, knowledge and wisdom do we draw upon to tell the many tales waiting to be told? Which are the stories that have remained untold despite the carpet coverage given to the disaster and its immediate aftermath?

Early critiques of media coverage in the wake of the tsunami tragedy of 26th December and beyond focussed primarily on the widespread use of extremely graphic images of the dead and injured, especially on television, in contrast to the discretion exercised by the international media during the 9/11 disaster in the U.S., suggesting double standards with regard to the dignity and privacy of human beings in the so-called First and Third Worlds.

There have been other manifestations of the apparently incorrigible bias of sections of the mainstream international media accessible from India - for instance, the excessive, if not exclusive, attention paid to post-disaster aid originating in Western nations, with little mention of inter-Asia assistance and, of course, scant reference to the tremendous outpouring of contributions in cash, kind, labour and expertise from civil society within the affected countries. Similarly, the relative coverage given to the impact of the disaster

on different countries is fairly revealing — Somalia, for example, has barely been on the media radar whereas Thailand, where the maximum number of foreign tourists died or disappeared, was very much in focus. The domestic media, too, have received some brickbats about sensationalism and voyeurism. And about the insensitivity with which grieving, traumatized survivors have been pursued, especially by television reporters anxious to feed the apparently insatiable hunger of 24-hour news channels for dramatic images and sound-bytes.

It must be said, however, that in the days after disaster struck, journalists reporting from the affected areas were naturally scrambling to do the best they could to provide information about the unprecedented scale and scope of the devastation caused by the sudden, short-lived blast from the sea. Thanks to their energetic efforts, people elsewhere could at least try to imagine and understand the enormity of the calamity, and do whatever they could to help in a situation of such extensive death and destruction. It goes without saying, therefore, that any discussion on media coverage of the catastrophe is not meant to criticise as much as to learn.

Among the many stories that remain to be told are those of tsunami-affected women. This is one aspect of post-tsunami media coverage that does not seem to have received much attention so far. It cannot be said that women have been missing from media coverage - on the contrary, the media tend to focus on women and children in any disaster situation, and this one was no exception. However, they have been appearing primarily as victims (weeping, wailing, awaiting or availing relief), as mothers (faced with bereavement and/or difficult choices, especially in their attempts to save children), and as heroines (for example, the Swedish mother and the British schoolgirl holidaying in Thailand). The question is whether or not such limited representations do justice to women's experiences, concerns and needs in the wake of the disaster.

It may seem irrelevant to raise the question of gender awareness in the context of media coverage of a natural disaster such as this one, which obviously affected all those who happened to be in the path of the massive waves — men, women and children. Can there possibly be a gender angle to the tsunami story? Is it at all reasonable to call for a gender perspective while covering the post-tsunami situation?

Assuming that the primary purpose of media coverage of disasters is to highlight the impact of such events, as well as their fallout, on diverse sections

of the affected people, especially those at most risk, the answer to those questions is a very definite “yes.” The fact is that gender, along with other socio-economic variables such as class and caste, race or ethnicity, age and health status, does influence people’s experience of the events themselves, as well as their access to subsequent help in coping with the consequences and rebuilding their lives.

What journalist Praful Bidwai wrote a few days after the disaster is significant in this context: “... Natural disasters are natural only in their causation. Their effects are socially determined and transmitted through mechanisms and arrangements which are the creation of societies and governments. Natural disasters are not socially neutral in their impact. Rather, they pick on the poor and the weak, rather than the privileged.” (The News, Pakistan, 30 Dec. 04)

Considering the gender-based inequality and inequity that mark most societies - certainly those affected by the recent tsunamis — women are clearly disadvantaged in multiple ways. It naturally follows that women from the economically and socially deprived communities that usually bear the brunt of disasters — both natural and man-made — are likely to be especially vulnerable in the aftermath of calamities, as well as conflicts, unless special care is taken to ensure that their needs and concerns are taken care of.

If disasters are not socially neutral in their impact, clearly policies and programmes for relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction cannot afford to be socially neutral either. If the government and/or other agencies involved in post-disaster or post-conflict work have not yet learnt this well-documented lesson, it is surely up to the media to remind them - and society as a whole — of the special needs, concerns and problems of various groups, including women, in the aftermath of such events. As a recent United Nations press release put it, “The Indian Ocean tsunami may have made no distinction between men and women in the grim death toll it reaped with its waves but it has produced some very gender-specific after-shocks, ranging from women’s traditional role in caring for the sick to increased cases of rape and abuse. Understanding and measuring these differences is essential for an effective response.”

There were a few, scattered glimpses in media coverage soon after disaster struck of the special vulnerabilities of women in such situations. For example, there was one story about women having been hampered by their saris in their bid to escape the waves. And another one about women being

raped and molested in unprotected refugee camps. The latter, a Reuters report based on a statement by the Women & Media Collective in Sri Lanka, underlined the importance of expanding the range of news sources to be tapped and taken seriously even in a crisis situation that appears, on the surface, to have nothing to do with gender.

There were also hints of potential gender-related stories in some other early reports. For example, the unscrupulous tactics reportedly employed by some family members in Tamilnadu to corner the funds expected as compensation for deaths does not bode well. Countless earlier examples of post-disaster and post-conflict situations, including the post-Kargil scenario, have demonstrated that the most vulnerable in society - including women and children - often tend to lose out in this process.

Similarly, reports early on about the possibility of adoption-related rules and regulations being officially relaxed to facilitate the adoption of children orphaned by the disaster, raised questions about how the authorities planned to ensure that no predatory adults would exploit the vulnerability of these children - especially, though not only, the girls among them. Fortunately, subsequent warnings from child rights groups and clarifications from the government raise hopes that due care will be taken to minimise opportunities for abuse and trafficking.

However, a number of other important stories concerning women have, by and large, been missing from the media over the past month. For example, media coverage of the impact of the disaster on people's livelihoods seems so far to have focused primarily on the fishermen, their boats, nets, and so on. This may well be because that is what the government and several other agencies are concentrating on. Despite the mandatory, usually superficial and ill-informed quotes and sound-bites from the so-called man/woman-on-the-street that have become media staples these days, the media continue to rely excessively on the "authorities," "leaders" of various groups and sundry "experts" for information on and analysis of crisis situations.

While restoration of fishing is no doubt an obvious and important issue that needs to be urgently tackled, too little attention is apparently being paid to other economic activities in coastal areas, including those involving women. A recent report by a team of volunteers who have just returned from the affected areas points out that rehabilitation packages for livelihoods formulated from a "property owner centric" viewpoint tend to ignore the

needs of people from the fishing and farming communities who do not own boats, nets, lands or shops.

According to them, thousands of people who contribute their labour and skills to the coastal economy and whose livelihoods have also been wrecked by the tsunami, are finding themselves left out of the reckoning. Among them are a wide range of workers, such as landless agricultural labourers, share croppers and tenant farmers, various categories of fish and boat workers, street vendors and petty traders, transport workers, construction labourers, salt pan workers, service providers like barbers, tailors and cobblers, and crafts persons such as basket-weavers.

Unfortunately, even reports documenting and highlighting the callous, indefensible neglect of Dalit and Adivasi communities in the relief and rehabilitation process, tend to be gender-blind. Yet women, especially those from such marginalized communities, who form a major section of the informal or unorganised sector of labour, and who rarely own property, are likely to be even more invisible and unaccounted for in this situation. And such an information gap could have serious repercussions in terms of reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, official and otherwise.

If women's economic activities, losses and needs are not taken into account, the relief, recovery and rehabilitation process may not address the livelihood concerns of a wide range of women, including female heads of households, widows, other single women, older women, destitute women, and so on. Consequently, they and their families may not receive the kind of help they require to survive in the short term, and rebuild their lives in the long term.

Such a situation could prove disastrous for a large number of families, especially among the poor, because many of these women may well be the sole earners and/or supporters of their families. In any case it is widely known that women's earnings generally go directly towards meeting the basic needs of their families, while a substantial proportion of many men's earnings is often spent on personal habits such as drinking, smoking and gambling.

By highlighting women's economic roles and requirements, the media could prompt the authorities and other decision-makers to pay more heed to them. A relatively simple way to do this would be to talk to members of the women's Self Help or Savings and Credit Groups (SHGs and SCGs) that reportedly exist in most of the tsunami-hit villages and highlighting their

members' livelihood-related concerns and needs. At present these groups are being ignored by the government, other agencies as well as gram panchayats in the process of planning and decision-making, according to preliminary reports from a team, including five women survivors of the Latur and Gujarat earthquakes, which visited 13 villages in the worst affected areas in Nagapattinam district in mid-January to share experiences with and assess the needs of fellow disaster-struck women.

The team of grassroots women also uncovered gender disparities in access to available health services - not on account of discrimination per se but because of the general lack of attention to women's special needs and concerns. For instance, in Madatikuppam and other villages where government health teams have been operating since the waves wrecked havoc, the medical staff on duty said that most of their patients were men and children seeking treatment for fractures, diarrhoea, as well as coughs, colds and fevers. At the same time, many women and girls told the team that they were too embarrassed to go the health camps even though they needed medical attention, because all the doctors were male and the facilities did not provide any privacy for check-ups. Again, the media could play an important part in helping to remove such hurdles to women survivors' access to healthcare.

Tapping women's experiences, knowledge and wisdom for post-disaster media coverage is important to ensure not only that they and their families get a fair deal but also that their communities are helped to recover from the trauma and rebuild their lives in the most appropriate and effective manner. It is clear, for example, that women are best placed to provide insights into the kind of relief measures and/or materials that would be most useful in the initial stages since they are likely to be the ones trying to ensure that their families are fed and clothed. In view of the vital role they play in ensuring family survival and well-being, their views also need to be subsequently sought on issues such as how and how long the temporary relief camps should operate, what assistance people need when they are in a position to return to their villages, what part the affected people themselves - including women - can and should play in rebuilding their homes and lives, what precautions need to be taken to ensure that reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts take the interests and needs of women and other disadvantaged groups into account, and how to make sure that the situation of women and other traditionally deprived sections of society is better, not worse, in the post-tsunami scenario.

The experience of survivors of the Latur earthquake — which has since been shared and built upon with earthquake survivors in Gujarat, Turkey and, now, tsunami survivors in Tamilnadu (and, possibly, Sri Lanka) — highlights the immense value of involving communities, particularly women, in the design and implementation of post-disaster plans and programmes, as well as in more long-term efforts towards appropriate, holistic development in the affected areas. According to Prema Gopalan, executive director of Swayam Shikshan Prayog, a Mumbai-based organisation that facilitated women’s involvement in reconstruction and rehabilitation after the 1993 earthquake in Marathwada district, “The key lesson from Latur is to listen to grassroots women’s groups and give them a central role in matters that affect their lives.” This view was echoed by Noeleen Heyzer, executive director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in a statement issued on 5 January, which called attention to the importance of women’s networks for emotional, social and economic recovery, and stated that “women must be at the heart of the relief efforts and the rebuilding of shattered communities.”

The point is that, while gender is often seen as a narrow, special interest issue far removed from the hurly-burly of hard news coverage, gender awareness can actually lead to a better, more holistic understanding of any event and its after effects. Taking the time and trouble to talk to women and women’s groups - even in a crisis situation - can not only yield insights into the larger picture but point the way to special stories that are not only interesting but significant. The media - and media professionals - stand to gain by recognising that there is a gender dimension to virtually every event, process, institution and/or individual experience covered by the media, including disasters and conflicts. And that woman - including poor and illiterate women have information, knowledge and opinions on practically everything. Failure to tap women - including those now attempting to resume life after the disaster - as sources and resources can only impoverish media coverage and diminish our understanding of the post-tsunami scenario, as well as many other similar situations. According to Heyzer, “The special protection needs of women and girls require attention, and the voices and perspectives of women and women’s support networks need to be given visibility in national strategies for relief and reconstruction, by aid organisations, and by the media. By responding in this way, we can turn the crisis into an opportunity for laying the foundations of a future where all people can live with dignity, security and justice.”

[2 Feb 2005, Indiatogether; also based on her lecture at a CRG workshop in Bhubaneswar]

The Refugees

Families, Displacement, Partition*

Meghna Guhathakurta

Fear, memory and the context

There has been the tendency to focus on the communal and violent nature of the Partition and the mass exodus accompanying it. This has been more the case of the Punjab frontier where forced migration took place on a large scale. Along the Bengal border things were different. For some families it was a matter of conscious choice. For example this was a choice for families whose members were in government service and who were given an option to take equivalent work on the other side. For others the decision to migrate was taken almost overnight, especially if the family was directly or indirectly hit by a communal carnage that succeeded the Partition. But for most families the decision to migrate was deliberated slowly and in waves within the circles of the family a process that continues even today. This created a curious effect on the social make-up of the region resulting in a *diaspora* of families. Hindus, Muslims, Biharis, Chakmas, Garos, etc, separated and divided; living on either side of the lines chalked out by the Radcliffe Award, each part engrossed in its own struggle for survival or achievement and yet still connected to each other by ties, emotional, imaginary and real...

People across the border both for trading as well as other social reasons defied these restrictions persistently so much so that a whole network of underground operators who helped people cross borders without visa or passport grew steadily, a method often colourfully termed in the local language as gola-dbakka passage (taking you by the scruff of your neck and pushing you across).

This is not to say that the Bengal Partition occurred without violence or was not stricken by communal forces." Violence is not always to be, "measured by external acts of murder, loot or abduction. Violence typifies a state where a sense of fear is generated and perpetrated in such a way as to make it systemic, pervasive and inevitable. Thus during the nine months occupation of Dhaka by the Pakistani army in 1971, in what General Yahya Khan called 'normal and peaceful' situation, people went about their daily chores in dread and fear, not knowing when a tap on the door could mean death or for women, rape. Thus also, in the many communal riots that preceded as well as followed the Partition, it was the *fear* of being persecuted, the *fear* of being dispossessed, and the *fear* of not belonging rather than actual incidents of violence that caused many to flee. On the other hand people stay back for many, reasons and nowhere were those reasons more rich or varied than in the case of the Bengal Partition.

The situation in Bengal is different also because the two Bengals enjoyed open borders for a long period of time. It was not until 1953 that passports were introduced and only after the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War were visas required. Rail communication stopped after the '65 war as also by air, and restrictive overland communication was maintained. But people across the border both for trading as well as other social reasons defied these restrictions persistently, so much so that a whole network of underground operators who helped people cross borders without visa or passport grew steadily, a method often colourfully termed in the local language as *gola-dhaka* passage (taking you by the I scruff of your neck and pushing you across).

In the fiction and autobiographical writings that have dominated the Partition discourse, the voices from Hindu migrants from East Bengal had been more prominent than Muslim migrants from West Bengal. The reason for this is of course an open question that awaits study. But one important distinction between the two 'migrant' groups has been created by the political conditions of the country where they migrated. For Hindus the experience has been mostly of dispossession and their nostalgia for their 'homesteads' (*bhitabari*) has been very pronounced and glorified in their writings. For many Muslims of a particular generation the journey to Pakistan was like a journey to a 'promised land' an image that later became tarnished as Pakistan entered its most repressive stage under the Ayub regime, the brunt of the repression being borne by the people of East Bengal. There is therefore a reticence, even now, among Bengali Muslims to talk of their '*desb*' (ancestral home as it is referred to in Bengali), publicly, if it happens to be in India. In recording family histories however one succeeds to a certain extent in overcoming this barrier, for nostalgic memories of childhood, growing up, family ties and accompanying emotions find a space where one can talk about them freely without the direct intervention of nationalist politics.

There is yet another phenomenon that distinguishes East Bengali reminiscences of the Partition from those in West Bengal. This is the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Memories of 1947 or Partition has often been superseded by memories of 1971, or of movements that led to 1971, because in the quest for a Bengali identity many Bengali Muslims have had to rethink their positions. Thus sometimes when memories of the Partition are revived, they are often coloured by memories of 1971. Many Muslims came to the East from West Bengal and Bihar in the hope of finding their own land, and not all of them necessarily believed in the Muslim League ideology. Many progressive cultural activists and professionals came from Calcutta, not spontaneously, but nevertheless with the ambition of constructing a new nation that would give shape and colour to their dreams. But for most this dream was short-lived. The

repression of a Bengali identity and the imposition of a new cultural identity of Pakistan, and the imposition of Martial Law brought about spontaneous resistance from the people whether in the form of the Language Movement of 1952, or the anti-Ayub demonstrations of 1969, culminating in independent Bangladesh. But whereas in the nationalist writing of history these events appear in a linear schema, the personal histories of those involved in or affected by these movements were far from linear.

Writings on the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent present it as a product of the colonial state as well as a landmark in the progressive march towards achieving modern nationhood. In subsequent years this nationhood had come to determine questions of citizenship and social exchange and to define personal identities for the people occupying the newly defined territories of India and Pakistan. In that context, family experiences of people who migrated or stayed back bring out the social history of a people who had been suddenly dispossessed of any power to control the events and then sought to retain an element of control in their attempts to adapt to the new situation. Family histories provide us with insights with which such processes can be better understood. Partition thus represents a significant moment in the temporal scale of generations since family histories are about inter-generation exchanges. To focus on the family, as an important intermediary site therefore is to see how memories of individuals and generations are constructed and negotiated and how personal identities of gender, class or nation are formed, conformed to or contested and confronted.

Feminist scholarship helps us to comprehend families as a site where identities of gender, community, class and religion intertwine with each other to generate a politics that is gendered whether along class, religion or national lines. Feminist rethinking of the family has important implications for the study of Partition because it anticipates important questions. It challenges the myth of the monolithic family with a breadwinner husband as the only legitimate form of family-organisation. It shows how the family is decomposed into underlying structures of sex, gender and generation. Also, it shows that because families are structured around gender and age, women, men, boys and girls do not experience their families in the same way. Family accounts in the times of Partition show the illusory nature of the isolation of the nuclear family, since there are close connections between the internal life of the families and the organisation of the economy, the state and other institutions. They challenge dichotomies of the private/public or family/society. For example families which affected by the Partition became divided or separated, also at the same time maintained kinship ties which proved important survival strategies 'or coping mechanisms to

overcome or circumvent the crisis situation and form new patterns of lived experiences.

Writings on the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent present it as a product of the colonial state as well as a landmark in the progressive march towards achieving modern nationhood. In subsequent years this nationhood had come to determine questions of citizenship and social exchange and to define personal identities for the people occupying the newly defined territories of India and Pakistan.

Histories

I place here cases of two families: one a Muslim family from Barasat, West Bengal and the other a Hindu family from Barisal, East Bengal. It may be mentioned that in the latter case it is my own family. However I am not the prime narrator here, but my aunt who herself is a witness to Partition. In both cases the interviewees are both men and women who have crossed the borders whether in 1947 or afterwards but as a result of Partition. However only one wing of each family was selected as my interviewee, i.e. the interviewees are brothers and sisters from each family, not cousins. There is not enough space here to go into the cases in detail. I shall outline some of the more interesting findings, which family histories have unearthed. But before anything else a comparison of the two families studied should set the scene.

The structures of the two families are different. The family from Barasat was land-centred, and hence matrilineal and location-specific, and the profession came in at a much later stage. The family from Banaripara on the other hand was not dependent on land, but rather capitalised on education and the service sector. But many of the marriage alliances that took place were with the landed gentry, and these alliances were used for resource pooling within the family.

In the first instance almost everyone married into the same district or at least neighbouring ones, whether they happened to be settled in West or East Bengal. The residences of the family were hence both location specific and patrilineal. Apart from the families who migrated to Bangladesh and one member of the Barasat family who settled in another village in West Bengal, most of the family still lives in the natal village though they have separate households. In the second instance, marriages took place with families in other districts, but located essentially within East Bengal. However because the members of the family were not directly dependent on land, and the ancestral home existed mostly at a symbolical level, even from the previous generation, the residence pattern was scattered. But a general pattern emerged where the tendency was to move towards the urban centres: Mymensingh, Dhaka, but mostly Calcutta. Though this was due to the dependence of white-collar jobs, the gravitation towards the

metropolis was not always through patrilineal connections, but often using connections through marriage. Thus many cousins in the Hindu family grew up in their Mamabari or maternal uncle's house. All this was a pre-partition syndrome. When the Partition occurred, this was the context in which each of the members of the family took their own decisions.

Calcutta was the mega city and metropolis of British India, and hence the focal point of the migration scene. Urban migration has been increasing in the forties, especially during and after the famine of 1943. Dhaka and Mymensingh in the eastern parts also had their attractions. The family from Barasat though landcentred was also living in the vicinity of Calcutta. This determined their mind-set when the decision to move or not was thrown open to them. Both concerns of property and living in the vicinity of Calcutta with educational and employment opportunities for their children became important considerations to affect their attitude, that East Bengal or Pakistan was the more "backward" place. It is interesting to note that many Muslim middle-class families of both East and West Bengal villages returned to Pakistan after the Partition. But as mentioned before there were also artists, writers, journalists and other professionals of West Bengal origin who came, bringing with them their talents and skill. Later they not only made names for themselves but contributed to the movement for a "Bengali identity" in the state of Pakistan.

The Hindu service worker had however started his/her migratory trend towards Calcutta long before everyone else, both in relation to education and employment. As the second case shows, this was true for them as well. But Dhaka and Mymensingh were also important urban centres. This pre-partition migration like any other urban migratory trend used family connections and contacts to establish a "chain" which enables other members of the family to follow. But when the Partition came, this 'chain' was stretched to its limits and often broke down. At this juncture, migrants became refugees. Too many people were coming in and at short notice, and family resources were often not adequate to bear the burden. Many 'fictive kinship' and extra family alliances too were made at this point.

Family histories of the Partition therefore make a strong statement about social transformation. They reiterate that families are open to the winds of change, changing themselves and thereby changing social reality. Times of transition are trying times when such changes maybe brought about quite suddenly creating havoc and upheaval that haunts one into the next century. Hopefully fruitful and further study will reveal to us some of the answers to questions which have been long haunting us in our own histories.

Gendered meanings

As mentioned above my particular methodological intervention was aimed to reveal the gendered narratives in family histories. Since in both the families I interviewed, I found women who during the Partition were unmarried and as a consequence was forced to migrate for reasons of physical security, this task was made a lot easier for me. Arjoo, Minhaj's sister was barely twelve when she was forced to leave her mother for the security of East Pakistan where her elder brother lived. The incident is related in her own poignant words:

Everyone got panicky. I remember some outsiders came and put fire to some houses in Kazipara, a nearby village. I heard the rumour and panicked. At that time my mother and I were alone in the house. I ran and hid in the sugar cane field for an hour. My mother didn't go with me. Being the youngest in the family I used to be the only one to go to the Kazipara primary school. The rest of the family had attended the village school. But after the riots my father put pressure on me to go and stay in East Pakistan with my brother. Both my mother and I resisted at first, but my father said he would stop my education if I didn't listen to him. My mother then laid out the options to me and said that either I go or my education will be stopped. I was determined to get an education. So I went. I remember before I left a goat was sacrificed on my behalf.

About community relations she speaks:

*I have fond memories of my school at Kazipara. I still maintain contact with some of my friends. I had mostly Hindu friends. I do not remember any sign of discrimination but there were differences. For example I remember we had a crazy teacher called Ganesh. Hindu girls used to say *anggen* (corrupted form of *angga*, in English obedience, in answer to roll call) and Muslim girls used to say *ji* (address of respect). Once my Hindu friend said *ji* and immediately Ganesh sir reacted, You are a Hindu, why should you say *ji*?*

Arjoo's perception of nation or homeland was mediated through kinship and marital relations: Arjoo got married to someone whose ancestral home was in Jessore. It meant double dislocation for her. Not only did she feel herself to be an outsider in East Pakistan or Bangladesh, she was also an outsider in her in-law's house. She relates her experience as a new bride: "I felt the differences of being from West Bengal although I was not openly told it. She said there was a difference in their dialect and hers. Her in laws used to tease her and called her "khuni" (murderer) because she spoke in her local dialect 'jabokhuni kabhokhuni' instead of jaboney khaboney. On the other hand she sometimes could not understand her mother in law when she asked her to come down from the roof (ulla aia) Ulla was the name of her village."

Arjoo feels proud of her natal village in Barasat. She visits it often but sometimes she even has to fight with her husband for that right. When her husband tells her why she goes there so often that there is no need now to go since she is married here, she replies that as long as she has strength she will go. "Once I lose my strength I will automatically stop". She visits with her children a boy and two girls. Once when she took her boy there he was surprised when he got down at Barasat and remarked Mom! But we have only come to Jessore! Tapati on the other hand was more insecure in her perceptions of family, community and homeland nation. This was perhaps due to the very disturbing and traumatic experiences of her adolescence and adult life. Tapati's miseries did not stop at Partition. In 1957 she married and started to live in a joint family, which soon broke up. 1971 brought the tragic news about Jyotirmoy's death in the hands of the Pakistan Army, but most tragic of all was when in 1980 her husband died of a heart attack leaving her to fend for herself and two unmarried daughters. It is incidents like this that makes her equate home with homeland in terms of it being a source of constant insecurity. In her own words, "I could never find stability. I lost my father when I was barely some months old. Throughout my life I have been compelled to leave one home for another. Even now that is my reality."

Tapati has no nostalgia about her homeland, some memories perhaps, but she never glorifies them. Her life has been too unsettling and she still relives the trauma in her everyday life. She is afraid whenever she reads in the papers about the Tenancy Act being revoked, withdrawing the rights of the tenant, she quakes with fear that the house she is living in might suddenly collapse because its built on uncertain foundations. Her only concern is for the security of her daughters and herself. Indeed family histories of the Partition therefore make a strong statement about social transformation. They reiterate that families are open to the winds of change, changing themselves and thereby changing social reality. Hopefully fruitful and further study will reveal to us some of the answers to questions which have been long haunting us in our own histories.

Widows of Brindaban: Memories of Partition*

Subhoranjan Dasgupta

(At present, 2910 Bengali women are struggling to survive in Brindaban. A few of them have crossed 100 years and some others are in their teens. These women live in abject poverty, with many of them depending totally on charity for their livelihood. A number of them had come to Brindaban during partition. Either they came without a stop or they spent some years after crossing the border in West Bengal, Tripura and Assam before 'delivering' themselves to 'Radheshyam'. Even now, 29 years after the creation of Bangladesh, Brindaban exerts a pull on the hapless and the helpless spending uneasy days and nights in Khulna or Chittagong. They still come though in far-reduced numbers. Given below are interviews with some of these women. The interviews were taken by Subhoranjan Dasgupta who sensitively chronicled their agonizing memories of violence. Here are the tales of women who have suffered through overwhelming feelings of loss and hopeless estrangement. Some of them are totally submerged in despair but there are a few who have been able to rise above their sufferings. Let the women speak for themselves - Ed).

IIa Bandyopadhyay

86 years old, came to Brindaban straight from Brandipara in Jessore district in 1947. "I came to live in Brandipara after my marriage. My in-laws were well placed and influential. My husband was an MBBS doctor. I had three sons - the oldest was in Class X, the next in Class V and the youngest in Class IV. They went to the market and did not return, not one. No trace of them could be found. After that our house was attacked and our dispensary was burnt down at that point my husband decided, "We are going to leave today."

At the dead of the night we left and entered Bongaon. There he said, "We have had enough of sansar, let us go to Brindaban straight. We shall die there." Since then we have been living in Brindaban. My husband who died ten years ago used to pray at Paglababa's ashram and I used to chant Hari's name in a dharmasala. We have had no ties with the outside world - none has come to visit us, we know nothing. From 1947 to 2000, I have chanted the name of God only. Well, a little peace I have won here. Till I die I shall chant Hari's name, I do not want to go anywhere. I cling to my Gopal."

Anusuya Roy, the caring matron of 'Amar Bari' told me, "She weeps softly at night."

Gopika Saha

68 years old. Left East Bengal in early sixties and came to Brindaban in 1995. "When riots broke out in 1960 we crossed over to Belonia in Tripura - my husband, my two sons, a few Gossains and I. It was no longer possible to survive in East Pakistan. From Agartala we came to Calcutta. My age then was 30- 31, my two sons were 7 and 8 years old and my husband used to work in the village grocery shop. We tried to settle at Jadavpur. I worked as a cook in middle class homes and my husband found a job at the local ration shop. We tried to bring up our children in the best possible manner, the older is now married and works in a shop at Howrah and the younger is a bit unbalanced. My husband died ten to twelve years ago and since then I did not find peace in Calcutta. My son was not well placed and I did not want to be a burden on him and his wife. I decided to leave. First, I went to Nabadwip and then for the last five years I am here at Brindaban. My life at Brindaban began at a dharmasala where I used to sing Radheshyam. From there I have come to 'Amar Bari' and I shall stay here till I die. My life is dedicated to Gobinda and Radharani. I have encountered and suffered a lot - loot, plunder, arson on the other side and a desperate struggle for survival on this side. Now I want to live in peace in the way I would like to. I left my son's family in sorrow, I did not inform him. I do not want to hurt anyone nor would I allow' anyone to hurt me. I do not want to recall Noakhali and my life there. Now that I have lost everything my only refuge is Radharani and Gobinda. I chant the whole day. My son and daughter-in-law do not know that I am in Brindaban."

Shushila De

80 years old crossed over in 1947 and came to Brindaban in 1960. "I was given to marriage when I was 12 years old. I lost my husband when I was 16 years old. I had a daughter. I used to live with my parents after I became a widow in Ubata village in Habiganj subdivision. My in-laws left some land for me which my parents took away. I could not protest because I could not speak. When riots broke out in 1947, my parents left me with my aunt and crossed over to Assam. Then my aunt's brother put my daughter and me in a packed train - everyone was fleeing. We went to our parents in Badarpur, from there we were sent to a relief camp in Silchar. There were many like me in that camp. Everyone shouted and screamed when food was distributed. We had to fight for our food and during one such fight I also tried to make sounds desperately. Suddenly, at that point, my tongue got loose and I began to talk. We were taught to weave in the

camp. Fourteen years I spent there. When the camp closed down, I went back to my parents who promptly sent me to Brindaban. In the meanwhile I had got my daughter married, my daughter died during childbirth.

My first shelter in Brindaban was Gotkunja. I use to sing 'Radheshyam' and earn money. For a single room I paid a rent of Rs. 5 per month. In 1999 I came to 'Amar Bari'. I simply have no one in this world. Where shall I go? No one looked for me in the last forty years. I shall continue to live and die in Brindaban. Radharani will care for me.

Chapalasundari Dhar

90 years old, she crossed over when riots broke out in the sixties. She came from Noakhali district, village Dakshinbaria. "I was married at the age of 11, I became a widow when I was 14. My husband was killed by his own relatives who eyed his property. When riots broke out in 1960, we came to this side - my one brother and four sisters. My brother and three sisters live in Tripura, they are well placed. Another sister lives in Delhi, she is also well placed and has repeatedly asked me to stay with her there. They communicate with me, from time to time. But I shall not leave Brindaban. You see, my brothers and sisters are good people but their lifestyle is different. They eat onions and garlic I do not touch them. Here I live in peace, I pray to Radheshyam, chant bhajans, take part in household chores.

Yes, why did we leave? Riots had just begun and my brother said, "No, we cannot live here any longer. Women will be dishonoured. We left everything behind - house, land and crossed over empty-handed. We paid for our escape so we did not face any problem on the road. Luckily, my father had already bought some land in Tripura and my brother began to work on it.

I came to Brindaban willingly. Even before settling here, I had come here twice. You see, I am a child-widow; I have never had my own home, so I do not even know what it is like. Hence I have no craving, no feeling of loss. I am devoted to my Radharani and I spend my days in peace."

While answering questions, Chapalasundari (she was strikingly beautiful in the past) laughed. She has one wish - to get the young matron Anusuya married to a worthy 'boy.' However, with one condition attached - Anusuya and her husband should continue to live in 'Amar Bari' because Anusuya is irreplaceable!

Refugee Repatriation: A Politics of Gender*

Paula Banerjee

The Hindustan-Pakistan plan of June 3, 1947 and the subsequent Partition, which resulted in the movement of over about fifteen million people across the borders of Bengal and Punjab, generated a national memory of rape, abduction and unprecedented brutalisation of women. Yet partition is often interpreted as being beyond gender politics. A corrective entails a new interpretative study of this fracture with a focus on women, which will move beyond the women's experiences to metaphoric uses of gender in state politics in a time of crisis.

Our questions then are: Was there a politics of gender in the politics of partition? Has that thrown up an alternative meaning of the women's identity? Did this emergent feminine identity result in objectification and exclusion of women? These questions assume greater importance if we consider that women's experiences of migration and destitution during partition and the State's response to it is a pointer to the relationship between the women's position as marginal participants, in highly insecure environment and the politics of gender subordination as perpetrated by the State. In this context the experiences of abducted women and their often-forcible repatriation by the State machinery becomes crucial especially today when thousands of South Asian women are either migrants or refugees within the subcontinent.

Abduction and Some Issues

A large number of abducted women have been missing during the transborder movement. On the basis of individual complaints received it seems that the number was well over 50,000. Some incidents relating to these abducted women/persons exemplify the politics of gender during partition were:

1. As early as September 1947 the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met in Lahore and decided that these women "must be restored to their families." Even when the two countries could decide on little else, they resolved the fate of abducted women without much delay.
2. Problems arose over the process and progress of recovery. An Abducted Persons Bill was brought in the Indian Parliament. Boys below the age of 16 and women of all ages came under the jurisdiction of this bill. The bill gave police officers unlimited power in matters regarding abducted person. "He" was empowered to "enter and search the place and take into custody any person found therein who, in his opinion, is an abducted person..."

3. Notwithstanding what was contained in the law, the detention of the abducted persons (to be read as women) could not be called into question in any Court. No officer of the State could be prosecuted for “any act, which is in good faith done in pursuance of this act.”
4. There were a number of criticisms against the bill with 70 amendments proposed in the House. But the bill was passed unchanged on December 19, 1949. The bill, which promised “liberty” to, abducted women, in actuality denied them even the writ of habeas corpus.
5. According to Rameshwari Nehru, the advisor to the Government of India, Ministry of Rehabilitation, many abducted women showed extreme unwillingness to leave their “captors.”
6. Those who were forcibly repatriated were often refused rehabilitation by their families. Senior Congress leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru on, numerous occasions requested the nation to take back these women into their homes since they were pure in intent if not in body.
7. The government itself could be of little help. Many forcibly repatriated women living in government shelter in 1952 were discharged from these Homes without any accommodation. They were offered rented accommodation, which they could not afford.

A Community of Interest

How did India and Pakistan achieve such commonality of interest regarding abducted women? The answer lay in the character of State that grew out of Partition. In any country where political control is the direct generator of social and economic control and the controllers are men, they take other men as prototypes for all humans. Male issues remain the active issues, which are contested. Non-male issues can be dismissed. Thus, for India and Pakistan, where “women” figured only in micro-levels, an easy solution to the question of abducted women was a reflection of that attitude of the State, which remained based on male values, concerns and reasonings.

Threatened Identities

A lot of the sexist bias is evident when one looks at the Abducted Persons Bill. Those who were abducted were not considered as legal entities with constitutional rights. They were denied judicial and moral prerogatives. All choices were denied to them because of their gender and the decision making power rested with their guardians who were defined by the male pronoun “he”. By objectifying the woman the State tried to silence her voice. It is crucial to note that between 1947 and 1949 there were many women who refused to leave their “subjugators” and their new homes. Rameshwari Nehru articulated their

opposition to this forcible repatriation. She advised the government to suspend the operations, which the government refused to do. She resigned from the Ministry of Rehabilitation in July 1949 and perhaps not coincidentally the same year the Abducted Persons Bill was passed. The abducted persons (to be read as women not only because they were greater in number but also because they were citizens of a free country whereas men under 16 years were not) were marginalised much in the same way as the Jews in Germany in the 30's who were first feminised by the Nazi propaganda machinery and then effaced.

Problems arose when both countries made claims of moral superiority over the other based on their ability to protect/control the female body. This control was essential for the self-definition of the male identity, which was in a state of crisis due to Partition. Their inability to take charge of their 'possession' caused a degree of psychological emasculation. Control over their women (their most important possession) became imperative to overcome this impotence. Abducted women symbolised the dangerous nature of female sexuality which had to be regulated, or else, it could lead to their dishonour which meant the dishonour of the men who were the custodians. Numerous debates in the Indian Parliament centered around questions of preservation of the purity of female sexuality. To highlight the urgency of the situation, fears of rape and aggression were invoked. Women who exercised agency on their own behalf and refused to be repatriated challenged the self-identity and virility of the patriarchy. This challenge could not be tolerated and so under the guise of protecting their person the patriarchy (represented by the State) depersonalised the women.

By insisting that the abducted women could not represent themselves and had to be represented, the State marginalised them from the decision making process and made them non-participants. Since it is their sexuality that supposedly threatened their security and the honour of the men and nation, their vulnerability was focused on their body. This made all women potentially susceptible to such threats and so had to be protected/controlled. By denying agency to the abducted women the State made it conceivable to deny agency to all women.

How honest were statist concerns regarding the abducted women is borne out by the fate of the repatriated women in government shelters. Very little was done to rehabilitate them. Women getting free rations were not entitled to any stipends. They were thus unable to acquire any practical training or skills and had to depend on public charities. L. Jodh Raj, the Secretary of Punjab Riot Sufferers Committee, bemoans in his letters that women from the camps who enrolled in the new industrial training programmes could not finish their training due to paucity of funds. The condition of women in Delhi Homes was slightly

better as they were given free maintenance and training. But in July 1952 thirty-eight displaced unattached women living in Rajpura Homes were discharged from their shelter. By the 1950s the Government of India had clearly lost interest in issues of rehabilitation of these women. This is hardly surprising as the government had made abducted women an issue only because control of their person was essential to the identity of the men. Even after fifty years, state politics in South Asia regarding women in general and refugee women in particular remains remarkably similar to the partition days.

An Endless Journey: The Plight of Afghan Refugee Women*

Soma Ghosal

Immediately after taking control of the capital in September 1996, the Taliban initiated a virtual war against women. Several edicts were issued forbidding women from working outside the home, attending school, or leaving home unless accompanied by the husband, father, brother or son. Dress codes were imposed directing that women be covered from head to toe in a burqa. The initial strictures were gradually followed up with more severe ones relating to the denial of even the basic rights to health. Non-compliance meant public beatings and even death. The result was an increasing number of refugees comprising of women and children. Thousands of Afghan women fled to Pakistan with their families. But gender violence did not stop.

Women refugees in Pakistan

Women comprise about 45 percent of the refugee population in Pakistan. The government of Pakistan is providing the refugees with the basic necessities. The amount of aid has often been a source of resentment among the poorer locals. Women are the main targets of such resentments. Since a number of the Afghan refugee women belong to the educated class in Kabul, they are branded as the agents of Russians who had come to inflict the old refugees with AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Afghan women with painted nails have been attacked in the local bazaars. The strictures on the freedom of movement and dress codes continued and domestic violence persisted. Women refugees who are widows face severe hardships in acquiring even the bare necessities for survival, as direct approach to the maliks is considered improper. Men dominate the entire organizational structure of the camps and every aspect of life and the distribution of amenities. The concept of a traditional family is upheld even under unusual circumstances. There have been reports of war widows being forced to marry their brothers-in-law. Rape of war widows by family members is frequent. According to an HRCP report 30% of the prostitutes in NWFP are Afghan women and very often the educated Afghan women bear the brunt of the blame for the rise in prostitution. Such allegations completely overlook the sharp decline in foreign aid as the major cause of impoverishment amongst the refugees.

The plight of the refugee women has been aggravated further due to a relatively soft stand taken by the Pakistan government towards the Taliban. Of

late, prominent Afghans in Pakistan and their families who've expressed strong dissent against the Taliban strictures, especially their violation of women's rights, have been attacked. Though the Taliban members deny their role outside Afghan territory, a special report in the Washington Times in Nov. 1998 had said that Pakistan was allowing the Taliban to extend its harsh rule across the border and giving it a free hand to root out opposition in the refugee camps. Afghan women with jobs in Peshawar were threatened and warned to quit work and stay at home, by stick-wielding men who claimed to be Taliban members. Fatima Gilani, head of the Afghan Women Council, a women's rights group, said her life had been threatened by suspected Taliban members. The Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), a vocal anti-Taliban feminist group, canceled a rally in Peshawar in December after self-proclaimed Taliban supporters threatened to break members' legs if they went ahead with the demonstration. Female teachers at girls' schools in Afghan refugee camps say they have been warned by men to teach the girls only verses from the Muslim holy book, Quran, and to end their schooling at eight.

Rehabilitation efforts

Throughout Afghanistan women are often both head of the family and principal breadwinner. Save the Children US had begun an UNHCR funded Group-Guaranteed Leading Project in Balkh and Jowzjan provinces in 1993. Since then, it had disbursed 6,500 loans for activities ranging from spinning projects, livestock and poultry rearing to rope-making and tailoring programs. Most of the participants had been widows.. The projects had been highly successful in themselves and there had been a 100 percent repayment rate for matured loans, not a single default and widespread community and religious support for the project. But with the Taliban coming to power these families have been reduced to begging for their survival. According to a study, at least 97% of women in Afghanistan are suffering from major depression, 86% have significant symptoms of anxiety and nearly a quarter frequently think of committing suicide. According to a Physician for Human Rights (PHR) report, 42% of Afghani women under the Taliban have post traumatic stress disorder. Malnutrition is rampant among the women and only six percent of the women interviewed reported receiving humanitarian assistance. Interestingly, according to a survey conducted by the Women's Health Information Center of JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association), the condition of the refugee women in Pakistan is far worse than the condition of the women surveyed in Kabul. This in spite of the efforts of the UNHCR at organizing and coordinating the activities of NGOs towards addressing issues of concern to women such as domestic violence, nutritional planning and income, generation to spell some brightness in the dismal lives of the Afghan refugee women. The Savera Counseling Service is

one such organization, which aims at increasing opportunities for formal education for girls, literacy and other technical skills for adult women while they are in Pakistan. The UNFPA has also contributed in extending the span of primary health services to reproductive health care. The government of Pakistan has also extended its support to the health care activities of the UNHCR. Dialogues with the community and religious leaders are initiated to help win women greater access to health, education and income generating activities. Dwindling aid support has, however, given a severe setback to the UNHCR relief work.

Conclusion

The prolonged Afghan wars, a gradual disinterest in the world towards it, more pressing refugee issues elsewhere along with the Taliban's rigid stance, have cast a gloom over the fate of the Afghan refugee women. International pressures especially those from Iran and Pakistan, the countries receiving the bulk of the refugees, have been lukewarm. While Iran's restrained policies towards Afghanistan have been largely influenced by considerations of its own geopolitical position in the region, Pakistan, on the other hand, has been powerless to influence the geopolitical changes, with its own inner contradictions allowing a softer stance towards the Taliban. The Central Asian countries though wary of their fundamentalist neighbour, are gradually rescinding to the reality of the Taliban presence in the region. The Western attitude, despite its vociferous protests against the Taliban's extremist overtures, has been, one of increasing apathy. The result has been a gradual decline in the aid flow towards the reprieve of these beleaguered people. The road to liberation for the Afghan refugee women is indeed a long one.

Afghan Women In Iran*

Arpita Basu Roy

Millions of women have gathered up their children and fled 'scorched earth', tactics of enemies who sweep through their villages, torching homes, killing villagers, poisoning the water, destroying crops, stealing cattle, strewing land mines, impressing their boy children into the military, and raping them and their daughters. As civilians, they are no longer byproducts of war. They are targets, part of military strategy.

Eighty percent of refugees are women and children. The refugee women who have been forced to leave their homes because of persecution and violence have to cope with the new environment, new language, new social and economic roles, new community structures, new familial relationships, and new problems. At the same time, they seek generally to reconstruct familiar lifestyles as much as possible. In a sense such women are both agents of change and sources of continuity and tradition.

Upon becoming refugees, refugee families have to deal with many new living arrangements. They often have to stay side by side with members of different tribes and clans. But for all refugee women, regardless of location, some issues appear to be common. They remain responsible for most domestic activities, whether in Third World camps or in industrialised countries. They also have to cope with changes in the family structure and roles. Women often find themselves as heads of households, with no husbands or older children to help support the families. They are also the principal maintainers of the traditional culture. And, when given the opportunity, refugee women form effective new social systems that provide support for their family members and the potential for helping others. By being resilient and inventive refugee women form new communities and support systems like the Afghan women's center at Peshawar and women's farming cooperatives in Somalia.

In addition to the common needs of the refugees like food, shelter, clothing and medical care; refugee women and girls require special protection and assistance ranging from physical security to cultural sensitivity. For instance, rape has been used as a weapon of ethnic cleansing, and under the laws of many countries, women do not have the same legal rights as men. Women are targets of sexual and physical abuse. They are often forced to give sexual favours to male refugees who have the authority to distribute rations in the refugee camps. Even without payment in sexual favour, food distribution is highly inequitous. As a result, women heads of households often receive fewer foods rations, and

they and their children have higher rates of malnutrition than the families headed by males. Women are often in charge of caring for the most vulnerable refugees, the young, the sick, and the elderly, even though they may be vulnerable themselves.

Adequate attention to general and comprehensive reproductive health needs of refugee women is of key importance to the survival of refugee population. Women of childbearing age often face pregnancy-related complications. Lack of training of midwives, septic abortions, in sanitary conditions during birth, poor lighting during deliveries, and frequency of pregnancies -all create difficulties.

Women also suffer from water-borne diseases like cholera, dysentery, typhoid and infectious hepatitis because they are generally responsible for collecting and storing water. Women also suffer from insect-borne diseases carried by insects that breed near water: for example, sleeping sickness, malaria, yellow fever and river blindness. They also risk infection from diseases transmitted through contact with water, worms and schistosomiasis. In addition to physical health problems, some refugee and displaced women suffer from mental health problems. Women often face emotional problems and difficulties in adjustment resulting from loss of family or community support.

Protection of women and their access to assistance are integrally woven. So too, is their involvement in the design, development and implementation of programmes. Judy Mayotte, who has worked in refugee camps all over the world, champions the cause of refugee women acting as peacemakers and decision makers. She says - "These women, who have endured so much in exile, are women of uncommon resilience and well springs of human resources and talents."

Exhausted from the effects of war and desirous of peace and stability, millions of them are reaching out across war-torn countries to find ways to resolve differences by non-violent means, to transform their societies through reconciliation, and to heal the spiritual wounds of war. Women, who so often are sustainers of culture and nurturers of society, are often uniquely endowed to create a climate of peace and reconciliation. It would be a terrible loss to allow their efforts to remain small scale, piecemeal, and scattered. In such efforts we have no better ally or resource than women who have known the chaos of conflict and who are dedicated to finding non-violent means of resolving the conflict."

Refugees in Iran

Afghans and Iraqi Kurds constitute the bulk of Iran's refugee population. For the last twenty years they have been allowed to live, work and move about freely within Iran to earn a living and become self-sufficient. About 1.4 million Afghans who stay in Iran can be found throughout the country, both in the urban centres as well as in the poor rural areas in eastern Iran bordering Afghanistan. In Iran there are very few refugees (about 5%) living in the camps.

Afghans can be very often found in construction sites or performing other forms of manual labour. To its benefit, Iran has consciously ignored some of its own regulations limiting foreigners' right to work. Afghans generally do the "dirty jobs" like digging ditches, curing skins for leather, cleaning wool, shelling pistachios, and working longer hours at lower pay than their Iranian counterparts. In a large number of cases, Afghan families have to solely depend on the women and children's work for a living. A comparison among men, women's and children's earnings (Table 1) in the fields indicates that children receive the lowest wage.

Table 1: Men's, women's, and children's earnings in their fields.

Type of Work	Avg. Working Hrs.	Avg. Income/Day
Irrigation/shoveling	10 hrs (men)	13,000 Rials (Rls.) (\$2.7)
Picking/weeding (women)	9 hrs	6,000 Rls, (\$1.25)
Picking (children)	8 hrs	3,500 Rls. (70 cents)

Source: ICRI reports, 1997.

Although the type of work performed by children partly justifies their low wage, the fact that children are subject to exploitation cannot be denied.

Most of the illegal refugees live at a marginal level. In Mash had, the average combined income of the refugee families ranged from 100,000 to 350,000 Rs./ month (about \$20 to \$70). The minimum legal wage for unskilled workers is about 260,000 Rs./month. Afghan refugees also enjoy the benefit of free primary health care services provided by the Ministry of Health (MOH) in health posts and health centres. Non-governmental organisations like the MSF and Merlin, along with the MOH have been efficiently helping refugees solve their health problems.

Documented refugees have also been provided with free primary education. Afghans have benefited from the schooling system in Iran. Until 1995, Afghan children could register in Iranian public schools, and as a result

many more children are literate (especially girls) than in their parents generation. After a gap of two years (1995-97), during which only permanent cardholders were allowed to enroll in public schools, it was in 1997 that temporary cardholders were once again allowed to attend public schools. Apart from these, the documented refugees were also provided the benefit from state subsidies for fuel, water, bread and transportation.

Iran, which is regarded as one of the most secretive, isolated and difficult countries is also the most generous host in the world bearing the burden of millions of refugees coming from Afghanistan and Iraq. With very little aid from the international community, Iran's policy of allowing refugees to move about and seek employment has suggested not only a remarkable level of generosity and understanding of the refugee circumstances, but also proved that promoting self-reliance of the refugees is best for the refugees and also the most cost-effective approach for the host government and the society as well.

However this policy of Iran is to undergo a drastic change as Iran along with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is planning a massive repatriation programme for the refugees. The programme intends to encourage Afghans, thousands of whom are undocumented, to come forward to register and to be assisted and repatriated. According to the draft plan, those found to have continuing well-founded fears of persecution in Afghanistan will be relocated to designate areas within Iran. This attitude on the part of the Iranian government is understandable given the fact that Iran's economy is slowing down and it is becoming increasingly difficult to bear the burden of the refugee population.

Afghan Women in Iran

It has been mentioned earlier in this article that women constitute the bulk of the refugee population, yet they remain the most vulnerable and neglected group. In Iran, the Afghan men are very often not able to work due to a number of reasons, which includes physical disability (a consequence of the war situation in their own country) to the lack of proper documentation.

Since Afghans have for long been fighting a civil war, many households lack male members. Men have been out for war or have lost their lives in the process. Thus very often women are the heads of the households or the principal breadwinners of their families. To contribute to their family income Afghan women usually work at home a result of cultural restraints, which does not welcome the work of women outside the home. As a result, it is the middle-aged

women who can work outside the house, in the fields (for instance) picking and harvesting fruits and vegetables.

Another reason for women working at home is the women's various responsibilities at home. Thus they need to look for a job, which can be combined with the housework. Hence, shelling pistachios, cleaning wool, making brooms, cleaning saffron, making chains, and carpet weaving are examples of some of the work Afghan women do at home. Women often suffer from muscular skeletal diseases, which are caused by long hours of poor posture, bending over and performing repetitive and mechanical work. Cleaning wool is an unhealthy job, as it causes obstructive bronchitis and other lung ailments.

Without the work of women and children, daily work at brick kilns cannot be completed. As the refugees often live with their families at brick kilns, it is possible for women to join men and help them by collecting and piling bricks.

Working at such brick kilns is backbreaking, while the average pay for the family is about 12,000 Rls./day. Compared to the minimum pay announced by the Ministry of Labour in 1998 (i.e. 8,482 Rls./day) Afghan women's earnings are very low ranging from 12% to 60% of the minimum. Table 2 below shows some examples of women's average income, based on at least 8 to 10 hours work per day.

The interviews carried out by the International Consortium For Refugees In Iran (ICRI) in the Afghan settlements in Sistan-Baluchistan, Mash had, and south of Tehran indicated that the number of working women in Zahedan was considerably lower than that in Mash' had. This must be due to the limited job opportunities in Sistan-Baluchistan, as well as the refugees' cultural background.

In the settlements located in the south of Tehran, it seems that there are not many employment opportunities available as in Mash' had. Thus, in these areas, being able to get work that can be done at home (embroidery, shelling pistachios etc.) largely depends on personal relationships.

Table 2: Example's Of Women's Work And Their Average Income

Type of Work	Avg. Pay	Avg. Income/Day
Shelling pistachios	300 Rls./kilo	1,800 Rls. (30 cents)
Cleaning wool	2,500 Rls./kilo	5,000 Rls. (about \$1)
Making brooms	50 Rls./broom	2,000 Rls. (about 40 cents)
Making chains	300 Rls./kilo	3,000 Rls. (about 60 cents)
Cleaning saffron	1,000 Rls./kilo	2,000 Rls.
Straightening used nails	250 Rls./kilo	1,000 Rls. (about 20 cents)
Embroidery	10,000 Rls./piece	1,200 Rls. (about 25 cents)

Source: ICRI Reports, 1997

Against the above background, it is necessary to investigate the perceptions of the needs and priorities of Afghan refugee women in Iran. The International Consortium For Refugees In Iran (ICRI) conducted a Needs Assessment Survey among Afghan women, both of the Hazara and the Pashtun ethnic group, to investigate the perceptions of their needs and priorities in August 1998. The study used a 'focus group discussion' technique and the objective of the study was to develop a better understanding of how two culturally different groups of Afghan refugee women see their needs and priorities. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- Rank refugees' own priorities for education, health and income generation programmes.
- Identify skills which women would like training in.
- Determine the problems of working women and the obstacles to work.
- Determine the degree of refugee women's access to health services.
- Identify obstacles to schooling for children.

The first aim of the study was to find out from the refugee women what they saw as their major needs. An important feature of the survey was that the facilitators of the survey did not give the women any suggestions- all the points were raised by the women themselves. Another important point worth noting was that the groups, the Hazaras and Pashtun women had no difference of opinion. They put the highest priority on *education and literacy*. After this the other areas which they highlighted were: clinics run by Afghans for Afghans, creation of workshops run by Afghans where they can work, creation of job opportunities where Afghan women can work, legal security and documentation, ID cards for their children, freedom of movement and personal security, basic needs (housing, household goods etc.), social insurance benefits.

When asked to prioritize their needs in the sectors of education, health and income, again there was a strong consensus among most of the women that

their priority was for *education*. However, the Hazara women emphasized basic education and literacy while the Pashtun women emphasized vocational training. The second priority for all groups was *income-earning opportunities*.

Both groups of women identified a wide range of *skills* and jobs, which they aspired to. However the Pashtuns said that apart from teaching, they were not allowed to work outside of their homes. The skills, which they identified for home-based work, included:

1. sewing, crocheting, embroidery
2. weaving carpets, weaving sashes
3. making bags

Many also wanted training for jobs based outside the home such as nursing, giving injections, hairdressing, secretarial skills, dried flower arrangement, running a kindergarten and research into refugee needs.

With regard to the *characteristics of a good job* the women pointed out that a good job should have the following features: it should have a *decent pay* and provide for at least a living wage; there should be *flexibility* and preference would be given to informal and the private sector, part-time work, work which can be done at home and which does not require bulky or expensive tools; *personal safety* should be ensured; where *literacy is not required* and any training needed is given free; the work should be *motivating* and should benefit other women (nursing/teaching); there should be *job security*, a job which they do not have to go hunting for and is *introduced to them* by an agency or someone they know.

The women also enlisted several *obstacles and problems* faced by the working women. The major obstacle faced by the Afghan women is *illiteracy*. Moreover being *foreigners*, they are not very familiar with Iran, the Iranian people get the priority for jobs, many do not have a work permit and Afghan university degrees are not recognised in Iran. Sometime the *husbands are not very supportive* of his wife's work. *Lack of childcare and housing conditions* (crowded homes where it is difficult to set up a loom or a sewing machine) are other obstacles faced by working women. *Cultural differences, language barrier, lack of familiarity with the working practices* are some other problems they face. The women have complained that they are discriminated and are *not allowed to make decisions*. The Afghan women are also laughed at and *mistrusted* by the Iranians.

Both Pashtun and Hazara women stated that they believed that both boys and girls should be provided with education. The Pashtun women said that it was particularly important for girls so that they could help the women of their

country in future. The reasons why boys and girls could not attend school were similar. Poverty, opposition from parents, legal constraints, schooling gaps were some of the reasons why they failed to go to school.

With regard to the health needs the Afghan women discussed their access to and use of various health services including general clinics, family planning, antenatal care and vaccination. There was a mixture of views with regard to access to government facilities. However, there was clearly not universal access to free government primary health services for refugees. It was found out that some government clinics even refused to vaccinate Afghan refugee children. On the other hand, lack of family planning or antenatal care was generally more to do with the husband or his family's opposition.

General Observations and Recommendations

The survey clearly revealed that the Afghan refugee women had to share the responsibilities of their families along with men but faced a number of obstacles and problems with regard to job, health care, schooling of their children and basic adjustments into the Iranian society. The women complained bitterly of the limitations placed on them by their husbands and his family and blamed this on their "low" culture. They thought that it was time that these customs undergo some reformation.

The women also did not attach too much importance to the fact that many of them were illegal refugees and lacked proper documentation. Although this came up in discussions it was never regarded as a top priority. They believed that many other things could be done to improve their lives even if they continued to remain as 'illegals'.

Refugee women should be provided with *education, literacy and skills training* as this remained their top priority. Provision of childcare, small loans and a job-search service would enable many more women to earn a living. The refugees should be involved in decision making and solving refugee problems. Counseling should be done to the male counterparts and the other senior family members of the refugee women who want to work, avail of health facilities in the clinics and get educated. This would help the refugee women to tread on a smoother path to self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

The women who constitute the largest and one of the most vulnerable groups are beyond doubt also the most important component of the refugee population

and their needs are to be given top priority for a refugee programme to be successful. With the needs and priorities of Afghan refugee women in Iran well explored, the challenge for the future is to translate the improved understanding of their situation into concrete, effective programmes which will help them live in safety and dignity. Since the refugee women are the best judges of their needs and aspirations, they should be included in all aspects of programme design and implementation.

Since the Iranian government along with the UNHCR is organising an ambitious voluntary repatriation programme through which hundreds of thousands of Afghans are likely to be repatriated, the question of the difficulties faced by the women upon return to their war ravaged country is basic to the safety and security of the refugees. Along with the problems of food and shelter, the total lack of social infrastructure, legal problems related to the ownership of land, demographic imbalances, lack of health, employment and educational opportunities will plague the lives of thousands returning to their homes. Tapping the resources that women bring to bear in development will be essential to the process of reconstruction of their country of origin. Including women at every stage of the planning process is essential to ensure that there will be no surprises along their way. This will, in the process, ensure a safe and successful repatriation programme.

Agony Continues: Refugee Women of Bhutan*

Jagatmani Acharya

Bhutan became a party to the UN convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women on 31 August 1981. But the situation of Bhutanese refugee women is appalling. Among the 100,000 Bhutanese refugees, around 50% of the population in the refugee camps are women, most of these women are illiterate and they participate less in social activities. In the cultural sphere the southern Bhutanese women had to bear the brunt of the government's cultural policy. The Bhutanese government forgetting its responsibility towards improving the status of women has deliberately attacked them in this campaign of ethnic cleansing. Some of the discriminatory policies of the government are, inter ethnic marriage policy, the 1985 Citizenship Act and the Census of 1988 and the one nation one people policy. Under one nation one people policy the culture of ruling elite was imposed on others thus banning the cultural pluralism in Bhutan. Southern Bhutanese women were deprived of their right to wear their dress; their ceremonial marriage necklaces were stripped off; they were made to cut short their hair. Instead, they were forced to adopt the dress and culture of the northern Bhutanese.

The women have always been the worst hit by government repression. In most cases, their husbands were imprisoned or had to flee the country for fear of persecution. The security forces plundered their homes, tortured, intimidated and raped these helpless women. There are 156 rape victims in Bhutanese refugee camps as per the records of *CVICT Nepal*. According to *Shangri-La Without Human Rights* eight women were raped to death. The following testimonies exemplify the extent to which women's rights have been violated by the Bhutanese government.

Demand for Girls to be supplied to the Army

“My father was born in Bhutan and his age is 63. Every day the office bearers used to come and threaten me to leave the village. They not only intimidated me, but the Bhutanese army one day suddenly came and burnt all the 27 houses of the village. They accused me of being a Nepali citizen and asked me to hand over our girls and wives to serve them. They demanded that 1520 ladies be handed over. In these circumstances we left our village. Our relatives are still there and we have our registered land there.

A statement by Mr. A (Voices of Pain/The Bhutan tragedy when will it end - report of the SAARC jurist

Mission on Bhutan, May 1992)

Rape and Torture by Security Personnel

A 23-year-old woman from Phibsoo, Sarbhang district, gave the following account of her and her husband's arrest and treatment in detention at an army camp in Sarbhang in November 1990.

“My husband and I had heard that the armies were coming to confiscate our goods, so we both went to take our valuables to my parents' house. On the way back, we were arrested on the banks of the Thulopinkwa River by about ten army personnel. The soldiers started beating us asking us if we had gone to see the party people and where the leaders were. They asked us about the campsites of our party people. We said we did not know. The soldiers tied our hands behind our backs and dragged us along. We were beaten all the time. We were taken to Sarbhang, about 30 km away and kept in a school that had been turned into an army barrack for about a month. I was locked inside a room and my husband was tied to a pillar in the compound. I could see him through the window. He was beaten until he vomited blood. He was also made to sit on the ground and was kicked. He was refused food for one week. Every night two or three soldiers came and raped me. This happened every night for a whole month. I was given food every night at about midnight. If I asked for water, I was beaten with chains that the soldiers used to tie on their guns. When I was released...I stayed for one month until I realised I was pregnant. I was so ashamed that I could not face the other villagers so I left Bhutan in early January 1991. I left my children with my mother in-law in Bhutan. I went to jungle hoping I would die there. Then I went to Kachugoan in Kokrajhar, Assam where I stayed with some relatives. My sister and a male relative came to Kachugoan by chance and I bumped into them there. They paid for me to come to Maidhar. As a result of rape I had twins, one of whom died and one survived. I do not know if I will see my husband again.”

From Amnesty International Report, Dec. 1992

Forceful Eviction

From Shangrila without Human Rights, AHURA, Bhutan, Ms. Bachala Maya Acharya narrates her story

One day in January 1992. Mr. Uday Bhattraai, a local court official, came to my house accompanied by twelve army personnel, asked me to list my property and ordered me to leave the country within four days. The next day army personnel came and took me to the village headman (Gup). They harassed

and threatened me by telling me of the dire consequences I'd have to face if I did not leave the country. They made me wait at the Gup office till mid-night.

Two days later, the "Gup" took me to Dungkhag Court at Damphu, Chirang Bhutan, and handed me to the "Thrimpon" (Chief district court official). The "Thrimpon" ordered me to leave the country within four days, saying that it was an order from the King and the Royal Bodyguards. I refused to leave my motherland and told him that I was a bona-fide citizen of Bhutan who had landed property since generations.

Moreover, I told him that my son Mr. Narayan Sharma had been arrested by the government and was imprisoned in Chemgang central prison because of his involvement in the human rights movement. When I repeatedly refused to comply with his order to leave the country, he took me to a courtroom and kept me in solitary confinement for the rest of the day. At dusk, he ordered me to return home in Lamidara, which is about 35 kms from Damphu, I went home on foot, reaching there at midnight.

After three days, army personal once again came to my home. They threatened me and looted all my movable household belongings. When the complaint of the Civil Administrators' excesses reached Thimphu, a high level delegation led by Home Minister Dago Tshering reached Chirang on January 13, 1992 for investigations. (Vide below: report in Kuensel, dated January 25, 1992) We were informed that we could express our grievances to the visiting minister.

Accordingly, I wrote a petition, met the minister and submitted the same. The minister assured me that I could stay in Bhutan. However, as soon as he left for Thimphu, army personnel entered my house and ordered me to leave the country. I steadfastly refused to do so.

However, as they continued to threaten me I ultimately told them that if it was the command of the King to evict me from the country and if I were to be penalized for refusing to do so, then I would appeal to the Royal government to release my son from the Thimphu central jail, where he had since been transferred from Chemgang, and was undergoing rigorous imprisonment since a peaceful demonstration in September 1990.

The Court official told me that my son would be released only on the condition that I leave the country. After a few days, my son was released. The very day that he came home, at mid-night, army personnel came to my house, threatened my family, then threw us out of our home which they proceeded to lock up.

At mid-night, I along with the helpless members of my family left my beloved homeland. After a difficult four days trek, we reached the Indian border town, along with my son, my daughter-in-law and my 17-month-old grandson. We were joined by other forcibly evicted Bhutanese nationals who helped us reach a refugee camp in Jhapa, eastern Nepal.

Refugee Women exercise the Right to Return

The Bhutanese refugees under the aegis of Appeal Movement Coordinating Council demanded their right to return. The Bhutanese refugee women played a very active role in the Peace March both as peace marchers and organisers. There were female representations from all the camps in the Appeal Movement. Exercising the right to return and the right to peaceful assembly and association as enshrined in articles 13 and 20 respectively of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, altogether around 1333 refugee women, in sixteen batches undertook the peace march to Bhutan from the vicinity of the refugee camps and from different places in India.

There were tens of thousands of other refugee women who were involved in the demonstration, mass meetings and other activities. But the peace marchers were intercepted, arrested and imprisoned by the Indian authorities as they entered the Indian soil after crossing over the Indo-Nepal border. The Indian authorities promulgated prohibitory orders although the refugees were peacefully traversing the land route through which they were driven to Nepal following forcible eviction from Bhutan.

After a prolonged detention in Indian jails of Siliguri, Jalpaiguri and Baharampur in West Bengal, Bhutanese refugees entered Bhutan, But the Bhutanese security forces deported them back to India and from there they were sent back to Nepal by the Indian police.

Women in Bhutan

With the schools and the health services remaining closed for the last ten years in south Bhutan, women and children have no access to these facilities. The harassment in south and eastern Bhutan continues. Amnesty International's report on Bhutan in 1998, states that, 'Ms. Kinzang Chozam, who was pregnant, was among those arrested and was not allowed to see her children. Other women were arrested, apparently in an attempt to force their husband to give themselves up to the authorities.' The most serious problems that the women in Bhutan are facing is the risk of rape, sexual humiliation, imprisonment and eviction from the

country. Women of all ages have been the targets of the police, army and even the civilian repressions.

Women in the Camps

Women in the camps continue to be subjected to various forms of torture and suppression. Many women have become the victims of local toughs and the authorities working in the camps. The harassment of women within the family is no less inside the camps. But the women have become active in the awareness programmes within and outside the camps. The role of women in running camp-life is often greater than men; their activities start from early morning until late night.

Now many women in the camps with the help of OXFAM (UK) know how to read and write. They write poems and short stories, and many of them who did not earlier know how to read and write are teachers and social activists. They now say that if they had known reading and writing before, they would have never left the country, and would have rather fought back to remain within their country Bhutan.

Dislocated Subjects: The Story of Refugee Women*

Mekno Kaapanda and Sherene Fenn

Introduction

The notion of a dislocated subject is not an uncommon one in today's social and political landscape. Our society is characterised by what many political scientists refer to as an erosion of the values and knowledge systems, which used to structure our existence. Traditional modes of authority, identities and social structures are collapsing, creating a vacuum as we struggle to construct new ones to replace the old. Dislocation represents a natural consequence of this process. It describes a psycho-social transition whereby the individual's identity and sense of self are disrupted, causing trauma but also forcing the individual to seek out a new identity in order to adapt to a new social context. Dislocation can be caused by a number of factors. To a large extent it can be viewed as a natural process. After all, society and culture are not static and monolithic constructs, but processes that evolve and change. Societal change rarely occurs on an even basis and many people experience some sort of dislocation as they try to come to terms with the transformation of their society. Another source of dislocation is war, a process that represents transition in its most violent and bewildering form.

A third source of dislocation is derived from coerced human displacement. Today it is estimated that more than 21 million people have been forced to cross internationally recognised borders in order to escape human rights abuses. Refugeehood, therefore, represents an imposed state of being that is the result of the trauma of persecution. The dislocation that refugees experience is an integral part, if not the definitive aspect, of the refugee condition. Flight, migration and becoming a refugee bring an avalanche of changes to an individual's material and social situation. (Maciej Domanski, 'Insights from Refugee Experience: A Background Paper on Temporary Protection' in James C. Hathaway (ed), *Reconceiving International Refugee Law*, The Hague, 1997, pp. 23-28). His/her social status, self-image and identity become greatly disturbed, as the individual's role system is dis- and re-organised.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the refugee experience of dislocation from a gendered perspective, with particular reference to the situation of Afghan refugee women. Women together with children make up 80% of the world's refugee population; their numerical dominance alone justifies a critical interrogation. More important, however, is the fact that gender represents a useful category or methodology through which to analyse the refugee experience and the phenomenon of dislocation. Refugees are not a homogenous or uniform

category of people. They are divided along cultural, linguistic, ethnic, political and religious lines, to cite but a few differentiating factors. Gender represents such a factor. The term “gender” will be used to refer to the construction of differences between men and women and ideas of “femininity” and “masculinity”. It is not within the scope of this essay to discuss the basis of this difference. It is, however, noted that difference has been said to rest in such concepts and processes such as biology, culture, socialisation, language and linguistics.

Gender, therefore, serves to fragment or at least problematise categories, which would otherwise essentialise the refugee experience. Gender, as a unit of analysis, allows us to contrast the lives of men and women within the context of the refugee experience. It illustrates that women experience the dislocation of refugeehood in a different and unique way. This paper recognises the problematic nature of the concept of gender. Like other categories, it is unstable because identity itself is unstable and constructed from a combination of other (macro) identities. In our case, this means that refugee women are not merely women, but possess other identities that relate to race, class, ethnicity and religion. These other identities may divide women more than they are united by their common gender. Despite the limitations of a gendered analysis (a limitation that is inevitable in any conceptual framework), gender clearly represents a useful method to analyse and understand dislocation in the context of the refugee experience.

The Dislocated Refugee

If dislocation is a natural experience brought about by the changes that any evolving society undergoes, then the refugee condition represents dislocation on a far greater, more radical and accelerated scale. The social, psychological and economic consequences of living as a refugee are profound. Being a refugee has been described as a form of bereavement where the individual is forced to endure the loss of roots, geography, emotional support and status (Mutoz in Helia Lopez Zarzosa, “Internal Exile, Exile and Return”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 11 (2), 1998, p.192). Egon Kunz, for example, compares the refugee condition to a state of suspension in which the refugee experiences “the spiritual, spatial, temporal, and emotional equidistant of no man’s land.” (Cited in Domanski, p. 28) Similarly, Simon Turner sees in the refugee condition elements and processes of social rupture: social disintegration, undoing, dissolution and decomposition, all of which are produced when accepted social structures and norms are suspended or lost (Simon Turner, “Angry Men In Camps: Gender, Age and Class Relations Among Burundian Refugees in Tanzania”, *New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No.9*, June 1999, p. 8).

The infantilisation or “de-maturation” that refugees are forced to endure is a critical and fundamentally disenfranchising process. It begins with the transference of decision-making power from refugees to officials, with the latter assuming the right to intrude into the private world of the former (Dorrtanski, “Insights from Refugee Experience”). Refugees have little chance of influencing administrative decisions relating to their life. This is because their knowledge and perception of their own problems are viewed as limited, biased and more subjective than those of experts. The result is that refugees experience a lack of power and self-determination. To overcome this state effective psychosocial adjustment is required.

Refugee Women and Dislocation

Refugee women experience displacement and dislocation in a different way to male refugees. Their gender often functions to their disadvantage and this is apparent in a number of ways. The unique types of persecutions that women are subjected to and which may compel them to flee their countries of origin, are not enumerated as grounds for persecution in the international legal instruments that define refugees. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees does not provide for a separate category for women who face gender-specific persecution or human rights abuses, which often occur in the private sphere and the sanctity of the home. As a result, women who fear harsh or inhuman treatment because they transgressed their society’s laws or customs regarding the role of women, find it difficult to establish a claim under the current international definition of refugee. In other words, women have less of a chance of obtaining refugee status as the key criteria for being a refugee are primarily drawn from the realm of public life, which, in many societies, is still dominated by men. The Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has encouraged the states to consider women who are subjected to particular human rights violations to be covered under the “social group”, but it is left to the discretion of countries to follow these recommendations (UNHCR, “Guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women”, EC/SCP/67, Geneva, July 1991, paragraph 53/ I a)

Due to the intrinsic social and economic instability that the refugee condition presents, the physical and emotional safety of all refugees is compromised. However, it is women and their dependants who are particularly vulnerable. They often face rape and other forms of sexual violence prior to, during their flight, following their arrival in countries of asylum and in some cases even during repatriation operations and re-integration phases. The potential for abuse increases considerably when women and children are separated from

their families amidst the confusion of flight. The perpetrators of this sexual abuse include military personnel, immigration personnel, bandit or pirate groups, other male refugees and rival ethnic groups. The abuse may be as flagrant as outright rape and abduction or as subtle as an offer of protection, documents or assistance in exchange for sexual favours (UNHCR Guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women, 1991). Data on Vietnamese boat people from UNHCR indicates that 39% of the women had been abducted or raped by pirates while at sea. (Dorothy Q. Thomas in "Preliminary -Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women to the Commission on Human Rights", E/CNA/1995/42, paragraph 215).

Even residing in a refugee camp can magnify the problems that refugee women face. The physical structure and location of the camp itself can undermine the safety of refugee women and contribute to the increase of sexual violence. For example, refugee camps can be located in areas with serious crime problems; they can be geographically isolated from local populations, making police protection difficult. Simple problems like poor lighting can compound the risk of sexual attacks at night. Women are also targeted when they leave the camp to collect water, firewood or simply when they have to use the facilities, which may be located away from the security cordons of the camp.

While residing in host countries, refugee women experience the negative aspects of refugeehood (such as losing traditional roles, responsibilities and supportive networks) just like their male counterparts. They are uprooted from their social and cultural context, which previously structured their behavioural roles and value systems. However, displacement and dislocation for women often means the dismemberment of families, which produces drastic changes to family structures. Many refugee women are vulnerable because they are single or widowed. Thus, the lack of safety that the refugee women experience is largely due to the altering of social and family structures which would otherwise have provided stability and protection. Many female refugees have become the heads of their household, not out of choice, but due to the loss of the male head of the family. In the case of Afghan refugee women, many of their men were forcibly taken to do military service in their country of origin and lost their lives in the process. In other instances, men have returned to their country to conduct business (for example, small trade, selling their property) to cover financial expenses in the country of refuge, and have never returned. Whatever the mode of loss is, the fact is that it has made these women more vulnerable. A large number of single or widowed women are forced to enter into non-consensual relationships in asylum countries in order to obtain protection and food security for their family. Others are forced to engage in prostitution or illicit trade in drugs and alcohol to survive.

Many refugee women, particularly those in, urban contexts, have had to adopt not only new familial roles, but also new social and economic responsibilities, new values and ways of thinking, new lifestyles and occupations. Lacking an effective male support or an alternative means to maintain their families (particularly children) many refugee women were forced to marry in order to procure a male protector and provider. Others have to abandon the private sphere they inhabit as housewives to find paid employment (primarily in the informal sector) or take up an economic activity so as to supplement the family income. In the Indian context, many Afghan women sell home-prepared meals in markets or do some tailoring and stitching at home. The economic activities, which Afghan women engage in are often centred on the domestic sphere, leaving the men to work in more public places, like markets and shops. Burmese women, on the other hand, sometimes find employment as domestic workers in private homes.

A number of urban refugee women are educated professionals who sometimes had to flee their country for precisely this reason. A number of studies have shown that these women are often unable to use their skills in the country of their asylum and find gainful employment. In India, this is primarily due to the fact that the majority of refugees are not able to obtain a Residential Permit, which would regularise their stay in this country. Even with a Residential Permit, refugees do not have the right to work. Because India has not signed the two international legal instruments relating to refugees and has no national refugee policy, refugees in India enjoy none of the basic economic and social entitlements, which their counterparts in other parts of the world do. The lack of work opportunities adds to the dislocation that refugee women experience. In India, there is a case of an Afghan refugee woman, who was one of the first few women to work in the building and construction industry in Afghanistan, earning government recognition and representing her country at international workshops. She was also a member of the Women's Organisation of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and mobilised thousands of women to leave the domestic sphere and engage in paid work. Lack of a steady flow of income and rejections from various Embassies for resettlement to a third country have rendered her desolate and: forced her to contemplate suicide if her situation does not improve.

Refugee women with male support are also in a problematic situation. The collapses of traditional structures of patriarchy and the lack of stability or security have undermined traditional gender roles. Many men, confronting the erosion of their once domineering male identity, have resorted to violent means in an attempt to re-establish their sense of worth and self. Men, once the

providers and breadwinners of their families become perpetrators of domestic violence, beating their wives and children. In such instances, many refugee women are powerless and fearing social ostracisation, do not report such crimes. Fear of engaging in a legal process in a foreign country without the benefit of a certain legal status, is another factor that prevents refugee women from reporting acts of violence against them. Furthermore, domestic violence represents an all too common occurrence in the lives of women all over the world, whether they are refugees or not. Many societies either endorse the right of a man to chastise his wife and children or mystify the true extent and severity of the problem behind myths that represent the home as a safe and loving place, and never the cradle of violence. As a result, acts of violence in the home are largely carried out with impunity and are underreported.

Refugee women also face unique problems when it comes to their resettlement to third countries. UNHCR promotes the resettlement of women-at-risk. This category encompasses women who have protection problems, and are single heads of families or are accompanied by an adult male who is unable to support and assume the role of the head of the family (UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, Geneva, 1997). Intrinsic to a successful application for resettlement is the establishment of a refugee claim. This is problematic, since most women have refugee claims based on the activities of other family members that placed their lives in danger. In other cases, a lack of gender-sensitive interviewing skills has led to the scarcity of adequate information. Cultural considerations, taboos and fear of further victimisation, also inhibit refugee women from completely elaborating on past persecutions. There have also been cases where widowed or single refugee women have married refugees who do not have a very strong refugee claim. Upon marriage, almost all husbands become the principal applicants on the refugee certificate, accepting responsibility for all people on the certificate. This is in line with the traditional background of many refugee women, which dictates that the husband is the head of the household. The main problem with this approach is that it can have serious ramifications for resettlement chances. Because prospective embassies only review the refugee claim of the principal applicant in reaching a decision regarding resettlement, refugee women who have married male refugees with weak claims are severely disadvantaged. The protection problems faced by refugee women during flight and in their country of asylum often follow them on their return home. Most of the time, decisions to repatriate are made by men on their behalf and often motivated by the lack of any other durable solution in the country of asylum. Many women face physical torture when they return home or are once more subjected to restrictive cultural, religious, educational and political practices that discriminate on the basis of sex. In many cases, they have been subjected to physical and sexual violence by the military forces still in control of their area.

Many victims have trouble reporting these crimes to those who are monitoring their safe return, particularly if there is a lack of female monitors.(UNHCR, *Guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women*, paragraph 42,1991)

Conclusion

Despite the aforementioned difficulties, refugee women have exhibited a remarkable openness to change. They are not powerless victims. Forced by changing circumstances, they have assumed new and unfamiliar roles even in environments and communities that are characterised by an opposition to women's independence and self-assertion and have a very low degree of tolerance for non-conformity (Gaim Kibreab, "Eritrean Women Refugees in Khartoum, Sudan, 1970-1990", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 8 (1), 1995, p.1 0).

It must be emphasised that dislocation is not always a negative process. While it is true that during periods of intense crisis and dislocation patriarchy can intensify and deepen the subordination of women, it is equally true that new space for maneuvering is created. Dislocation can produce a climate in which women are no longer obliged to adhere to traditional, culturally determined roles. As Kibreab argues, displacement need not necessarily be a disenfranchising experience but can, for example, represent liberation from patriarchal control and domination exercised through families ("Eritrean Women Refugees in Khartoum, Sudan, 1970-1990", p. 8). A similar point is made by Simon Turner, who sees in social rupture an opportunity to transgress hitherto accepted norms and customs, which have oppressed certain members of the community. In other words, dislocation can be accompanied by positive processes such as growth, transformation and decomposition and the reformulation of old elements into newer and more progressive patterns (Simon Turner, "Angry Men In Camps: Gender, Age and Class Relations Among Burundian Refugees in Tanzania", p. 8). Alternatively, we must be careful not to romanticise displacement and dislocation. Refugee women are still a vulnerable category of persons whose human rights are circumvented. Dislocation, particularly in the context of refugeehood, is a profoundly traumatic experience that can undermine an individual's sense of self as well as threaten his or her physical well being. Clearly, the case of refugee women must be studied in greater detail and policies need to be formulated in order to address their pressing needs and concerns.

(The views expressed in this article are those of the authors, and are not necessarily shared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the United Nations.)

In Search of “Homelands”: Russian Women in Central Asia*

Anita Sengupta

“It is hard to go back... It is not even back really.” ...She trembled a little as she spoke. “But they are making it hard for us. If you want a job you have to apply in Turkoman. The first question they ask is: Do you speak Turkoman? But I have never learnt this language...” She said this with wondering regret...overnight she was a foreigner in her birthplace. I asked “But where will you go?”

“I don’t know. I have relatives in Moscow, but its impossible to find work there... Its too hard a place... harder than here”...

This poignant description is from Colin Thubron’s *The Lost Heart of Asia*, where in the course of a conversation to a half Russian, half Armenian woman, married till recently to a Turkoman, the author portrays the sense of insecurity that is today evident among ethnic Russian women in the Central Asian region. Her ambivalent, “...in a way”, in response to the author’s query of whether she belonged to the region is interpreted by the author to be reflective of the fact that she did not, in fact, belong anywhere, neither to Russia nor to the Central Asian region. This passage, where the author records her predicament, is representative of the position of groups of ethnic Russian women who now feel displaced from places that had till recently been “home”. While in the strict sense of the term, Russians in the Central Asian region cannot be identified as “displaced persons”, as most of them have not been physically dislocated from regions that they had considered as “home” and now also recognize that actual threats to their life and security is very nearly non-existent, yet the increasing sense of isolation and alienation from the regions that they now inhabit and have lived in all their lives, in a sense identifies them as displaced.

This sense of alienation is the result of the recent reconfiguration of political authority along national lines in much of Eurasia today, which has once again focused attention on the compelling political need to identify ethnic “homelands”. Conceived, as “nation states”, there is a distinct project in all newly independent states of the former Soviet Union to promote the language, culture demographic position, economic development and political hegemony of the ethnic group after which the state is named. This programme of “nationalization” of political space has meant that large numbers of people are now left outside their own national territory or do not have one at all and are faced with the dilemma of having to redefine their identities vis-à-vis the regions that they inhabit or emigrate to regions they consider “home”.

One of the most dramatic transformations in recent years has been the change in status of some 25 million ethnic Russians, now resident in the various independent states of the CIS, from a majority group into minorities with disputed identities and uncertain futures. The designation of non-Russians as minorities in the former Soviet Union has been reversed through an abrupt change of fortunes where Russians are today the new “minorities” in the post Soviet states. Ethnic Russians are now a people in quest of an identity as suddenly many of them find themselves to be deemed as “foreigners” in what they had once considered their “homeland”. As reconfigurations create “new” minorities and construct new definitions of majority identity, this is an attempt to examine how notions of “homeland” have changed in the course of this transformation among Russian women in the Central Asian region.

The Russians in Central Asia

Russian migration to the Central Asian region is not a recent event. The first wave of Russians to have settled in Turkestan, consisted of former soldiers, colonial functionaries, traders and priests who arrived in the second half of the 19th century. The second wave consisted of peasants who were settled in the newly acquired lands. Further migration took place during the period of the Revolution and the post Revolution decade and consisted of soldiers and new functionaries as well as a section of the Russian peasantry. The fourth wave of Russian migration began in the years of the Second World War due to the evacuation of industrial units and consisted of workers. The fifth and final wave of Russian migration to Central Asia began around the end of the 1960's and early 1970's and was stimulated by the government. Consisting of the technical intelligentsia and workers, this migration also led to a significant rise in the number of Russian functionaries in the Republics' administrative and industrial structures. Many women were part of the waves of migration, including workers, engineers and technicians. Russian women also came to Central Asia with soldier or officer husbands. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the dilemma of how and where to live in the future came to the forefront in a big way for many of these women. Responses to the situation have differed widely, ranging from recent migrants who wish to repatriate to Russia and those who were born here and still consider this as home. The dilemma of Russian women married to Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazak or Turkman spouses is a particularly difficult one, as their acceptance within the Central Asian families, has in a number of instances, been reduced in the aftermath of disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The massive effort at politicization of space that has resulted due to the emergence of “nationalizing” states in the Central Asian has meant that a

number of changes are now underway in the states. One of the most significant is the proclamation of new language laws in the states, establishing the legal hegemony of local languages over Russian. This has meant that the socio-professional status of the Russian population is seen as being threatened in the newly independent states. It is significant to keep in mind that the integration of the Russian population within the Central Asian societies was low. In particular, most of the Russian population never felt the need to learn the local languages.

This today means that in the face of introduction of new language laws, the possibility of discrimination is higher. Here, the most commonly heard complaint is that the possibility of finding jobs and prospects of promotion has been significantly reduced in the aftermath of independence of the Republics. Also there are doubts about the future of children particularly since the ability to acquire the Central Asian languages has now become very important as the use of Russian for all official purposes is likely to be reduced.

While the out migration of Russian population from the Central Asian Republics to the RSFSR had begun by the end of the 1980's, there is also the understanding among the Russian population that Russians in the Central Asian Republics are different from the Russians living in Russia. This is because their domestic lifestyle has assimilated much of what is characteristic of the Central Asian way of life. In fact on migrating to Russia they are identified as "Kyrgyz Russians" or "Uzbek Russians". Life in Russia is difficult and (more often than not job prospects are low). All this has combined to mean that a sense of insecurity pervades among Russian women today, prompted not so much by external factors as by the necessity of internal reconstruction of one's own views about one's place in life beyond the borders of ethnic homelands. Moreover, for most of the migrating Russians, their sense of displacement is magnified by the fact that integration into Russian society in Russia is proving to be difficult. This has led to a tragedy that is reflected in these words of Natasha, a schoolteacher in Samarkand.

It is not a question of returning to Russia. I have never lived there. I was born and brought up in Samarkand and my parents have lived here most of their lives and are committed to it. I love this place and my whole life is here. I don't look forward to going to Russia. I hardly know it I hate Moscow... Increasingly we are being looked upon, as foreigners and I do not think it will be long before we hear shouts of "Russians go home".

A Search for Homelands

A sizeable proportion of the Russian women living in cities like Uzbekistan today were born in Central Asia. They have memories of their fathers or grandfathers who had fought and sacrificed here during the Revolution and also for most of them their parents or grandparents are buried here. Yet, while recognizing that having been born here, this is their “homeland”, most of them also point to the fact that having been infused since childhood with Russian culture, Russia is also “homeland”. In fact many point out that this cultural difference is so significant that the sense of Central Asia being “homeland” is significantly reduced. The ambiguity and uncertainty that pervades is evident from responses to a study that sought to interpret the recent changes in the lives of Central Asian women. As a teacher at the Tashkent Technical University, pointed out when asked whether she considered Central Asia to be her “homeland.”

I myself grew up in an Uzbek mahallah and the question of where to live has simply not arisen until now. The point is not the state language - to a certain extent it is possible to learn Uzbek, even at my age, the point is different- a question of one's homeland. It would be strange to suddenly find oneself an emigrant it is something entirely unexpected. Yes, this is our home, we have many people dear to us here, and one has passed one's whole life here. But life is just not going to be the same here... I see my future as lying in Russia. Not because someone is making me leave... I am not certain that my opinions will count when decisions regarding my fate are being made. I know that in Russia it would not be easy for me either because there too there are strong vestiges of the old regime. But I believe that nevertheless, I need to be in my homeland, although in my heart I will always retain a great love for Uzbekistan.

That this sense of duality is being felt by the younger groups of Russian women also, those who were born in the region is evident from the reply of a young student at the Tashkent Institute of communications, while answering the same question.

Uzbekistan is my homeland, it is difficult for me to imagine that I could be able to live elsewhere.

My home, friends and relatives are all here. But neither is Russia an alien country...I have always found that Russians in Central Asia differ from Russians in Russia itself. My elder sister and her husband left four years ago for the Orenburg region. They are very depressed... I do not want to go anywhere, the main problem for me' is the language, even though at the daily level, I do not have any problems with it. But if it came to using Uzbek for my professional work, it would be very' difficult for me. Life in Uzbekistan differs from life in Russia and is dictated by another way of doing things, another way of thinking.

The last decade has shown that in diglossic societies, like the Central Asian one, abrupt changes in language usage is improbable. While this largely

negates the most significant difficulty identified by the Russian women in the Central Asian region, yet, the sense of displacement that has now become pervasive means that most echo the desire to repatriate to Russia. In a process of what is termed as “hidden migration” many of the younger generation are migrating to Russia with the hope of the older members of the families following subsequently. A search for “homeland” thus continues to be one of the fallouts of the politicization of space that accompanies the process of nationalization of states.

“I saw helplessness everywhere and felt powerless to act positively to make a difference. I felt the feeling of being a lost woman.”

Chronicles of Sufferings - Refugee 'Women of South Asia'*

Syed Sikander Mehdi

No one wishes to be a refugee. One is forced to become one by circumstances beyond one's control. Wars and conflicts between states, and structural, political, social, sectarian, ethnic and sexual violence within states often drive desperate people towards refugeehood. Indeed, for many men, women and children on the run or in the camps awaiting return, the exoduses beyond and within borders have proved to be too overwhelming and disillusioning. Constantly at risk and threat, the refugees suffer innumerable vulnerabilities, indignities and insecurities.

By comparison, the refugee women generally suffer the most. They are more threatened at every stage of flight -in their country of origin, along escape routes and in border areas, in refugee camps, in countries of asylum, during repatriation and even in their country of resettlement. They encounter more violence because they happen to be women. In the absence of male members, the households headed by women are the norm in refugee situations and so two thirds of the world's refugees are women and girls.

Fear of rape haunts them at all stages of refugeehood, from flight to asylum. In fact, rape is a common element in the pattern of persecution or terror or "ethnic cleansing" causing forced migration of families. The risks multiply when women and girls try to cross military lines or regions affected by lawlessness or civil war.

In camps, moreover, the women may be forced into sex in exchange for material assistance for themselves and their children and sometimes even the officials use rations or identity papers in order to sexually coerce women. Traumas, hardships, guilt and shame of post- rape living, the agony of witnessing near and dear ones dying due to malnutrition, sickness and fights, the terrible feeling of loss of home, valuable possessions, family members, dignity and identity, and the unending agonizing wait for the day of return are not merely images of possible sufferings. These are the realities of feminine refugeehood. These are happening all the time, are well known and well documented.

Refugees in South Asia

But little is known about South Asian refugee women and the state of their refugeehood. It is only recently that an active interest has developed in the region in research and study on forced population displacements. This is ironic, because South Asia has been consistently criss-crossed by successive waves of involuntary migratory movements. A recent study by Ranabir Samaddar entitled " *Understanding Migratory Flows in South Asia: A humanitarian agenda*" lists twelve important flows of rejected people and unwanted migrants.

Again, IDPs constitute an important segment of forcibly displaced population in South Asia. A study by Samir Das, Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury and Tapan Bose (presented at a regional conference on internal displacement in Asia at Bangkok in February 2000), suggests that there are about 30 million IDPs in the region.

However, certain issues still need to be addressed. How many among these and other categories of South Asia displaced persons are women? What traumas have they suffered or are suffering? How do they cope with the multiple challenges of refugeehood? Finally, are these refugee women gaining empowerment through their travails in flight, exile, repatriation and resettlement or are they withering away as individuals? Answers to these questions are not easy to trace. Tracing women's inclusion in the South Asian regional refugee regime is a tall order. Serious gender focused regional refugee studies are the need of the hour. Further, talking about themselves, their vulnerabilities, their experiences and their dreams, by and large, remains a taboo in a predominantly patriarchal society. Patriarchy ensures that the culture of silence that is so cleverly weaved through male manipulations is not disturbed. What then occurs when such women become refugees?

The State of Women Refugees in South Asia

Indeed, this world of refugees and IDPs is a crowded world. Women and children constitute the largest numbers in this world. While comprehensive, gender based statistical details are not easy to find, a UNHCR data limited to a small percentage of refugees in South Asia taken as sample and referred to in Asha Hans paper (presented at a regional conference on women and children in refugee and refugee like situations in South Asia held in November 1999 at Dhaka), shows that refugee women and children form 76 percent of the total refugee population in Pakistan, 97 percent in India, 73 percent in Bangladesh and 87 percent in Nepal. It is widely believed that refugee women and girl children form the majority in South Asia's refugee population.

Though not very widely reported, some of them- like African, Latin American, Eastern European and South East Asian female refugees - have been subjected to sexual violence and abuse. Sri Lankan women, for example, reportedly encountered sexual assaults at the hands of security forces, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces. Asha Hans maintains that gender specific violence is common and the same women have been open to abuse by security forces and police in India where they went in quest of refuge.

Life in the conflict zones in Sri Lanka is tragic. The Vanni region, for example, is only a six-hour drive from the bustling capital of Colombo, but is a ghetto of traumatized civilians. It is a region where certain areas are controlled by Government forces and others by Tiger insurgents. People are frequently caught in the crossfire and women suffer most. Here, forty year old Pushpukanti, a mother of two, fled 14 times, the last time losing everything including her only son. Like Pushpukanti, many thousands have spent years on the road, always struggling to stay one step ahead of the fighting.

In Nepal, another South Asian state, the Bhutanese people of Nepalese origin are suffering for over a decade. It was the nationality issue triggered by the 1985 Citizenship Act and the census exercise of 1988, which caused their forced migration in 1990-92, 1993-95, and 1996-97. In a systematic way, pre-determined geographical targets and localities were picked up. Raids were unleashed and arbitrary arrests, torture, rape and killings committed. Captives were kept in detention in horrendous conditions and the men, women and children who were well settled in Bhutan for a long time were uprooted and forced out. Most of them took shelter in camps in Nepal. Commenting on the condition of these refugees and the camps, M. Sharma of BRAVE - an NGO working in the camps, observed: "They (the refugees) were sheltered in makeshift camps on the brink of the Kankai River in Jhapa district of eastern Nepal with no proper sanitation, food or medicine. I saw helplessness everywhere and I felt indeed powerless to act positively to make a difference. I deeply felt the feeling of being a lost woman."

Also widely unreported are the traumas and travails of women refugees from Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Situated in the south east of Bangladesh, covering about one tenth of the area of the country and accounting for about one percent of its population, the CHT is the traditional home of 13 tribal people, including Chakmas, Marma, Tripura, Tanachangya and Chak. Collectively known as "Jumma people", the inhabitants of the CHT region have suffered frequent displacement. Successive Governments tried systematically to destroy

the distinct cultural, religious, linguistic and economic features of the region and reduce the degree of its political autonomy.

This resulted in the launching of the movement for the greater autonomy of Jummaland, creation of the Shanti Bahini, the militant wing of the movement, intimidation, assault and massacre of the inhabitants by the security forces, forcible settling of Bangladeshis in the region and deliberate eviction of the indigenous people. During the 1980s and 90s, several waves of refugees fled to nearby Indian states. A peace agreement signed on 2 December 1997 by the two warring parties resulted in the eventual repatriation of these refugees from CHT. Besides suffering the agony of deliberate and forced displacement, shelter in a very hostile environment, repatriation of many against their will, refugee women between the age of 13 and 60 were reportedly raped by the Bangladeshi soldiers and settlers and subjected to sexual violence by the local population.

Likewise, Rohingya refugee women suffered enormously during their flight and stay in the camps in Bangladesh and while returning to and resettling in Myanmar. They fled in waves since mid 1970s when the Myanmar Government pursued a deliberate policy of decitizenising the Rohingya Muslims, subjecting them to army harassment, arrests, rapes and arbitrary violence, and forcing them to flee. In 1978, for instance, an exodus of over 222,000 Muslim refugees from northern Arakan into an area between Teknaf and Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh took place. The receiving state Bangladesh resorted to heavy-handed tactics to ensure their early return. For instance, the government reportedly held back food for the refugees causing the death rate for Rohingyas in the camps to reach 33 per 10,000 per week, with 10,000 refugees dying between May and December 1978. In the year 1991-92, there was a new exodus of about 250,000 Rohingyas due to Burmese military excesses. They took shelter in the camps in Bangladesh. Their repatriation was also ensured through coercive methods.

Carl Grundy War and Elaine Wong maintain that virtually all repatriations of Rohingya refugees between September 1992 and the end of 1993 were forced ones. One doesn't need to elaborate upon the consequences of such failings for the most vulnerable in the refugee camps women and children. Similarly, one doesn't need to prepare volumes to project the plight of Afghan refugee women living in Pakistan, Iran, India and other places. Suffice it to say that even after the voluntary return of four million Afghans since 1989, the Afghans remain the single largest refugee group in the world. Afghanistan has been at war with itself and, in the process, has caused enormous sufferings and difficulties for its citizens, specially women and children. Belonging to a traditional, patriarchal society, Afghan women were forced to adjust to a world

moved upside down - a destroying civil war raging for years, a flight to homes and refugehood in an alien environment, the harshness of camp life, and anxiety for their male members. Further, they were required to protect themselves, their sisters, daughters and often their mothers from the threatening advances of other males. These women die a relentless death.

It's true that cold war imperatives induced the United States and its allies in the West and Muslim world to glorify Afghan resistance against pro-Moscow elites in Kabul and Soviet troops in Afghanistan, ignore the hardships and insecurities encountered by Afghan men, women and children and underplay the enormous difficulties faced by Afghan refugees.

Power politics was the dominant concern of major actors in the conflict and the humanitarian concern was generally limited to moralize and legitimize in the name of ideology the bloodbath and forced displacement of human beings. However, with the end of the cold war and collapse of Soviet empire, Afghanistan is now left to itself and the Afghan refugees are no longer the pampered community of the West and host states. One by one, the donors have withdrawn and the unabated civil war has continued for more than a decade.

The Afghan Refugee Women

Though outside Afghanistan, Afghan women refugees in Pakistan do not seem to enjoy any immunity from the consequences of talibanization in their own country. Talibanization affects them as well and no less critically. Refugee women opposed to Taliban rule and their discriminatory policies against women and those with evolved ideas favouring the commencement of democratic governance based on the consent of the people of the country have been reportedly attacked and terrorized in Peshawar in North west Frontier province (NWFP) and Quetta in Pakistan. To some extent, if not fully, the talibanisation of refugee camps in Pakistan seems to have been accomplished and the women refugees are clearly the main victims.

While referring to Afghan refugee women in Pakistan, a study by Saba Khattak (presented at a conference in Dhaka in November 1998) and another by Nasreen Ghufuran (presented at a workshop in Karachi in April 1999) suggest that by religiously adhering to the concept of honour and non-violation of women, by being ever vigilant to protect the honour of women at all cost and by promising deadly retaliation against sexual violence, refugee men have built up a highly effective protection regime for the women in the camps. As such, the women in the camps are secure and well protected.

Nevertheless, caught in the bloody civil war for years and staying in the refugee camps for so long, Afghan refugee women in Pakistan-like other refugee women in similar situations in other countries and regions- remain very vulnerable. An Amnesty International report titled '*Women in Afghanistan: A Human Rights Catastrophe*' (1995) says that Afghan women were attacked, molested, raped and killed by warring factions and had to bribe people at various check posts in both Afghanistan and Pakistan for their safe entry into Pakistan. Rape of war widows by family members according to a report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is common, 30% of the prostitutes in NWFP are Afghan women. Afghan refugee women in Pakistan see no future for themselves.

According to Nasreen Ghufraan, when requested to respond to a question about their future, a refugee woman said: "we cannot think about the future. We have to survive every day". Another woman declared: "our future is clear because there is nothing for us". Awareness of the state and status of women in Afghanistan and that of the refugee women in Pakistan strongly suggest that these women are, after all, not exaggerating.

One may, therefore, conclude by emphasizing that: a) South Asia hosts a large number of refugees accounting for the fourth largest concentration of refugees in the World; b) women form a large segment of its refugee population; c) there is little awareness of the travails and tragedies of forced migration suffered by refugee women and children in the region and d) South Asian refugee women suffer mainly because of man-made catastrophies, wars and conflicts, as elsewhere.

Women Refugees of Kot Chandana*

Atta ur Rehman Sheikh

Following the 1979 civil war in Afghanistan when more than three million refugees had fled Afghanistan and arrived in Pakistan, the province of Punjab, being the largest province of Pakistan, was asked to share the burden. The Governor of Punjab formed a committee and entrusted it with the task of identifying an appropriate location for the settlement of a large number of refugees. Kot Chandna was to be a site for a camp holding 180,000 refugees in 1982, out of which 60% were women and children. Kot Chandna is about 300 km away from the provincial capital (Lahore), some 60 km from the district headquarter (Mianwali) and 4 km off the main highway. It is a rugged plain with barren hills on both sides of the camp. A few cars, privately owned by comparatively wealthy Afghans, are the only means of transportation between the camp and the highway.

Over the years UNHCR, UNICEF, CRS, ICRC, GTZ, Health Net Int., World Food Programme, WHO, SOS Belgium, Save the Children UK and numerous other independent organisations were indulged in providing relief services to the refugees in the camp. They were given rations of wheat, dry milk, dates, kerosene oil, vegetable oil, clothes, and utensils. Unfortunately in the wake of the withdrawal of Russian forces from Afghanistan, and the subsequent Geneva Peace Agreement, much of this assistance was discontinued in 1995. The World Food Programme was the most needed agency. But it wound up its operations in September 1995 despite the continuing need for its services.

Consequently as soon as food aid and other services, once available free of cost, were terminated, the refugees began to move out of the camp in search of a livelihood. A large number moved to bigger cities or elsewhere in the district or neighboring districts. Some returned to Afghanistan. According to an assessment made by the Commissioner for Afghan Refugees, approximately 2 lakh Afghan refugees are living in Lahore alone. They are mainly involved in low skill sectors such as construction, rag picking, and tenant farming, brick-kiln work, watchmen and so on. Some have started their own businesses in cloth timber and livestock rearing. As they are exempted from paying taxes, they are able to sell their goods at lower prices. Consequently, they are developing a monopoly, which is causing resentment among local traders.

At present 33 thousand refugees are residing in Kot Chandana camp. Their position is quite vulnerable, as they cannot move out of the camp. The

termination of relief services has added to the plight of the refugees. The water, electricity and health care services that are currently being provided have to be paid for, however, education is free. The Government of Pakistan is not spending a single penny on the refugees in the camp except for the allowances and other expenses of government employees deputed in the camp. All financial and technical support is being provided by the UNHCR. Previously 565 employees worked in the camp but only 65 employees were retained apart from the project's 100 employees. Repatriation was begun in 1992 and more than 30,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan. But a good number of refugees returned to the camp after war broke out between Taliban and anti-Taliban forces.

The camp has begun its 18th year and visible changes in the cultural attitudes of the refugees can be felt. The administrator of the camp is of the view that there has been a significant improvement in the refugees' attitudes towards the provision of health, education particularly female education and vocational training. The camp presents a wide spectrum of ethnic groups. There are 18 different groups settled here namely Olikhel, Khidarkhel, Ahmedzai, Zadran, Sulemankhel, Hussainkhel, Barakzai, Achakzai, Noorzai, Baloch, Barangai, Nasirkhel, Pashai, Aqakhel, Kharoti, Syed, Temori, and Moghal. All eighteen tribes have their own chiefs called "Malik", who represent their tribes in matters related to camp affairs as well as in case of conflicts. An overwhelming majority of refugees is Sunni. In terms of political affiliation, the entire camp is pro - Taliban. During the war against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul, it was mandatory for each family to send one of their male members for "Jihad" (Holy War) on a rotation basis, but now it has become a voluntary practice, as the current conflict is no longer viewed as a "Jihad".

In accordance with the traditional division of labour in Afghan society, women are restricted to household and men take care of the public sphere. Women are less visible in public places, while their men folk make all the purchases for household needs. "purdah" (veiling) is strictly observed and recreational activities for women are non-existent. Entertainment whether on TV or radio is either not made available or not allowed. If a woman is widowed, she is obliged to marry her husband's brother, or a first or second cousin otherwise she can choose to remain unmarried for the rest of her life. On an average, each male refugee in the camp has two wives, as traditionally Afghans are known to be polygamists. The bride price ranges from Rs.1 to 2 lakh. Although daughters are economically more beneficial to the families as they can be sold off to prospective husbands, boys are still preferred.

There is a Combined Health Unit comprising of clinical laboratory, labour room and TB clinic. Basic Health Units I and II also function in different locations of the camp. BHUs are meant to see out-door patients. A nominal registration fee is charged which includes consultation and medicines but widows, destitutes and needy patients are treated free. The treatment of TB is completely free of charge. All medical tests in the laboratory are charged cost fees. Equal emphasis is placed on preventive healthcare through lectures and information dissemination meetings, which are held in schools and different units of the camp. Regular door-to-door visits are made by out-reach supervisors and community health workers in each unit of the camp. Attendants are of Afghan origin and working on a voluntary basis.

A tree plantation programme was launched and 3000 trees have been planted. The Contraceptive Prevalence Rate in the camp is 30%, which is better than the district's ratio. Similarly the TB ratio in the camp is 0.1 % as opposed to 10% in the district. Malnutrition among the children of the camp is 2.5%, lower than the district's 9%. In the early years of the camp, the Health Section faced many attitudinal problems from the traditional Afghans.. For example, in order to carry out a vaccination campaign, not only did the camp administration have to offer incentives such as blankets, towels, dry milk etc, but the refugees also demanded that visits are paid at home and a female doctor carries out the inoculation. Similarly, initially the refugees were not willing to bring their women to the hospital, but now 70% out-door patients are women and children according to camp medical records. Another change in attitude is that women now come to clinic on their own, which previously was not allowed by their men folk. However, some degree of gender discrimination still prevails; if a boy is ill, his father will immediately take him to the hospital; whereas if a girl is ill, then the responsibility lies with her mother and is given secondary priority.

In respect of education: 9 schools are being managed in the camp out of which 4 schools are for boys and 5 for girls. These are all primary schools except for a middle school for boys. The total enrolment at the schools is 2458, of which 1558 are girls and 860 are boys. The first school for boys was started in 1983 and the first school for girls in 1984. In the early days of the schools, the Afghans thought that the schools would make their children "Russian" and thus were reluctant to send their children to school. But with the persuasion of the staff, this fear vanished over the years. Now there is an increasing demand for girls' schools as well. Books and other material are provided free of cost. Recently the administration has incorporated Quranic education in the curriculum. The girls who go to school can easily be distinguished from the non-school going girls, as they are neater, cleaner and look more confident. However, unfortunately as soon as a girl passes class five, she is confined to her home or is

engaged according to custom. Similarly, boys after passing class five have to leave for work in order to support their families. The termination of aid has made the situation worse.

A skill-training centre is being run by an NGO called Skills for Employment and Self-employment. The centre provides training in different crafts, which include: carpet weaving, machine embroidery, tailoring, radio repairing, auto-mechanic, denting, welding, carpenter and bread baking. Separate training centers for men and women have been established. A 'five-month course is conducted which includes basic literacy classes. The women who complete it are provided necessary equipment. The NGO staff makes regular follow up visits to make sure that these trained women continue to practice their learned craft and enhance their skills. So far 700 women have acquired training from the center and 80% of them are working as home based workers. The majority of them are in carpet weaving. They make carpets at home and their men sell them in Peshawar and other big cities. Tailoring is another profession that women are engaged in. Initially men had opposed the establishment of the women's centre. Now they make requests for the admission of their girls, since the economic pressures created by the termination of food aid have enabled women to get training and work at home. SES also manages the water supply. Seven water tanks have been installed in the camp wherefrom households can collect wafer. Women and children are responsible for making sure that water for the family is available. Water is supplied daily at each point for two and half-hours. The charge for this service is Rs. 250 for three months.

All this sounds good and happy reading. Only one nagging question remains. Moreover this question is crucial for international institutions including multinational relief organizations - where does all this assistance lead us? Will the work of charity programmes continue like this without end and on a selective basis, or, will the refugee question while being addressed in its immediate context be linked to the broader issues of international peace and sustainable development?

Gendering Refugee Care*

Madhuresh Kumar

“More than eighty percent of the world refugees is made up of women and their dependent children. An overwhelming majority of these women come from the developing world. South Asia is the largest refugee-producing region in the world. Again a majority of these refugees are women. Refugee women and children form 76 percent of the total refugee population in Pakistan, 79 percent in India, 73 percent in Bangladesh, and 87 percent in Nepal (Syed Sikander Mehdi, Chronicles of Suffering, Refugee Watch, nos. 10 & 11 July 2000, pp 33-34).

Research on the experience of the asylum in the UK has traditionally focused on male experience. As with most research on migrant groups, men become the first focus of research and policy, women's experience become secondary. This lack of interest in or awareness of women's experiences can be seen in the responses from statutory bodies. According to the information from the refugee women's resource project, when women claim asylum in the UK there is a lack of awareness by officials of how their gender has shaped their experience of persecution, consequently, genuine claims are at risk of failing. (Kate Reed, Feminist Review, 73:2003, pp 114)

Above two statements are reflective of the nature of refugee situation, in particular to two regions but will find worldwide applicability, without dissolving the variations and complexities. The situation is similar, and simple and at the same time complex because each of them is a construct of a myriad of social, political, economical, geographical, religious and other factors. Some of the significant issues that can be drawn from is: a) the issue of refugee relief is more gendered in nature b) there is a gender bias in the existing refugee laws, asylum policies, refugee studies and research, and c) this bias results in to gender insensitivity leading further plight of those caught in the conflict zones or in the host countries where they are applying for asylum or are seeking refuge.

It is evident from the review of the process of resettling, relocating, or providing social, economical and mental relief which does not even add up to satisfactory rehabilitation of 50 percent of the refugee population. We find a large number of them camping in refugee camps or caught in the conflict zones. This is the situation in spite of the 'best' efforts of the states, international agencies and others involved in conflict resolution. This means the situation requires a review, and a different approach to understanding the problems of refugees, especially women and children. The best way to engage with the problem will be to giving credence to their own experiences, chronicle them and engage with them critically. This requires acknowledgement of the fact that they have a distinct understanding of their own situation than those engaged in the relief operation or policy formulation. The special position of women in refugee

situation also needs to be recognised that they are a unique construct, a product of a society which they never intended to build and is heavily lopsided, and patriarchal in nature, in spite of all the technological, material and social advancements. The bias is evident in the resource allocation for women in the states' budget, marriage laws, succession laws, and employment opportunities and in general in society. In fact, the state more often than not acts as the extended arms of the patriarchal society, and legitimises and protects its oppressive and discriminatory structure against women.

Women in Refugee Situation and Conflict Zone

Women are the worst sufferers of any political turmoil, conflict, war, or disasters because of the position they have in society. We need to understand that across the societies and cultures women are central to the running of social fabric to a large extent without even considering the vital role played by them in other fields. In a way they have an edge over their counterpart, men and acquire a more respectable position. Women also have a special responsibility because as opposed to being the carriers of genetic material, as believed widely, they are carriers of social and personal histories which can never be found in the textbooks and do not even get the attention in traditional history writing.

However, this special position in normal times transforms to an extremely vulnerable situation in the time of crisis and conflict. Their body becomes a disadvantage for them because of the way it is being perceived by opposing communities and the societies in which they live. All the sufferings such as rape, assault, genital mutilation and torture have their roots in the construction of the gender roles in the society. They are also the worst sufferers because apart from the violence they also have to face the wrath after the conflict, and bulk of the responsibility for reconstruction falls on them. This happens because in some cases the main bread earner of the family is missing or has lost his life and even in cases where he is alive but because of the changed economic situation his own potential to earn has declined.

Again it is to be noted that the refugee women have been forced to leave their homes because of persecution and violence and they have to cope with the new environment, new language, new social and economic roles, new community structures, new familial relationships, and new problems. At the same time they seek generally to reconstruct familiar lifestyles as much as possible. In a sense such women are both agents of change and sources of continuity of tradition.

Women are also principal maintainers of the traditional culture (*I don't mean the conservativeness in a society, though it is difficult to draw the line between conservative*

and modern). And, when given the opportunity, refugee women form effective new social systems that provide support for their family members and potential for helping others. They are often in charge of caring for the most vulnerable refugees, the young, the sick, and the elderly, even though they may be vulnerable themselves. But being vulnerable has also made them indomitable in spirit and increased their resolve to recreate everything. Judy Mayotte, says – “these women, who have endured so much in exile, are women of uncommon resilience and well springs of human resources and talents. She further adds that they are the ones who must re-establish the family in exile, so too must recreate the familial environment on return to the homeland”.

All these factors mean only providing temporary material support is not adequate to the women, because of their disadvantageous situation they also need legal services, spiritual support, mental solace and a permanent economic support base. Refugee women from third world countries are more in distress because of their own social, economic, and educational background than those from the western societies which are economically better off, but it is to be noted that women in the north are also bound to the patriarchal chains be it Canada, Eastern Europe or any other developed region. And in solving all these problems whether at the level of policy formulation or implementation, one will have to relate to the women themselves and their experiences and consider them as key actors in the relief operation.

Gender or Women

With the growth of feminist movement from 60s onwards and the slogan *Personal is Political* attracting wider attention foray has been made into the feminisation of the study of refugee situation. Talking of women’s history Joan Kelly suggests a dual goal firstly, of restoring women to history, and secondly, restoring our history to women. She further adds that the aim of the enterprise is to “make women a focus of the enquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative”, in other words to construct women as a historical subject and through this construction, “disabuse us the notion that the history of women is the same as the history of men, that significant turning points in history have the same impact for one sex as for the other”.

However Kate Reed warns that focus on women can also lead to the marginalisation of their experiences within the broader debates. So it is not appropriate to see ‘sex’ as opposed to ‘Gender’ the key factor accounting for the differential experiences of men and women in the conflict zone and refugee situation. As Crawley also argues that women-centred approaches to research and practice are problematic because they tend to see sex as the key factor

accounting for the differential experience of refugee and asylum seeking women. They fail to acknowledge the ways in which such references are product of gender construction in specific geographical, historical political and socio-cultural contexts. She argues that by focusing on women as opposed to gender, forced migration research and practice often replicate and reinforce the marginalisation of women's experiences within the dominant discourse.

It is also important to recognise the value of recording women's experiences because of its implications for the historical study in general. Women's history in a way has revitalised theory by problematising at least three of the basic concerns of historical thought: periodisation; the categories of social analysis; and theories of social change. However not going into the details of these issues I would like to point out that the researchers and actors in refugee situation have a greater responsibility towards understanding of refugees' or migrants' historical, cultural, and socio-economic experience and of the refugee women's own construction of their current lives.

As Parminder Bhachu points out that certain cultural forms that westerners might suppose to be oppressive, such as the dowry system or arranged marriages, can be liberating for the women involved (though it is highly contested). She argues that the frequently used triple oppression model of analysis – the status of one subordinated by class, gender, and ethnicity implies that the cultural values that these women hold are themselves oppressive. That refugees and migrants, based on their own individual historical experiences, may actually choose to continue their traditional forms of living and customs of their home societies rather than adapt to the western models of, for example the double income, nuclear family, once they relocate is often overlooked or dismissed as 'false consciousness'.

However, it is important to note that women are not homogeneous entities and the diversity within the experiences must be recognised because of their own perception of the gender in their society and community. This understanding also stems from the situation back in home from where they are uprooted and also on their personal economic, social and cultural background. It has been seen that a white woman - seeking refuge in UK may not have to face racism as opposed to a black or brown woman. Again many a time refugees are not benefited from the existing laws in a country because of the ignorance of the laws or their own illiteracy, which also increase the need for legal help and courses for acclimatisation of the refugee with the new language and laws.

To conclude, I would like to suggest that the points above are relevant not only to those studying the refugee situation but also to the states,

international agencies and NGOs that are engaged in relief. It is important because the understanding of the problem itself emanates from a political understanding rather than a social and cultural sensitivity, so the solutions are also political and embedded in a larger world context where there is no space for experiences of refugees themselves and their voices are lost, and never form an integral part of the dominant discourse in the process. To change the current situation what is required is not only the increased gender sensitivity and understanding within the actors engaged in the relief operation but also in society at large. Again it would be inappropriate to work towards a temporary solution of the problem rather the effort has to be concentrated towards finding long term solutions and containing the process of refugee generation at large. The situation would only improve when the refugees themselves will be engaged, and their experiences given value in finding the solution to the problem rather than they just being an object in the whole process.

Why Should We Listen to Her?*

Maria Ahlqvist

The refugee situation is one of the burning issues in today's world, where refugees make up more than one percent of the whole population (Banerjee in Raja (ed.), 2003: 139). Moreover, a great majority – of over eighty percent – of refugees are women and their dependent children. (Ibid) The world's refugee situation is thus strongly manifested in and lived through the gendered experiences of women refugees. Yet, even in the face of the telling figures, there however exists a striking disparity between the reality of the refugee situation and the business-as-usual of the refugee regime – refugee women's experiences are deemed to fundamental *otherness* as “(H)istorically, the refugee definition has been interpreted through a framework of male experiences.” (UNHCR, 2002) Furthermore, research in the area “has traditionally focused on male experiences” (Reed, 2002) amounting to the fact that “men become the first focus of research and policy, women's experiences become secondary. This lack of interest or awareness of women's experiences can be seen in the responses from statutory bodies.” (Ibid)

Without taking into account refugee women's experiences, it is not possible to understand the refugee situation in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Omitting women's experiences leads to a deficient and incomplete refugee regime and results in inadequate and often even faulty responses to the refugee situation. There is thus a strong argument for the importance of listening to refugee women's experiences, and also chronicling them, in understanding the refugee situation and forging appropriate responses.

It is also of importance and interest to elaborate on the argument on a broader plain. It is possible to connect the argument for example to feminist historiography. In this connection, the argument for the importance of moving towards a more complete refugee regime through listening to women's experiences can be strengthened by the notion that “a representative history can only be written if the experience and status of one half of humankind is an integral part of the story.” (Menon & Bhasin) Further, as the work of Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin on women's narratives about the partition of India points out: “Hardly ever, and hardly anywhere, have women “written history”... Women historians have noticed this absence and emphasized the importance of retrieving women's history through oral sources. Because women have used speech much more widely than the written word, oral history practitioners have

found in interviews... a rich vein to mine and to surface what, so far, has been hidden from history... The real value of these oral testimonies... lies in their ability to capture the *quality* of women's lives". In the case of refugee women, such qualitative information derived from indeed listening to their experiences can, for example, vividly point out to the kind of specific needs refugee women have.

The other side of the refugee experience – patriarchal norms as shapers of refugee women's gendered experiences

"It is in the person of a refugee that women's marginality reaches its climatic height." (Banerjee in Raja (ed.), 2003: 139) What, then, amounts to the female refugee experience? What makes it gender-specific? The literature on the theme draws up a highly multidimensional picture of the issues, influences and vulnerabilities that a *woman* refugee faces. This multidimensionality makes the listening to women's experiences, and hence properly understanding the refugee situation, a challenging and a necessary task.

From the multitude of entry points to the gender-specificity of women refugees' experiences I have selected an aspect, which appears as a major overarching factor greatly influencing and penetrating the gendered experience of refugee women – namely their status and position characterized by patriarchal norms. Particularly in the developing world, where "an overwhelming majority" (Banerjee in Raja (ed.), 2003: 139) of refugee women come from, patriarchal norms direct, to a large extent, women's socio-cultural and economic positions. Under situations of conflict, these contribute to and become manifested in women's destinies.

Yet, the gendered experience is always contextual. There is no single bloc of a female refugee experience as "refugee women are not merely women, but possess other identities that relate to race, class, ethnicity and religion". (Kaapanda & Fenn) It must thus be kept in mind that these "other identities may divide women more than they are united in their common gender". (Ibid) Yet, I argue, and the literature on the theme also suggests, that patriarchal norms are a common denominator to refugee women's experiences from countries and societies under conflict, marking the experiences women refugees frequently go through. It is thus imperative to listen to women's experiences in order to understand the factors, of which patriarchal norms are part / in which patriarchal norms are embedded in, that affect and contribute their refugee experience and create gender-specific needs which have to be met by appropriate responses.

My elaboration on how patriarchal norms mark refugee women's experiences focuses on a few selected aspects which a number of sources highlight as of especial significance in the context. I would like to use a diagram to illustrate these aspects of patriarchal norms and the way in which they contribute to and manifest in women refugees' experiences:

Gendered violence

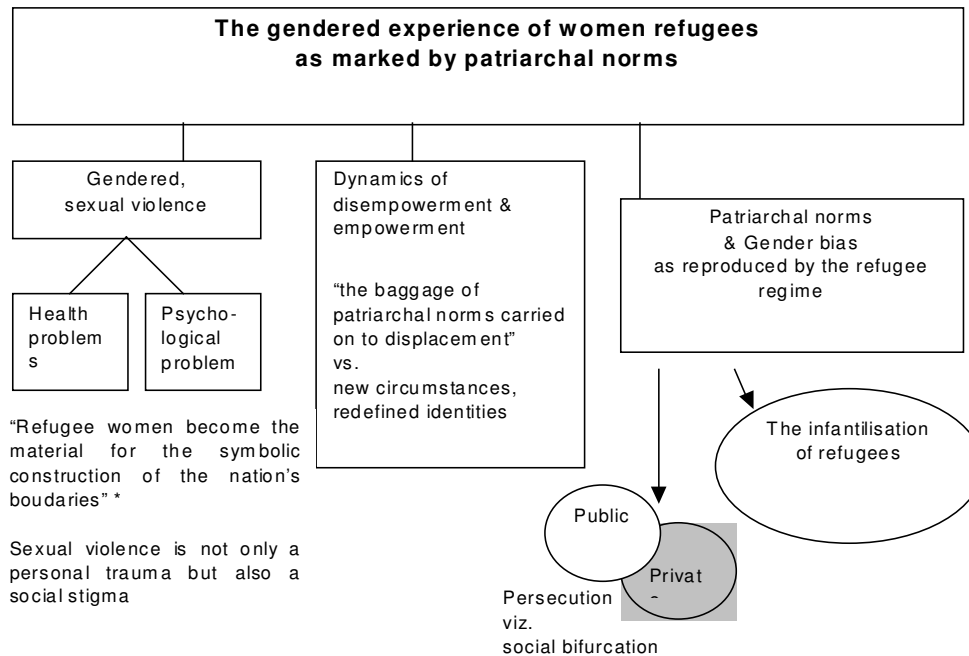
Displacement situations are "universally often preceded and accompanied by physical violence." (Hans, 2000) It has, however, to be noted that conflict affects men and women differently and "the targets of ethnic violence are particularly women and they suffer the worst forms of cruelty and indignity in the form of rape." (Ibid) Gendered, sexual violence indeed stands out as a key denominator permeating refugee women's experiences.

Women's vulnerability to gendered, sexual violence in conflict and refugee situations is a strong manifestation of women's patriarchally governed social positions. Patriarchal norms' manifestations in this context are, moreover, dual in nature. On one hand, "Desecration of women's honour to demoralize the enemy", for instance, "has always been an important wartime strategy." (Hans in Samaddar (ed.), 2003: 379)

On the other hand, another, contrasting manifestation of the role of patriarchal norms in the gendered violence faced by women is described by Urvashi Butalia in what happened during the partition of India, where, when "women were concerned, the debate entered another realm altogether – that of the honour of the nation, and of its men". (Butalia, 2000: 189) Characterizing the **Banerjee in Raja (ed.), 2003 140* gendered violence drawing from patriarchal norms faced by many women in the partition, was thus the notion that "While the men could thus save themselves, it was imperative that the women – and through them, the entire race – be 'saved' by them" through the *martyrdom of women* in the face of the threat of forced conversion and rape, through which "not only would they be rendered impure individually, but through them, the entire community could be polluted for they would give birth to 'impure' children." (Ibid: 196, emphasis mime)

Refugee women's bodies are frequently the site of the protection of national honour and namely, the markers of male honour. (Banerjee in Raja (ed.), 2003: 143) The patriarchal control over refugee women's sexuality can further be identified in the institutional responses, which vary with individuals. (Ibid: 146) As a historical example, women refugees from East-Pakistan who "were considered respectable and therefore useful for the nationalizing and state building project were accommodated within the majoritarian community." (Ibid)

Those women who, on the contrary, were not respectable, were further displaced and forced to remain permanent refugees in the margins of the society (ibid), facing another realm of gendered violence.



“The experience of being a woman refugee is already fraught with health risk and uncertainty” (Kennedy & Murphy-Lawless, 2003) – a plight with interconnected elements contributing to the risk and vulnerability. The gendered violence permeating women refugees’ experiences amounts in severe health and psychological problems understanding of which and appropriate responses to which can be attempted only when the experiences of women themselves are listened to. Further, as Asha Hans points out, “sexual violence is not only a personal trauma but has a social stigma attached to it”, which highlights the way in which a refugee woman’s status and sexuality are tied to the society – a further challenge for the understanding and for providing appropriate responses in refugee situation.

Dynamics of disempowerment and empowerment

Displacement is a two-way path on which refugee women are never merely marginalized victims but can in fact transform their marginality into agency. (Banerjee in Raja (ed.), 2003: 160) Indeed, “While it is true that during periods of intense crisis and dislocation, patriarchy can intensify and deepen the

subordination of women, it is equally true that new space for manoeuvring is created. Dislocation can produce a climate in which women are no longer obliged to adhere to traditional, culturally determined roles.” (Kaapanda & Fenn) The spaces of empowerment brought about by displacement however face their negative counterpart in patriarchal norms where “the process of empowerment can be burdening. These women are different and therefore the world may consider them as empowered decision-makers able to take on the disaster confronting them, but society sees them as detractors from traditional socio-cultural norms. The process of empowerment therefore is complex and guilt ridden, and not easy in a hostile environment where patriarchal norms remain entrenched.” (Hans, 2000)

Understanding the question of women’s disempowerment in refugee situations and the interplay of patriarchal norms in it, is of vital importance further because it also touches upon the destiny of refugee children. For example where “patriarchal norms have not prepared women for an independent life, especially as the heads of households in an unknown environment” there is a risk that “generations of children in refuge go without the common necessities of childhood” (Hans in Samaddar (ed.), 2003: 356).

Understanding the ways in which patriarchal norms lie in and influence refugee women’s experiences of disempowerment and / or empowerment is another vital dimension for a proper understanding of the refugee situation and for the formation of appropriate responses, to promote empowerment and / via the transformation and reformulation of old elements into progressive patterns. This does not address only refugee women – refugee men also need support where “the collapse of traditional structures of patriarchy and the lack of stability or security have undermined traditional gender roles”, at the face of which men frequently resort in violent means while confronting the erosion of their once domineering male identity and attempting to re-establish their sense of self (Kaapanda & Fenn).

The refugee regime as a reproducer of patriarchal norms

Majority of refugee women indeed come from developing countries in which patriarchal norms mark their positions and further, their destinies as refugees. It is of critical importance anyhow to take another look at patriarchal norms – the way in which they are reflected and reproduced in the refugee regime. Firstly, it can be interrogated to what extent the international refugee regime in itself is based on a fundamental patriarchal notion where it is based on the officials’ representing the refugees. Refugees are infantilized in a process where decision-making power is transferred from refugees to officials. (Kaapanda & Fenn) This

process is especially strong with reference to women refugees who have the least opportunity to represent themselves but instead, “the practices of international organizations such as the UNHCR tend to delegate woman to the status of victim, which is a disenfranchising phenomenon”. (Banerjee in Raja (ed.), 2003)

Listening to and chronicling women’s experiences is extremely significant in tackling another challenge of paramount significance in the proper understanding of and appropriate responses to the refugee situation – namely, to respond to the “call for a definition of persecution which acknowledges the feminist theory of social bifurcation: that society is divided into public and private spheres... the public sphere is male-dominated and women are relegated to the private sphere.”(Jacqueline Creatbatch in Chimni (ed.), 2000: 35) Understanding this is imperative for a gender-conscious, more complete refugee regime because of “a distinct ‘women’s experience of the private sphere which is the site of gender oppression.” (Ibid) What, thus, amounts to the ignorance of women’s experiences of persecution is the fact that “the key criteria for being a refugee are drawn primarily from the realm of public sphere activities dominated by men”. (Ibid) An example of this is the shortcoming of the refugee regime to “correspond to the reality of the experiences of women in some societies”. (UNHCR, 2002: 8) As a result, women are not protected by the definition of a political refugee fleeing persecution for direct involvement in political activity while, in reality women are “frequently attributed with political opinions of their family or male relatives, and subjected to persecution because of the activities of their male relatives”. (Ibid: 9)

A further, practical manifestation of the presence of patriarchal norms in the refugee regime marking women refugees’ experiences is illustrated by Susan McDonald: “Often it is the male who applies for and receives permanent residency status and he then will sponsor his wife.” (Ibid, in Canadian Woman Studies, Vol. 19, No. 3: 164) Such a procedure amounts to women’s vulnerability where, “When a woman does not have a secure immigration status, the fear of deportation can be overwhelming. An abuser may have made threats in this context or actually have withdrawn his sponsorship.” (Ibid)

Conclusions and further thoughts

From the viewpoint of this term paper, listening to women’s experiences, and also chronicling them, is particularly important in understanding the refugee situation and forging appropriate responses because patriarchal norms lie at the heart of many of women refugees’ gendered experiences and vulnerabilities and the fact that many of women refugees’ claims go unrecognised. Only through listening to women themselves can the interplay of these norms in what

constitutes the great majority of the refugee experience be comprehended and responded to in a constructive and sustainable manner. Indeed, where listening to women in itself can be seen as amounting to participation: “To understand fully and address the protection concerns of refugee women, they themselves must participate” (UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, in Chimni (ed.), 2000: 191). Listening to women’s experiences can in itself also be an appropriate response to refugee situation where “Participation itself promotes protection. Internal protection problems are often due as much to people’s feelings of... lack of belonging to a structured society and lack of control over their own future... This may be particularly evident in overcrowded camp conditions. Refugee participation helps build the values and sense of community that contribute to reducing protection problems.” (Ibid: 192)

On a broader plane, listening to women refugees’ experiences, and chronicling them, is of particular importance because women’s experiences add a critical and vital dimension to “any analysis of the refugee situation’s impact on women *and* men, on the relations between them and also the relation between gender and social as well as historical processes.” (Menon & Bhasin, italics added) Also, a critical look into women refugees’ experiences highlights the imperative for being acknowledging the diversity of their experiences which “must not be underestimated” (Reed, 2002: 117) as women, like asylum-seekers overall, are not a homogenous entity but originate from various geographical locations, with different identities and different stories of persecution. Gender-sensitivity needs to be exercised in a spirit which enables a better and a more sensitive exploration of the experiences of *both* women and men. (Reed, 2002: 117) Listening to women’s experiences is also important for it can pave the way for the recognition that the notion of *gender element* should also cover for example refugee claims based on differing sexual orientation. Further, as Asha Hans (2000) points out, listening to women’s experiences about how conflict “has affected women’s lives... is an important dimension in *the general study* of peace and conflict which is overlooked.” (italics added)

Attention to women refugees’ experiences should also increase critical awareness on the reasons why people are forced to become refugees in today’s world to begin with. A critical factor contributing to this is severe economic disadvantage, which “stems from the globalised market and that in advanced economies, from where that globalised market is largely directed, national borders are used as a way to control the movement of labour while capital flows across borders are unimpeded. In that sense, the very concept of asylum-seekers, that is people who do not fall under the 1951 UN Convention, is the creation of a dominant narrative that is intent on retaining as limited a definition of refugee as possible in order to protect its own interests.” (Kennedy & Murphy-Lawless,

2003: 42) A gender-sensitive view taking into account women's socio-economic positions reveals that, "presumably because more money is required to flee to Europe than is required to flee to refugee camps in neighbouring countries (as the great majority of refugees are forced to do), less than a quarter of the few asylum seekers... are women." (Hayter, 2002: 7) Such accounts highlight the inequality between those on the favourable and those on the unfavourable side of globalisation, and further, the lot of women in this context, and call for critical self-reflection by the former on their involvement in and contribution to the problem.

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Protection of Refugees, Migrants, Internally and Stateless Persons*

A Document

[Below we reproduce the recommendations of the Kathmandu Consultation (November 21 -22, 1996) on a regional protocol for the protection of refugees, migrants, internally displaced and stateless persons - Ed.]

Considering that South Asia has the fourth largest refugee population in the world, not taking into account the millions of internally displaced persons and environmental refugees;

Noting that in the region of South Asia, governments by arbitrarily changing their citizenship laws and introducing severe restrictions to retaining, acquiring or re-acquiring citizenship have created millions of stateless persons;

Cognizant of the peculiar process of colonial and post-colonial border making between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal which has divided several transborder communities disrupting their economy, society and family, and that it has also affected trans-border communities between Bangladesh, India and Myanmar on the eastern side and between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan on the western side;

Recognising that sometimes states do not accept refugees from another country for fear of incurring the displeasure of the refugee creating state;

Concerned that the situation of the refugees and displaced persons in South Asia has evolved in recent years to the point at which it demands special attention and action, call upon the South Asian states to develop and adopt a Regional Charter and a Protocol for the protection of refugees and displaced persons.

The Participants call upon the states to accede to and ratify the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of refugees and the 1967 Protocol, without reservation.

A Regional Charter/Protocol must make it incumbent on the states to receive refugees on humanitarian ground and the regional charter should provide for a mechanism to support the refugee receiving country in such instances.

While recognising the right of a state to refuse permanent asylum to a refugee, the regional mechanism must ensure that the states grant temporary asylum and protection to the refugee till the person finds another country willing to accept her/him;

Underlining that states have a responsibility to prevent incitement of racial, religious and other hatred against refugees, migrants and displaced persons;

The Regional Charter/Protocol should ensure that any repatriation of refugees is voluntary and is declared to be so on an individual basis, and is carried out in an atmosphere of transparency with the co-operation of UNHCR and NGOs working in the area of relief and protection.

The Participants demand that the Regional Charter/ Protocol must ensure that no person or community can be deprived of the right to citizenship, habitat, language, religion and culture arbitrarily by states/governments or be made stateless. Citizenship must not be taken away because of marriage. There should be no gender discrimination on grant of citizenship including all rights flowing there from. States must ensure that all citizens enjoy the right to freedom of movement and residence within their borders. The states individually and the regional governments collectively must agree to protect these basic rights of the people of the South Asian region.

Aware that the definition of refugees in the 1951 Convention is restrictive and that it applies only to persons who are outside their country, - "owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or opinion" - and that the definition does not provide protection to those who have been forced to flee or have been internally displaced because of ethnic strife, civil disturbance, break down of law and order, denial of human rights and insecurity of food, land and water caused by forces beyond their control.

Bearing in mind that the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, while retaining the definition of refugee contained in the 1951 UN Convention, expanded it by adding:

...the term refugee shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence...

Observing that the Cartagena Declaration on refugees adopted by the Central American governments in 1984 further expanded the definition of refugees to include;

...persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order.

The participants call upon the states of South Asia to expand the definition of refugees along the lines of the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration and also taking into consideration the following;

Victims of forced eviction, man-made and natural disaster and environmental refugees

Noting that some policies pursued by South Asian governments have impoverished vast sections of their peoples, particularly those belonging to minority communities and economically backward sections and that some of these development projects have adversely affected the economy and livelihood of the people across the border forcing them to be uprooted. Some of them have crossed international borders to become” refugee/migrants”;

Concerned that millions of people have been uprooted by such development projects and by natural environmental disasters to become internally displaced;

Regretting that the failure of governments to provide the security of food, shelter, land and water has caused mass migration of their peoples across borders in search of livelihood and shelter;

Observing that the integration of the economies of South Asia into the global economy has intensified the free flow of capital and goods, the participants urge the states to adopt a policy of developing an integrated labour market in the region of South Asia. This is essential to prevent the exploitation of migrants and displaced persons by unscrupulous employers in “sweat shops”.

Recognising that migrant women and children are the worst affected, the states are called upon to make special efforts to protect their rights.

The participants further recommend that the South Asian Charter/Protocol on refugees, migrants, internally displaced and stateless persons should recognise all such persons who have been displaced by natural and/ or man made disasters and the denial of food, land and water scarcity, are Persons of Concern.

The states have an obligation to protect the rights of its citizens to remain in their habitat. The states shall endeavour not to create a situation, which compels citizens to be displaced. States shall be responsible for the rehabilitation of all internally displaced persons in a dignified and secure manner. The participants are of the opinion that the states shall be held accountable for the displacement of their citizens to other countries.

However, when such displaced persons seek refuge in another state, the host state should respect the principle of nonrefoulement.

Accepting that it is important to retain the distinction between people who flee because of political, ethnic and cultural persecution, discrimination, violation of human rights and the disruption of law and order and those who leave their homes because of insecurity of food and shelter;

But noting that the process of migration is complicated by the fact that governments and/or majority groups are systematically denying relief and violating the human rights of affected communities, the participants urge caution in matters of classification of refugees and displaced persons as “economic refugees or migrants”.

The assumption that migrants cause economic hardship to the poorer sections of the host country population by competing for lower wage jobs may not necessarily be correct. There is a need for research on this in South Asia.

Governments and NGOs should take up the task of developing a detailed status report on cross border population movements. Existing policies are based on assumptions and conjecture. The Nepal-India case is a telling example.

Minimum standards

Understanding that the South Asian states cannot be called upon to provide for high standards of relief and support to refugees, stateless and displaced persons as envisaged in the 1951 UN Convention and the 1967 Protocol, it is necessary that minimum standards be maintained, otherwise the act of granting temporary asylum or residence permit becomes meaningless. This should be ensured through a regional standard setting exercise, which must be enforceable. A regional fund and responsibility sharing mechanism need to be created to help smaller and poorer states. In this regard the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration can serve as models.

States should provide access and support to UNHCR, international and national aid and relief agencies to fulfil their obligations.

UNHCR and regional mechanism

While appreciating that the UNHCR is expanding its mandate to cover internally displaced persons, there is concern that it has been diluting its protection mandate for refugees. This trend needs to be arrested. Anxiety is being expressed at the tendency of the UNHCR to support “imposed repatriation” of refugees to home countries under “less than desirable conditions”.

The UNHCR has been decreasing its financial support for refugees in South Asia. This needs to be checked. The refugee determination process should be transparent. The process of status determination followed by the UNHCR is not open to scrutiny. It is recommended that in the region of South Asia refugee status determination should be done jointly by the states and the UNHCR under a Regional Charter/Protocol. This process should be open to judicial scrutiny and appeal.