

Responsibility to Rehabilitate : Gendered Travails of Internally Displaced Persons in India

Patterns of migration praxis bring the term 'conflict' to the forefront when working on refugees and forced migration. Conflict induced internal displacement in India can be studied through the prism of communal or ethnic violence. These episodes of violence are seldom spontaneous, they are orchestrated, institutionalised as Paul Brass opines, so if this scheme of violence between Hindus and Muslims is often orchestrated then the corresponding displacement that often comes with the violent outbursts in that corollary can be said to be planned displacement. Parts of Central India (Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal), North-East India (Assam, Mizoram-Tripura and Manipur), Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa and Gujarat have been affected by ethnic violence and subsequent forced migration leading to internal displacement where the affected families have not been able to return back to their homes even after decades from the episode of violence.. The last two mentioned states of Orissa and Gujarat being amongst the most recent cases of having experienced conflict-induced displacement. The Hindu-Christian violence in 2007 and 2008 in Orissa led to displacement of around 10,000 people while the Hindu-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 displaced 19,000 people who continue to stay in relief camps. The outbreak of violence between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh, India in August–September 2013 is one of the latest additions to the repertory of conflict induced displacement.

Presenting a factual case of conflict induced displacement through field work in three selected districts in the state of Gujarat this paper shall attempt to highlight the travails and narratives of several women living in IDP colonies who struggle to uphold their citizenship rights which acquire a new meaning in the changed circumstances which are forced on them due to communal violence. These women in situations of conflict-induced displacement have taken the 'responsibility to rehabilitate' their families negotiating multiple intertwined questions of gender, religion and resource.

The paper shall seek deliberations on the question that should India take steps to recognise conflict-induced displacement particularly in the backdrop of the repertory of communal violence. And if some gender sensitive policy initiatives may be taken for combating such kind of displacement, to uphold the concept of 'sovereignty as responsibility' because Internally Displaced Persons remain the responsibility of their own states.