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

The feeling of returning home gives a sense of respite and belonging to many. But how does one feel when the home does not give a sense of belonging and it is just a mere lifeless structure that one returns to every day, for the simple reason that, what was once upon a time their home, today no longer welcomes them? The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) live with this dilemma every day. Living in relief colonies or camps, their condition is similar to that of refugees as they are forced to leave their homes which results in severed ties with the community, families often get disintegrated, they face unemployment and have limited or no access to land, housing, food and education.

# The Internally Displaced Persons are defined as:

Persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disaster, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border.

The visible and acknowledged mark of separation which differentiates an internally displaced person from a refugee is the internationally recognised State border. Faced with situations varying from armed conflicts, internal strife, continuous and systematic violation of human rights, those who flee and seek asylum in countries other than that of their origin are recognised as refugees and the ones who continue to stay within the border of their own countries seeking protection and support from their own government join the category of internally displaced persons.

# **Understanding Displacement**

The Guiding Principles spell out the definition of situations leading to displacement. These are armed conflict, episodes of generalised violence, violations of human rights, or natural and man-made disasters. Displacement can be studied through different lens rather can be classified in different types with reference to the trigger-points or what causes displacement. Principle 6 of the given 30 Guiding Principles enumerates the following:

1. Every human being shall have the right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from his or her home or place of habitual residence.

2. The prohibition of arbitrary displacement includes displacement:

(a) When it is based on policies of apartheid, "ethnic cleansing" or similar practices aimed at/or resulting in altering the ethnic, religious or racial composition of the affected population;

(b) In situations of armed conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand;

(c) In cases of large-scale development projects, which are not justified by compelling and overriding public interests;

(d) In cases of disasters, unless the safety and health of those affected requires their evacuation; and

(e) When it is used as a collective punishment.

# **Conflict-induced Displacement**

Detailed literature in terms of independent reports, newspaper and journal articles as well as books is available on the severity of the riots in 2002 that brought national and international ignominy highlighting gross human rights violation. In contrast very few reports mostly done by NGOs based in Gujarat and independent citizen's initiatives are amongst the available literature on the families displaced by the communal violence of 2002. Since India has a repertoire of communal violence most of the writings and reports focus on understanding the causes of violence, what led to it and how did the government respond in terms of setting up enquiry commissions and announcing compensation amounts. Though each of the above mentioned sequence of functions is important, it is also equally important to examine if people forced to flee during violent attacks have been able to return to their original homes, if there is sufficient help from the state and its various agencies to assist the victims in rebuilding their lives socially, economically, physically and emotionally.

The ease with which the words refugees and internally displaced have been inter changeably used in reports and documents without much thought being given to the borders drawn between these two terms is a cause of concern. The issue of conflict-induced displacement highlighted and being discussed as one of the subsequent resultant residue after an incident of communal violence in India, the existing relief colonies where those internally displaced by the violence of 2002 continue to reside till date: these were the few yet magnetically forceful questions that drew me to the field.

# Narratives from the field

Gujarat being the state selected as case study put forth a strong case for studying internal displacement, as a direct consequence of the communal violence in 2002, remained the primary objective during the field visit.

The field study began with the list of 83 internally displaced colonies existing in Gujarat as given in a Status Report<sup>1</sup> released in 2012 by Janvikas with an open access as a public document and few journal articles like 'Inside Gujarat's Relief Colonies: Surviving Hostility and Denial' by Harsh Mander.

Janvikas, an 'Organizational Development Institute' has been working in Gujarat for more than 25 years and today stands as a coalition of several value based organizations working in the field of social development. While reading on various

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See report, Gujarat's Internally Displaced: Ten Years Later. Survey of Gujarat's IDP Colonies prepared by Janvikas, Ahmedabad, 2012.

NGOs functioning in Gujarat, Janvikas came across as an organization which has continuously worked for the cause of getting fair compensations and rehabilitation of those displaced due to the violence in 2002. Also the founder President of Janvikas , Gagan Sethi, was one of the members of the Monitoring Committee appointed by the NHRC in Gujarat. Along with the Special Rapporteur P.G.J. Nampoothiri , Janvikas-Centre for Social Justice team guided prepared the first preliminary study which surveyed and gave a Status Report in April 2004 on the rehabilitation of the victims displaced due to communal violence. Since then this organization has been working consistently with the Internally Displaced Persons in Gujarat, the focus being on conflict-induced displacement.

The districts selected were **Ahmedabad**, the former capital city of the state and also marked as one of the most riot prone cities in India. **Panchmahal**, a district situated in eastern part of the Gujarat and the trigger point for the outbreak of violence in 2002 being located there. Lastly **Sabarkantha** which had the highest number of relief colonies, numbering upto 19( nineteen), existing even after a decade since 2002. (Documented in the Survey Report by Janvikas published in 2012)

## Survivor's Speak

The field visits were made spanning from November 2013 till about end of 2017 intermittently. The respondents mostly women in this field work, each representing a household of usually five to six or at times more family members joined the group discussions out of their own volition. Few women though present in the discussion spoke sparingly while others interacted keenly and vociferously in an effort to make their voices heard. Most of these interactions began as freewheeling conversations which then gradually became more of an experience sharing by the respondents of how and what has become of their lives post 2002. While collating the data or responses gathered across three districts, it reflected, that some issues were repeated in almost all the discussions and they gained salience as matters requiring 'urgent attention' in all the visited IDP colonies.

The issues that kept repeating themselves and surfaced during all interaction and discussions like housing, basic amenities, processing of documents, means of livelihood and education. These issues are identical to the variables identified in the Model of Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR Model) by Michael M.

Cernea (1995) while discussing the movement in time from destitution in displacement to recovery in resettlement. And how the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement have enumerated these above mentioned issues requiring immediate attention from the government in case of displacement particularly conflict-induced displacement.

In the light of the above the narratives collected from the IDP colonies shall be presented under five sub-headings each highlighting a variable of the IRR Model and also reflecting the components of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as given by the United Nations. It is important to note here that responses presented district wise as attempted initially did not generate the desired result since most of the responses in terms of grievances, perils or experience post communal violence were often common to all the existing IDP colonies irrespective of the district they were located in, varying only in terms of their severity. Also since the data analysis is not quantitative but qualitative in approach hence the responses collected from the field shall be presented under the following themes. These five themes figured pertinently during all the group discussions and response recording, they also reflect violation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as given by the United Nations which have been recognised by India as a member-state.

- A. House not Home
- B. Basic Amenities Awaited
- C. Livelihood Struggles
- D. Documents and Compensation
- E. Education and its Necessity

# A. House not Home

The category of displaced people gives the understanding that there is an evident territorial dislocation of the affected families or the targeted victims. The months following February 2002 in Gujarat witnessed thousands of Muslim families being

forced to flee from their homes in search of security and safety from the violent armed mobs that unleashed plunder and killings. Within a fortnight more than hundred relief camps were set up to shelter people displaced by violence. Even by a conservative estimate, the number was around 1,50,000 people taking shelter in the relief camps spread across several districts. Added to this were thousands of other Muslims families who stayed with their relatives or friends. Since India does not have any mechanism or organization to tabulate the number of those displaced due to conflict hence the numbers continue to remain in approximate figures or have the phrase of 'conservative estimate' prefixed to it. All the relief camps were set up and run by private initiatives mostly coming from minority organizations or faith based organizations like the Islamic Relief Committee(IRC) [the relief wing of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)] and Gujarat Sarvajanik Relief Committee (GSRC) affiliated to the Jamiat-el-Ulema-e-Hind (JU.) Alongside civil society organizations like Janvikas and Aman Biradari stepped in to help the affected families relocate and resettle though much of the burden was shouldered by the JI and JU. On June 30th 2002 all the relief camps were declared closed by the state government of Gujarat in a bid to declare 'normalcy' in the state. The journey from victims of communal violence to being internally displaced within the state of Gujarat began from here for thousands of families who could not return to their original homes. Persisting threats from neighbours of further killing and destruction, loss of home and property: cumulatively put almost the entire population residing in difficult conditions in the relief camps did not feel secure to return back.

The next step for the faith based organizations and the civil society organizations were to construct relief colonies , most of them one room tenements built on a plot not exceeding 24 feet by 12 feet, with a small kitchen space and common bath and toilet facilities. The IRC as learnt through group discussions with affected families set up around 11 colonies with nearly six hundred small units like the one described above for the displaced victims of the communal violence, these colonies are commonly addressed as IDP Colony. While the GRSC constructed six to seven such IDP colonies benefitting over eight hundred families, clusters of twenty five to thirty houses in different IDP colonies spread across districts were built by few civil society organizations too. Travelling into these far away and secluded hamlets was a world of a different hue where one could gather through narratives and at times through unspoken emotions the years of forced seclusion , trauma and continued struggle for those Muslim families that were displaced.

Most of the residents have not been given any ownership papers nor can they transfer occupancy rights to anybody else, what they have is an assurance given by the concerned trust that they will not be displaced from the homes where they are residing now. Though the families do not have ownership papers yet are required to pay the 'development fee' this point led to a unanimous outcry that the violence of 2002 has displaced the affected families forever. They are caught in a complicated web where the house is a structure given to them when they were looking for shelter yet it does not legally belong to them and they live in perpetual fear of being displaced anytime in future.

Also many of the IDP colonies have been built on what the state government claims as 'land for agricultural use' hence residential construction on such land is far from being recognized or regularized. Rather they stand as illegal encroachments. The loss of their homes and its perpetuation for over a decade was a pertinent expression which highlighted the dilemma of the internally displaced people in Gujarat due to communal violence.

Juhapura the largest Muslim ghetto in Ahmedabad is a research question in itself and it took several visits to Juhapura to visit the scattered IDP colonies located there. Juhapura presents two variants of internally displaced people, those who lost their dwellings and savings in the violence and could not rebuild their homes hence they settled in the IDP colonies built by faith based organizations and the other group were those affected families which had savings that they could fall back upon. These families bought houses in areas with sizeable Muslim population because of continued vitiated surroundings after the violence, they lived in constant pall of insecurity in their earlier places of residence. Thus several families sold off their houses or property in such locations and shifted to Muslim ghettos most often much against their wishes but coerced by circumstances. Juhapura is collective of different forms of housing clusters where, IDP colonies (Asim Park, Ekta Row House, Imaarat-e-Sariah) share space with modest houses for those who can afford a dwelling with two room sets and kitchen with attached bath and toilet facilities, along side stand three to four storey apartment blocks like the one in Javed Park. The population of this area has almost doubled in the last one decade post 2002 and today it stands as the biggest Muslim ghetto in the city of Ahmedabad.

Most of the discussions on the issue of housing could be summed up in the following three points:

- Lack of ownership rights and transfer papers makes the displaced families feel unsettled about the housing issue.
- Located in distant patches away from the towns and cities they feel secluded and neglected, often questioning their rights as citizens
- This displacement due to violence of 2002 has had severe impact on their livelihood opportunities and education of the children, a point that reverberated in every interaction and had a subtitle indicating lifelong misery.

# **B. Basic Amenities Awaited**

The first thing that strikes every visitor to these IDP colonies is the appalling condition and gross neglect in which hundreds of families have been left to live now for over a decade. The location of the colonies is non descript that it becomes difficult to navigate and reach these hamlets in the absence of any signage leading to the colonies. The visits to Halol and Kalol in Panchmahal district were spread over few months as there were several colonies to be visited. The colonies in Halol , beginning from 101 colony built by Haji Majid Kaka Cooperative Society, to Falah Nagar built by Falah-e-Alam Trust and two colonies of Sanjri Park and Karim Colony built by IRC and GSRC respectively had similar status when asked about basic amenities.

The approach road to '101 colony' a name given in numerical terms is because there are 101 houses built in that colony for the displaced families . The residents spelt out the water and electricity woes of that their colony. The water supply through a private arrangement was available for two hours during the day time and electricity supply was also erratic and available for few hours only. Though there is no approach road from the state highway to the colonies, the roads were un-tarred or kutcha roads.

'Anganwadis' or Integrated Child Development Service centres (ICDS) are required in most of the colonies. Juhapura has one 'anganwadi' in Imaraat-e-Shariah Colony where more than sixteen children aged under four years were jolting for space in a one room tenement while loudly reciting poems in unison. Kasimabad in Kalol stands as an example, amidst struggle and neglect, often pointed out as a model settlement where with the efforts of the families, tireless work by the volunteers of civil society organizations and duty bound district level officials much has been achieved when compared to other IDP colonies in the same district. Most important is that close to 125 families of the houses in Kasimabad IDP colony have got the ownership papers and their documentation is in process.

Located in the district of Sabarkantha, one of the worst hit districts during the communal violence, Kifayatnagar and Hussainabad both show gross neglect and sub-human conditions in which families have continued to live for more than eight to nine years. There are no street lights, limited electricity supply and most of the houses still have asbestos sheet roofs with brick structures, walls yet to be plastered. This section on basic amenities can be summarized in the following points:

- The IDP colonies in Ahmedabad complained of living like neglected islands in the outskirt of the city. They still lack access roads and internal roads , sewage systems are still awaited and Citizen Nagar seems to be worst hit during the monsoons as being located right next to the landfill area of Ahmedabad city, tons of garbage that is dumped flows down clogging the colony and makes even breathing difficult. Potable water is still not supplied to several colonies and being forced to live in such sub-human conditions, worse is that most of these colonies do not have any health coverage. There are no hospitals or health clinics nearby and rarely does any health officer visit these families living in gross neglect.
- Panchmahal district also shows similar lack of basic amenities where several colonies still do not have access to safe drinking water, one colony in Halol has common tap facility only, with 28-30 households sharing that only tap for water requirements needed for cooking, cleaning and washing. Street lights are yet to installed and electricity arrangement in most colonies is self financed by the families or through the Trust. Health centres are a distant dream in all the colonies and schools are located at a distance of more than 3 kilometres from the colonies. Many women in Halol made a plea that they

have been demanding for more than six years now, is of opening primary schools in the IDP colony clusters because children below the age of 10 years have no schools in their vicinity and they cannot travel on foot to schools located far away from home. With no approach roads and no internal roads finding transportation or private carrier service is not possible for these colonies.

• Sabarkantha with its severe lack of basic amenities stands out amongst all the three districts visited. Few colonies still have no access to electricity or any water supply. The houses are bare brick structures with asbestos sheet roofs making them like cauldrons in summer months without any sewage system. The affected families are living in abject poverty as many still struggle to find jobs everyday as casual labourers. Health centres and 'anganwadis' or Intergrated Child Development Services centres (ICDS) are awaited even after a decade of the existence of these 18 (eighteen) IDP colonies with a population of more than four thousand residing in them.

# **C. Livelihood Struggles**

Location of the IDP colonies in the hinterland with no approach roads makes the job hunt a daily ordeal for the internally displaced families. The episode of violence was followed by a call for economic boycott that persists informally in many villages and urban settlements. Another major blow to the livelihood struggles is because every relief colony is a cluster of families hailing from several villages, hence they compete with each other for the very few job sources available to them. Also much time, labour and money is spent on commuting from the IDP colonies located on the outskirts , to reach the town or village centres where they can find jobs on daily wage basis or sell some small items in 'laaris' ( push carts). Several women respondents who became bread winners for their families after tragic turn of events post 2002 said the only options available for them was to either stitch as that was a skill they knew well or sell 'bhaaji' (vegetables).

In almost all the visits to IDP colonies, women were eager to work and earn their livelihood since they wanted to assure a better future for their children. The targeted attack on the Muslim families followed by an economic boycott has had spiralling effects on their livelihood, petty shop owners have now become casual workers in factories and shops, families who owned tailoring shops now sell vegetables for a living, in Sabarkantha a family who had a flourishing catering business for decades now finds it difficult to feed all the members at home with two square meals a day. Compensation amounts being meagre as compared to the losses all the affected families have till date not been able recover from the scourge of the carnage.

To summarize this section on livelihood struggles, few points are:

- Families living in IDP colonies face severe livelihood problems because of the economic boycott that still persists informally in the towns and villages of Gujarat. It is further aggravated by distant location of the IDP colonies which requires long hours of travelling and takes away a sum of out their meagre earnings for the day.
- To sustain the families women are eager to work and all the IDP colonies wanted tailoring units or mehendi (henna) art classes where they could learn and earn as well.
- Children are worst affected as they have had to forgo their limited options of education and have been forced to do casual work like rolling joss sticks, making match sticks and paper bags or assisting their elder siblings in selling vegetables or other small items of daily use in the local markets.

## **D.** Compensation and Documents

Compensations were fixed at low levels and these were assessed and distributed by an administration that was 'openly hostile on communal grounds' to the survivors of the violence. (Mander 2007: 850) Despite the sub-human survival conditions for the affected Muslim families in the relief colonies, the state government returned Rs. 19.10 crores citing it as unutilised from the grant of 150 crores originally made by the central government. The state government claimed that rehabilitation work was complete and they did not find any affected family as per the framework or category under which the grants had been forwarded by the centre, hence the money was returned after due consultation with auditors. The National Commission for Minorities noted in its report that many more families could have been covered under the existing and relevant schemes and the entire grant could have been well utilised.

Documents, something as basic as electoral identity cards are still awaited for the families in displaced colonies , even after three state elections having being held in December 2002, in the year 2007 and 2012 respectively. Two IDP colonies in Panpur, Himmatnagar area in Sabarkantha district were yet to receive their electoral identity cards. In all the group meetings and discussions one common complaint was Above Poverty Line (APL) ration cards to poverty stricken displaced families where it was evident that they should have been issued Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards. This makes a big difference because BPL ration card holders are entitled to food grains, edible oil, kerosene etc. at subsidised rates. While electoral identity cards and BPL ration cards are still awaited in several IDP colonies, many colonies have made some arrangement with the help from the Trusts for electricity and meters are duly installed in them for the same

To sum up this section two pertinent points are:

- Compensation amounts have been low and few families have been covered as for most the loss of household goods have been either covered under the small sum of 'ghar vakhari' or the evaluators have found 'nil' damages.
- Documents have been delayed and no concessions have been made by the state government for the displaced families who have lost everything in the communal violence, for example residence proofs cannot be produced by families whose homes have been burnt down.

## E. Education and its Necessity

The displaced families seemed most proactive when the discussion shifted to the topic of education and future of their children. Since these discussions and meetings were with the women mostly they shared some of their dire needs rather the mission to get their children educated. Mothers were unhappy that their children were growing up in ghettos and did not have friends from the other communities. They reasoned out that getting the children educated in Gujarati medium schools is important to open doors for better job prospects. During a group discussion at Halol, a resident of 101 Colony pointed out a very important point which needs urgent attention of the state education department. Primary education being the focal point of discussion in all interactions became a major issue waiting to be addressed.

In Citizen Nagar a novel initiative has been taken by Noor Jahan Bano and her family. The mission was to enable the children of the colony aged below twelve years to have some experience of schooling. This one room functions as a primary school under the Kadam Education Programme run by Centre for Development, Ahmedabad which works towards bringing education to vulnerable and poor children. With only one teacher teaching in two shifts , it is inspiring to see the enthusiasm of the children reciting poems, perfectly arranging the alphabets in Gujarati and using shades of colourful crayons in their craft books. All the children had similar looking bags and books were kept in the school and were commonly shared by the students. The teacher during the break time between two shifts said that books, notebooks, bags and stationery come through contributions and are arranged by Kadam Education Programme. This novel endeavour is a joint effort by the IDP families and civil society initiatives to share the light of learning for a generation which has just started blossoming amidst neglect, poverty and tough survival battles.

Meghdhanush, yet another novel and encouraging education initiative where I spent considerable time interacting with the students and the teachers. This school was started by Janvikas in 2006 in Kasimabad Colony in Halol , Panchmahal for imparting primary education to the children of displaced families after 2002. Today the school has more than 170 students and have woven some beautiful educational patterns working with children from displaced families. The first batch of students that the school had, as shared by the team of 11 teachers and their principal, Rukhsar were those children who had witnessed the violence in 2002 with their families. They took months to adjust in the school and seldom spoke to each other, their drawing were depressing expressions as they drew disfigured huts in red

colour, which a teacher explained was symbolic of their burnt homes that had left an indelible mark on the minds of the children.

Following a curriculum as given by the state education board they have made additions like teaching human rights to the primary school children. It was interesting to attend classes where the teacher explained to the students of standard III that all human beings are equal and in times of need neighbours must help each other. When she explained this very valuable lesson, the students on being instructed at the end of the class hugged each other to show solidarity and the feeling of togetherness. Since the students come from family of daily wage earners or casual labourers, the school has a unique method of fees payment which is open throughout the month. The records are painstakingly kept by the teachers, the student for example, as per the daily earning of the family, in one week pays rupees twenty then in the following pays rupees fifty, adding up to their monthly fees ranging between seventy rupees to two hundred rupees as per the grade in which they study. The classrooms are creatively decorated and students excel in craft activities as proudly shown by the teachers. Several students have joined this school from nearby town in Kalol and few non Muslim parents are also keen to send their children to Meghdhanush because of its innovative teaching methods. This school with limited space and few classrooms is doing great service for the displaced families spearing ahead with a dedicated army of teachers and community workers.

To sum up this section:

- Primary schools are the need of the hour as repeatedly opined by the families in IDP colonies.
- The displaced families want to educate their children in Gujarati medium schools and do not want only religious education imparted through Madrassa for them.
- Initiatives like Kadam Education Programme and Meghdhanush are novel efforts which are duly filling up the gap left by the apathy of the state towards the IDP families.

## **Emerging Fault line: Repertoire of Displacement**

The visits to the 'relief colonies' or the IDP colonies show a factual inter-relation between the communal violence of 2002 and subsequent conflict induced displacement for the affected families. Harsh Mander, a social worker and writer, who works with survivors of mass violence as well as homeless people correctly terms these IDP colonies as 'relief colonies'. According to Mander (2006) these 'relief colonies' have a more permanent character than relief camps yet they are not systematically built colonies by the state for the resettlement of families affected by the communal violence in 2002. Thus to call them relief colonies would suggest that an initiative was taken for planned and supervised resettlement by a responsible state, which in the context of Gujarat 2002 would be a misleading. Hence the author uses a hybrid term of 'relief colonies', a step ahead of relief camps yet miles away from being a regularised colony with basic amenities.

It can then be said that the relief colonies or IDP colonies built after 2002 in various districts of Gujarat is a **factual case of conflict-induced displacement**. The residents of these colonies are displaced due to communal violence, forced to flee due to targeted attacks, they continue to live in these changed locations not for reasons of economic benefits or better employment opportunities but because of threat, insecurity and no assurance or support from the state government, which disables their safe return journey back to their homes where they lived prior to the episode of violence.

This denial and neglect is the developing fault line between the displaced families and the state. And such fault lines are warning signals for our democracy because continued denial and refusal to accept the existence of families displaced due to violence can only be described as open state hostility and negligence towards a segment of citizens only because they are the 'other' who do not ascribe to the majority religion.

In the absence of justice, rehabilitation and reconciliation, many of the affected Muslim families have shifted into Muslim ghettos, some continue to live amidst humiliating conditions in their earlier residences prior to 2002 while a large number resides in the relief colonies or the IDP colonies unable to return to their native villages and towns. The state government having looked away from the affected Muslim families and their rehabilitation has left a space vacant which is now occupied by faith based organisations, this has serious implications on the future of our country. To conclude, in the words of Asghar Ali Engineer that communal upheaval is like a continued sequence of violence in India since independence. Therefore we already have an ethnic repertoire of violence. Charles Tilly sees repertoire as the whole set of means that a group has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups. With the repeated practise of displacing a certain section of the population as a result of the communal violence as witnessed in Gujarat post-2002 and feebly reminded in Muzaffarnagar in 2013, India might put forward its own variant manufacturing a *repertoire of displacement* which is not a pleasant prospect for the country.

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