

Abstract Title - Uprooted Women and Citizenship

by

Roshni Sharma

Nation-states have existed by drawing borders to mark their territories and mark out those who belong within it and those who stay outside. To preserve and maintain its sovereignty and dignity, nation-state needs aliens and outsiders to uphold who 'legitimately' belongs to them (Chimni 2005). In an era of the shrinking of borders of nation states, because of the process of globalisation and due to increasing populist and nativist discourse, there has been a continuous upsurge in the number of people becoming homeless and stateless. Consequently, resulting in a mass exodus of those who fail to match up to the legitimacy criteria, adding on to the already existing number of 80 million people forcefully displaced across the globe (UNHCR, 2020).

Further, the rise in authoritarian discourses, state-sanctioned violence is exacerbating the problem. Given this fact, the world day-by-day is turning to be more polarised, in terms of the already existing binaries of us/them. It has become more about identifying and defining the marginalised identities in terms of labelling them 'secondary' and 'inferior'. The space of the nation has always been a masculinized one, demarcating it as the space that belongs for men to protect that space from aliens.

When defined through the prism of gender, citizenship adds on new and complex layers to the dynamics of the relation between the citizen-subject and the nation-state. In the discourse on citizenship, women still occupy the status of 'second citizen'. Writing about Partition experience of north India, Gyanendra Pandey writes about 'the misogynist north Indian proverb, "*beeranki kai jaat*" ('what caste [or nationality] can a woman have?') – for she 'belongs' to someone else, and therefore to his caste, nationality and religion' (Pandey, 2001). On the same lines Menon asks a critical question – 'Do Women have a Country?' (Menon, 2017).

The plight of a woman, who is uprooted and is outside the country of her nationality, who is without citizenship has always meant a threat to her life. Not that displacement treats men in any different way, but the gender and the refugee identity, adds on to her vulnerability

making her the face of victimhood. Women experience dislocation in ways which are highly gendered amounting to array of vulnerabilities at all stages. The 'new' identity associated with refugee women determines their position within the host location, where they become disempowered and are exposed to more vulnerable circumstances.

This paper is an attempt to understand and re-examine the stories of forced migration and (re)settlement of refugees, especially women, in the available historiography. The focus would be on revisiting the question of 'identity' that changed for refugee women for no fault of their own, highlighting their stories of acceptance, of belonging as against the citizen-subject.