



## Editorial

Every year, hundreds of millions of persons are persuaded to leave or are forcibly evicted from spaces they have regarded as their home. But despite their swelling numbers and the magnitude of their trauma, they have generally remained in the periphery, not just in terms of spatial location but in terms of public consciousness. The displaced population comes centre stage only when political parties need to distract people's attention away from other issues that might threaten their hegemony. This volume of *Peace Prints* presents a collection of articles that deal with the phenomena of Forced Migration and Displacement. The volume looks at forced migration from different vantage points, bringing out the trauma of the people caught up in it. It also critiques the humanitarian structures within which forced migrants are placed that make permanent victims of them. It steers clear of any characterization of forced migrants as silent victims; subjects of care and protection. Instead, it privileges narratives of the displaced, as this is one way of combating their state of voicelessness and bringing back agency.

In regions such as South Asia, where displacement/forced migration have been a reality for years, the popular perception that displacement is an aberration seems ironic. A case in point is India. India has been both the generator and recipient of mixed and massive flows of displaced people over the last six decades, if not far longer, and yet this phenomenon is seen as unusual or out of the ordinary. Born out of a partition where 15 million people were displaced, India has witnessed multiple displacements of huge proportions ever since. Interestingly, forced migration in the context of India did not end with the Partition but rather began with it.

After the Partition, among the first group of forced migrants to come to India were the Tibetans. About 80,000 Tibetans arrived in India in 1959 followed by over 100,000 East Pakistanis between 1969 and 1971. Many of these East Pakistanis returned to Bangladesh after 1972. The Sri Lankans started coming in from 1983 and their numbers swelled to 134,000 by 1987. Although, some Sri Lankan refugees were repatriated, once the conflict restarted in Sri Lanka they again came back. This flow ended only in 2009, when the Sri Lankan army defeated the LTTE in a War. Another area which has been a source of regular flow of forced migrants has been Myanmar from where refugees have been coming since 1988. They are about 40,000 in number and spread over Northeast India and New Delhi. Apart from these, there are 9000 Afghans, 200 Somali families, and an indeterminate number of Lhotshampas and Bangladeshi forced migrants in India.<sup>1</sup>

Forced migrants from across the borders, who are largely and sometimes incorrectly termed as refugees, are not the only footloose people in India. In fact, India's record with refugees is quite exemplary when compared to the internally displaced persons (hereafter IDPs). India is neither a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees nor to the 1967 Protocol, and yet India is an ex-com member of UNHCR and as such has adhered to the principle of non-refoulement and has generally acted humanely towards the refugees. The IDPs are a different case altogether.

Manifold more in number than the refugees, the IDPs are forced migrants who do not cross an international border. There are multiple reasons for their displacement but at the root lies their vulnerability. An overwhelming number of the IDPs belong to indigenous communities or religious and ethnic minorities. Among the different vulnerable sections of the population, the indigenous people form the largest group who are displaced. One reason is that they inhabit areas that are rich in resources. Further, law privileges individual ownership systems, while they largely practice community ownership, which places them in a disadvantageous position when claiming rights guaranteed under the Constitution. Their vulnerability often leads to their displacement but the immediate trigger could be conflict, development projects, environmental disaster or a change in law. Invariably, behind the immediate cause lies the issue of redistribution of resources. Though the burden of displacement and costs of development are borne by the resource-less, the benefits are often accrued by the resourceful. The result is that many of the displaced get consigned to poor urban enclaves and work in the informal and unorganized sectors of the economy, marginalizing them even further.

This volume of *Peace Prints* touches upon many of these issues. The volume begins with a reflective piece by Ranabir Samaddar on *Forced Migration: State of the Field* in which he frontally places the question of resource politics and displacement. Tracing the trajectory of research on forced migration he notes that it is marked currently by post-coloniality and has to a large extent come out of the binaries that were characteristic of research in the 1980s and early 1990s. Researchers and those involved with displaced population are looking inwards and searching for ways to empower the 'displaced' and moving out of the protectionist/caregiver mode. He urges researchers and practitioners to continue to delve deeper into the interstices and overlaps of nation, sovereignty, economy, globalisation, social violence, and development.

Discussion on any issue related to forced migration would be incomplete unless it addressed the gender dimensions, Asha Hans in her paper *Of Displacement and Gendered Spaces: A Note* foregrounds this vital aspect. She looks at how camps are both 'home' and places that alienate, at the same time. She says that typically the displaced mind tries to recreate its home in places of asylum. Yet these cannot be homes as Hans argues that they are places of extreme insecurity. Hans also discusses how both displacement and asylum are gendered experiences and affect men and women differently. Even in transition, female insecurity is far greater than that of males. The camps are often built in a way that women feel more insecure living in them. The lack of privacy increases the risk of sexual violence largely against the female body.

The paper by Bina Srinivasan on *The Taming of a River: Gender, Displacement and Resistance in Anti-Dam Movements* uses a critical lens to draw attention to the condition of IDPs generated by large dams. She presents a scathing critique of the paradigm of development privileged by the Indian state. The author clearly portrays that the issue of displacement is intrinsically attached to the question of resources but cautions against looking at displacement as the beginning of the struggle for access to resources and the power to control them. She argues that with or without displacement, gender inequalities are entrenched in the family and the community. The disempowerment that a community faces with displacement usually only exacerbates the discrimination suffered by the least powerful constituents within it.

In this paper, she places the status of women under the scanner to bring out the multiple layers of reality.

The fact that displaced peoples' lives change drastically and displacement often leads to tremendous trauma has been documented extensively. Also, there is no guarantee that the cycle of displacements will end with one such event. Once displaced, people often face and become victims of multiple displacements. With displacement as Micheal Cernea observes, comes joblessness, homelessness, landlessness, marginalization, food insecurity, morbidity, mortality, loss of common property and social disarticulation.<sup>2</sup> Many of the articles presented in this collection deal with the trauma of displacement. Nasreen Chowdhury in *Assessing "Belonging" and Claims of "Home" among Refugees: A Note on Repatriation in South Asia* speaks of belonging and the trope of home in the displaced minds. She captures the yearning of the refugees and their intense hope of belonging and yet finds that displacement within the context of the modern nation form leads to a sense of 'not belonging'.

In another paper on a similar theme titled *Burmese Refugee Women in India: Victims and Agents of Empowerment*, Sheena Kumari documents the experiences of the Burmese refugee women in Delhi and argues that displacement is not a condition of complete lack of agency. While displacement causes tremendous pressures on women, on many occasions, as in the case of Burmese refugees, it offers an opportunity for empowerment and autonomy that not only reduces the trauma but catalyzes moments of transformation.

Continuing with the theme of gender and displacement, Anusua Basu Raychowdhury in her paper on *Trafficking of Women and the Crisis of Identity* provides insights on trafficking in the Indian subcontinent and how it can lead to statelessness for many of the trafficked women and their offspring. She makes a plea for South Asian states to work together to address the problems of these trafficked women and children. She argues that the problem cannot be tackled by one country alone. Though the SAARC Convention is a milestone on the path to coordinated interventions against trafficking at the regional level, it has some limitations. It fails to recognize various dimensions of trafficking by limiting the scope of the Convention to trafficking for prostitution. Critics have argued that this definition has created hurdles for concerted action. Instead of addressing the problem from the regional platform, countries are indulging in a blame game. Each one is making an effort to absolve itself of the crime of allowing trafficking networks to operate from its soil.

The next section of the volume brings together a range of experiences from the field. Moving out of the South Asian context, Kamini Karlekar in *Christmas in Polokwane* talks about how as a humanitarian aid worker for the Zimbabwean refugees in South Africa she dealt with the difficulties of camp life. She describes how "working in the field," was different in imagination than in reality, which somehow seemed far worse. She draws the same conclusion as Hans that women are much more in danger in the camps than men.

While many of the papers foreground the problems of displacement, Jeevan Thiagrajah in *Internal Displacement and The National Approaches of Countries of South Asia: Sri Lanka* explores some solutions that have been tried in South Asia. Drawing largely from the work that has taken shape at the grassroots level in Sri Lanka,

Thiagrajah concludes that the government has succeeded in improving the situation of some forced migrants, if not all. In July 1999, the Government initiated the Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation (RRR) Framework process to ensure that the basic needs of people affected by conflict are met; productive livelihoods are rebuilt and reconciliation across ethnic lines is facilitated. The Government set up a Steering Committee for RRR to provide leadership to the development of the Framework and to facilitate the necessary linkages with key decision-makers within the Government, civil society and the donor community. He maintains that Sri Lanka has succeeded in developing a knowledge base that could be used in the future when dealing with displacement. These include the RRR Framework, Resettlement Authority Act, the work of the DRMU of the NHRC and its functions which could provide effective institutional mechanism to end displacement. The role of advocacy particularly by national civic actors is another important aspect of the Sri Lankan story.

This issue also carries a fact sheet by Anwesha Sengupta which provides a glimpse into the gendered effects of the Partition. This short note titled *Looking Back at Partition and Women: A Factsheet* underscores the intrinsic connections between nation formation and displacement and captures in one place the relevant facts on the impact of Partition on Indian women.

Exploring the contribution of the UNHCR in providing protection to the displaced persons, the book review by Ipshita Ghosh provides an appropriate conclusion to the volume. It looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the existing institutional arrangements and assesses the solutions offered by the authors of the work *UNHCR: The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection*.

This collection of essays is unique in many ways. Never before has a journal in the South Asian context dealt with so many aspects of forced migration in a single volume. Yet all the articles uphold the importance of gender in analyzing displacement and here again this volume is exceptional as it foregrounds gender in all matters of displacement. A few other questions that arise from this collection are the vexed relationship between citizenship and forced migration; the question of resource politics and displacement. In trying to address the issue of forced migration and the migrants themselves from many different angles the volume has probably problematized it further instead of giving easy answers. But since the real life phenomenon has no easy answers, we are perhaps not remiss in this regard. Our hope is that if nothing else, this volume will present new ways of looking at forced migration and displacement and inspire future generations of scholars into seeking answers to some of the difficult questions it has raised.

**Paula Banerjee**  
**Guest Editor**

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<sup>1</sup> Report of Refugee Populations in India, November 2007,  
[http://www.hrln.org/admin/issue/subpdf/Refugee\\_populations\\_in\\_India.pdf](http://www.hrln.org/admin/issue/subpdf/Refugee_populations_in_India.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cernea, "Impoverishment Risks, Risk Management, and Reconstruction: A Model of Population Displacement and Resettlement",  
[http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/energy/op/hydro\\_cernea\\_population\\_resettlement\\_background\\_paper.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/energy/op/hydro_cernea_population_resettlement_background_paper.pdf)