

Refugees and Human Rights- An Indian Perspective with Respect to Rohingya Refugees

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Abstract

It is a Universal obligation of every nation that no individual should be left in a condition of statelessness. The concept of nationality acts as a vital link between an individual and a nation. It enables the person to ensure certain rights and duties and to be secured by a particular nation to which he belongs. But in the case of Refugees it does not happen so because Refugees are the ones who has left their native country due to various reasons as established by the International law. They migrate to another country where they will be either or not given protection and rights depending upon the municipal laws of that country to which they have migrated.

India is the follower of the Specific Adoption Theory according to which an international law in order to be applied under its municipal laws it requires the adoption of its principles through a relevant legislation passed by the Parliament of India.

The study has adopted the Doctrinal and Non-empirical method of research.

The study has found that the Rohingya refugees who migrated to India from Bangladesh didn't enjoy a harmonious welcome, as some conflicts arose to their legal status of their stay in India. The absence of well-established laws with respect to refugees acts as the sole reason for the conflict of rohingya refugees.

Thus, the paper has concluded that, since India preaches the concept of humanity and has inculcated several rights relating to the protection of human rights, should legislate a certain law respect to the recognition and status of refugees in order to give them a definite right and security.

Keywords- Refugees, Status under International Law, Status in India, Rohingyas, Need for legislation for Refugees.

Introduction

Every human being is having the Right to live with dignity and to be given a nationality status. It is a Universal obligation of every nation that no individual should be left in a condition of statelessness. The concept of nationality acts as a vital link between an individual and a nation. It enables the person to ensure certain rights and duties and to be secured by a particular nation to which he belongs. But in the case of Refugees it does not happen so because Refugees are the ones who has left their native country due to various reasons as established by the International law. They migrate to another country where they will be either or not given protection and rights depending upon the municipal laws of that country to which they have migrated.

India is one few countries that welcome refugees with hospitality and has also ascertained certain rights over them for their security. Over the past 5000 years India has given protection and shelter to various refugees from different countries like Americans, Persians, Syrians, Palestinians, Ethiopians, Afghans and Christians. India has no specific legal framework for the status of refugees but still has extended certain essential fundamental rights over them. India is not a signatory member to the United Nations Refugee Convention 1951 and its protocol of 1967.

On the other hand though steps have been taken under the international laws for the protection of the rights of the refugees, those rights are not effectively implemented among the nations due to the variations in the implementation of the international laws within their territory. India is the follower of the Specific Adoption Theory according to which an international law in order to be applied under its municipal laws, requires the adoption of its principles through a relevant legislation passed by the Parliament of India.

Aim

This paper studies about the concept of refugees, examines about the various rights guaranteed for them under the Indian law, analyzes about the rohingya refugee issue and also ascertains the need for a specific legislation for the protection of refugee rights in India.

Objectives

1. To study about the concept of refugees.
2. To examine about the various rights entrusted upon the refugees under Indian law.
3. To study about the various International and Domestic legal instruments for refugees.
4. To analyse the inadequate implementation of welfare measures.
5. To enquire about the utility of law with regard to Rohingya issue.

The study is done with the help of secondary sources which includes research articles, books, judgements etc. the secondary sources are those that are already collected and is a compilation work and the selection will differ from study to study. The method the study has adopted is the Doctrinal and Non-empirical study. The doctrinal study is also known as descriptive study and it is done on the basis of already given data and work done. It involves no practical method. It is termed to be an Ex-post facto research as it respects what has happened already.

Review of Literature

A.K.M. Ahsan Ullah, Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for the "Statelessness", Journal on Contemporary Issues, Vol-3, 2016, pp. 286-298- this research article gave a detailed study about the Rohingya crisis but failed to deal with its relation to India.

Abilasha Jha, Rohingya Refugee Crisis: India's Legal Stand and way forward, Journal on Contemporary Issues of Law, Vol-3, Issue-12, 2017, pp. 1-17- this research article analyses the Indian legislative measures for the refugees but has not analysed whether a specific law for refugee is required or not.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀)- inadequate legislative measures does not affect the rights of Refugees in India.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha)- inadequate legislative measures does affect the rights of refugees in India.

Indian Perspective of Refugees

India is a follower of various principles like non-violence, integrity, security etc. The features like security, social welfare, integrity, democracy etc are embedded in the Preamble of Indian Constitution. The various principles of United Nations Declaration of Human Rights 1948 has been established under various fundamental rights like Right to Life and Liberty under Article-21, Right against Unlawful Detention under Article-22, Right to Privacy which was extended under Article-21 etc. The education of Human Rights is embedded under Article-26 of the Indian Constitution³(Choudhury). Even the ancient Vedas of Hindu mythology in India insist on Human Rights⁴(Sastry). Human Rights also form the essential product of Democracy⁵. The remedies are established under Article-32 and 226 of the Indian Constitution. The concept of protection of refugees falls under the ambit of human rights. Refugees are those who leave from their native countries to seek the shelter of other nations due to either internal conflict or insecurities. In order to provide Protection for the refugees on international level the United Nation Convention on Refugees of 1951 was framed in order to initiate the voluntary action of developed nations⁶(Azad and Jasmin 2013). The protection of refugees is based on the concept that hunger, poverty, security threats recognise no border⁷(Kumar 2009). The Right to Dignity which enables a person to make one's own free choices, respect for the choices and conditions to operate is also applicable to the Refugees⁸. The refugee problem has been existing even before the World War II⁹. A study shows that by 2015 there was a total of 2,01,381 refugees and 6,480 asylum seekers were present in India¹⁰(Acharya). Mostly in the case of refugees the men, women and children may be targeted for abuse by the

³Topu Choudhry, Human Rights Education as a Means of Ensuring the Observance of Human Rights, *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, Vol-3, Issue-3, 2013, pp. 1-3.

⁴ Dr. T.S.N. Sastry, "Judicial process and Human Rights in India", *Indian Law Review*, Vol-5, 2013, pp. 56-69.

⁵ Paras Diwan and Payush Diwan, *Human Rights and the Law*, Deep and Deep Publications.

⁶ Asraful Azad and Fareha Jasmin, "Durable Solutions to the Protracted Refugee Situation: The Case of Rohingyas in Bangladesh", *Journal of Indian Research*, Vol-1, Issue-4, 2013, pp. 25-35.

⁷ Chirankan Kumar, Migration and Refugee Issue between India and Bangladesh, scholar's Voice: A New way of thinking, Vol-1, No-1, 2009, pp. 64-82.

⁸ Lokendra Malik and Justice P.N. Bhagwati, *Rule of Law and Human Rights in India*, 2011, New Delhi, Universal Law Publishing Co.

⁹ K.C. Joshi, *International Law and Human Rights*, Eastern Book Company, 2006.

¹⁰ Bhairav Acharya, "The Future of Asylum in India, Four Principles to appraise recent legislature proposals", *NUJS Law Review*, Vol-9, 2016, pp. 73-228.

police, the military or other officials in the country of origin which force them to evacuate¹¹(Ullah 2016). India acts as the host to refugees who leave their native countries.

Various instances that stands as an example are in the cases of refugees from Sri Lanka, Tibet, Jumma people from Bangladesh, China, Tribal people from Burma, Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan etc. In India there is no specific legislation for refugees and mostly they are treated as aliens. There are certain administrative guidelines that deals with refugees in the form of the following three legislations. The Registration of Foreigners Act 1939 deals with the Foreigners, The Foreigners Act of 1946 empowers the State to regulate the entry, presence and departure of aliens in India. The Foreigners Order 1948 under Section-2 defines the term Foreigner as those who are not the citizens of India, which can refer to aliens of categories like immigrants, tourists and even refugees. The government of India has power to limit the entry and even to issue orders to the refugees to return to their native countries when there is a risk for the internal peace, absence of valid passport etc.

India receives mass influx of refugees to whom it has to provide shelter, camps, socio-economic measures etc. The following table portrays the statistics of refugees in India in the year of 2008 which is claimed to be an active year for refugees in India.

Item	2008 figures
Refugees and asylum seekers	411,000
Sri Lanka	120,000
China	110,000
Myanmar	100,000
Afghanistan	30,000

¹¹ A.K.M Ashan Ullah, Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar: Seeking Justice for the “Statelessness”, *Journal on Contemporary Issues*, Vol-3, 2016, pp. 286-298.

Bhutan	25,900
Nepal	25,200
Population	1.2. billion
GDP	\$ 1.2 trillion
GDP Per capita	\$1,050

Table 1.1 World Refugee Survey, 2008¹²

International Protection of Refugees and India

Globally the population of refugees in total is about 9.9 million¹³ ([Masud et al. 2017](#)). The general health status of refugees in various countries is reported to be poor with malnutrition. The United Nation Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1961 deals with the international protection of refugees¹⁴. India joined the Executive of United Nations Human Rights Commission but without signing the 1951 Convention. India's reason for not officially recognizing the United Nation Body Work relating to refugees in its territory is that it is a highly populated country which by signing the Convention would attract refugees and the financial burden and obligation to provide them food, clothing, employment etc will increase which is not actually possible. India being the member of High Commissioner Programme (EXCOM) of 1995 actively adopted the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights to both citizens and non-citizens. India adopted the United Nations Declaration of Territorial Asylum in 1967 and also ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1976. The administrative measures relating to refugees in India is governed by the Home Ministry and the matters of policies is governed by the Ministry of External Affairs. India provides the status of political asylum to the refugees instead of granting them the status of refugees. From the above Conventions and Declarations ratified by India it is well established that India is supportive

¹²http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/128419/15/12_chapter%204.pdf, last seen on 10/12/2017.

¹³ Abudullah Al. Mausal and et. alas, Health Problems and Health Care Seeking Behaviour of Rohingya Refugees, *Journal of Medical Research and Innovation*, Vol-1, Issue-I, pp. 21-29.

¹⁴ Dr. S.K. Kapoor, *International Law and Human Rights*, 2014, Central Law Agency.

for the welfare of the refugees, but at the same time India is concerned about the welfare of its own citizens at the first priority. India maintains a sensitive relationship with the South Asian countries in the matters relating to the governing of asylum.

Refugees and Indian legal framework

Though Indian government claims that its guidelines relating to the treatment of refugees are of international standards there is no specific municipal law to govern the provisions relating to the refugees. But India did not fail to ensure certain fundamental privileges to the refugees under its already existing laws. Those provisions that are extended to the refugees under the Indian law are discussed below.

Constitutional provisions

Constitution of India is the basic and supreme document governing the entire administration and legislative actions of the Indian government. It enumerates the key principles to be ensured in the administration of the Indian government. It also ensures the various fundamental rights and duties for its citizens. Some of the rights are also extended to the foreigners and thus thereby extending to the refugees also. Those provisions are as follows

(a). Equality before the law or equal protection of the law

Right to equality is established under the Article-14 of the Constitution of India. Equality is one such principle which is guaranteed in almost majority of the written constitutions in the world. This right ensures that every individual are treated in an equal manner without any discrimination from one another. This right is extended for both citizens and non-citizens of India. Thus it includes foreigners thereby extending to the refugees also. The wordings of article-14 are as follows, "*The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection of laws within the territory of India.*"

From the wordings of this article it is clear that every individual has to be treated in an equal manner and no person should be discriminated. Under this right the refugees can attain certain privileges as they are bound to be treated equally along with the citizens of India. The Supreme Court in a case titled *Louis De Raedt Vs Union of India* has held that the fundamental rights extends to a foreigner as established under the constitution of India, but it doesn't give the right to the foreigners to reside in India. Thus the foreigners as of now

refugees cannot claim permanent residence in India without obtaining through established legal procedure.

(b). Right to Life and Personal Liberty

Right to life and personal liberty is established under Article-21 of the Constitution of India.

According to this right every individual is having the right to live a peaceful life irrespective of his race, religion, nationality etc. The wordings of article-21 are as follows, *“No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”*

The wordings of this article clearly highlights that no person is supposed to be deprived of their rights without a proper procedure established under the law of India.

It is one such right which is wider in manner to cover various important aspects of life. The judiciary in various landmark and other important cases has extended its scope to various aspects, which are as follows

1. **Right to live with human dignity-** it is one such right that states that every individual is secured to lead a dignified life until he affects the peace of the society or violates the law of India. Thus even refugees are entitled to lead a dignified life in India
2. **Right to livelihood-** this right is similar to that of right to life under article-21 and acts as substantiate right to the latter ensuring the right to basic amenities, shelter etc.
3. **Right to health and medical assistance-** this right establishes the right to adequate medical assistance and health care to every individual in India. Thus under this right the refugees is entitled to proper medical assistance until their stay in India.
4. **Right to constitutional remedies-** no right will be effective unless there is a remedy established under law in case of its violation.

Thus the above stated fundamental rights will be meaningless unless there are constitutional remedies guaranteed by law. Article-32 and article-226 are the two vital constitutional remedies guaranteed by the constitution of India in case of any violation of fundamental rights. The former empowers the Supreme Court for judicial activism and the latter extends the same to the High Court.

Special Treatment

(a). Exemption from penalties

India is apathetic towards the status of refugees. According to the Indian law, foreigners are subjected to be liable for a term not extending five years and are also liable to fine. However India has not implemented this provision without any reasonable causes. In

case of large influxes of refugees, India laid down the principle of the refugee convention under Article-3 which states that the contracting States shall not penalise any refugee for illegal entry into their territory if good cause for such entry is shown.

(b). Identity and travel documents

India issues identification certificates to the refugees thereby showing their refugee status. But no refugees were given travel documents so far except for the Tibetan refugees. The Tibetan refugees were given travel documents under which they could travel to foreign countries and could return to India.

This is in accordance with the provisions of the Refugee Convention under Article-28 which states that the contracting States shall provide travel documents for the refugees within the prescribed conditions.

India has adopted the following three main ways in protecting the refugees

1. India receives the refugees in mass influx by providing them a temporary shelter in camps and in certain essential situations provides them certain socio-economic measures too.
2. Asylum seekers from countries like South Asian countries or any other countries with which India is maintaining a sensitive relationship India grants them a status of political asylum without providing them the refugee status.
3. Whereas the refugees of other countries are subject to apply for the refugee status in the office of the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR). In addition to the above administrative ways being followed by India, India has also adopted three bureaucratic strategies in order to deal with the problems relating to refugees
4. The Home Ministry of India is empowered to deal with the matters of policies, framework regarding the rehabilitation and settlement of refugees. The Ministry of External Affairs is authorized to deal with the matters pertaining to the bilateral negotiations and the international issues respectively.
5. The State Governments are responsible for the maintenance of the protection in the refugee camps being organized in their respective limits.
6. The National Human Rights Commission and The State Human Rights Commissioner are authorized to ensure the overall human rights to the refugees.

Implementation of international humanitarian treaties in India

India is a follower of the theory of Specific adoption, according to which the legislative organ of India must enact a legislation acknowledging the principles of a particular international convention in order for the principles to be implemented.

Thus for all the treaties entered by India, there requires a law to be enacted. In case of refugees, though India has not enacted any specific law so far, India has agreed to issue long term visa for refugees and asylum seekers.

Role of Judiciary

In the absence of laws relating to the refugees in India, the judiciary plays the vital role in ensuring the rights and justice to the refugees seeking the protection of India. The Supreme Court in a case of National Human Rights Commission vs State of Arunachal Pradesh which involved with the large number of Chakma migrants from Bangladesh, held that the refugees cannot be sent back to Bangladesh which has fled from their country due to persecution and it is the responsibility of the state of Arunachal Pradesh to protect them, to ensure the rights vested upon them under article-21 and to repel any action attempting to drive them out of the state.

Rohingya issue- Critical Study

The Rohingyas are an Indo-Aryan ethnic minority group in Rakhine (Rahman 2015). The Rohingyas are the most persecuted minority group in the world. Their educational rights are restricted only in fundamental Islamic studies. Myanmar is a multi-religious country. India and Myanmar have got the robust and rugged relationship in their own legacy¹⁵([Anupama 2017](#)). Earlier 4000 Rohingya muslim came to India and settled in Jammu and Kashmir.

Myanmar is a muslim community originating from Arakan kingdom situated on the western coast of Burma. The list contained in the Citizenship Act 1948 of Myanmar passed after Burma got independence didn't apply for Rohingyas¹⁶.

According to the United Nations high Commissioner for Refugees, Rohingyas are one of the world's largest and most prominent groups of stateless people¹⁷.

¹⁵ Kumari Anupama, A Case Study of Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar and India's Concern, *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, Vol-2, Issue-5, 2017, pp. 477-481.

¹⁶ Abilasha Jha, Rohingya Refugee Crisis: India's Legal Stand and Way Forward, *Journal on Contemporary Issues of Law*, Vol-3, Issue-12, 2017, pp. 1-17.

¹⁷ Kimberly Ramos Gamez, Examining the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights: The Case Study of the Rohingya Crisis, Tilburg University, 2017.

The New York Times Report states that there were 2000 to 6000 Rohingyas were found in boats in Andaman sea¹⁸ ([Majumder 2015](#)).

Since 1996 1000 Rohingyas were repatriated from Myanmar¹⁹ ([Ullah 2011](#)). According to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) 3 lakh Rohingya muslims fled Myanmar as of 25th August²⁰ ([Basu 2018](#)).

Earlier May of this year numerous Rohingyas who are the minority groups of Myanmar immigrated into India. India being the home for various refugees in South-Asia, was not ready to give support to the Rohingyas as some groups of Rohingyas was connected with militant groups which may cause danger to the internal and national security of the country. Though the UNHCR requested India to extend its support to them, India denied to do so, but agreed to extend its support to Bangladesh in deporting Rohingyas.

The Refugee Law and its Benefits

The absence of specific laws relating to refugees increases the non-uniformity among the treatment of refugees. Though the judiciary of India has extended the Articles 14 and 21 to the refugees, they are applicable only to selected groups of refugees leaving the other part to be discriminated. The example of this is the treatment of the Tibetan and Sri Lankan refugees. The Sri Lankan refugees until the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was welcomed and treated well by Tamil Nadu, but after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi the treatment of them depends upon the ruling political party of Tamil Nadu. Another benefit of having a well defined refugee policy/law is that it could clearly define the term 'Refugee' thereby differentiating it from the term foreigners or aliens which cover the refugees in present. The instance can be traced in the situation of people involved in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi where apart from the accused all the other was termed as refugees.²²

¹⁸ A Report by Calcutta Research Group, Rohingyas: The Emergence of a Statelessness Community 2015, Calcutta.

¹⁹ A.K.M. Ashan Ullah, Rohingya Refugees Historical Exclusions and Contemporary Marginalization, *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, Vol-9, 2011, pp. 139-161.

²⁰ <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/bhatis-rohingya-crisis-India-narendra-modi-refugee-policy.law/11/1080474.html>.

²² Dr.Lakshmi T and Rajeshkumar S "In Vitro Evaluation of Anticariogenic Activity of Acacia Catechu against Selected Microbes", *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Science & Technology*, Volume No. 3 , Issue No. 3, P.No 20-25, March 2018.

²³ Trishala A , Lakshmi T and Rajeshkumar S, " Physicochemical profile of Acacia catechu bark extract –An In vitro study", *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Science & Technology*, Volume No. 3 , Issue No. 4, P.No 26-30, April 2018.

Roadblock in Framing Laws Relating to Refugees

The National Human Rights Commission in 1997 requested the Ministry of External Affairs to legislate a proper regulatory framework regarding refugees. It stated that the management of the refugees through the administrative decisions based on political and security considerations gives ad hoc remedies.

But the reason for not regulating a uniform framework for the refugees is that India is having different treaties with its neighboring countries and hence a uniform framework cannot be suitable for the refugees²³.

The other reason for not framing a permanent law for refugees is that India being situated in a geographical location sharing its borders with many nations like Pakistan, China, Nepal etc has to give its security the top priority as a recognized law for refugees may attract large influxes of refugees to India.

Recommendations

1. A specific municipal legislation for refugees is required.
2. A precise definition for refugees is required.
3. Refugees should be distinguished from the term 'Foreigner' and 'Aliens'.
4. Well established guidelines should be established about the remedial measures for refugees.
5. The legislation may try to adopt some key principles of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

Conclusion

Every individual is entitled to lead a dignified and peaceful life; no person should be left with a condition of statelessness. It is the duty of each and every nation to ensure the above rights to every individual across the world. In the case of refugees the above rights are not assured to them in all the cases. India, though is not the signatory member to the 1951 Refugee Convention is an active supporter to the refugees who seek the assistance of India, but the recognition of refugees under the definitions of 'Foreigners' and 'Aliens' leads to certain absurdity in certain cases. Though there are certain reasons to justify for not framing a municipal legislation regarding the refugees in India, certain instances where the refugees were denied their rights as discussed in this paper.

Moreover the present form of regulations administering the refugees in India involves the political dominations in deciding the remedial measures to the refugees.

Thus the paper highlights the need for a specific municipal legislation governing the provisions relating to refugees with well defined definitions and reducing the involvement of politics.

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