

UNCERTAIN GROUNDS: AGENCY AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ROHINGYA WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses Feminist Political Geography (FPG) to examine the spatial dynamics of power impacting Rohingya refugees, particularly women, in India.

It critiques the 1951 Refugee Convention and subsequent attempts to include women within existing frameworks. Such efforts often portray refugee women as passive victims, neglecting their agency. Focusing on Rohingya women who have fled Myanmar to India over the past three decades, the research investigates their experiences of displacement and violence.

The thesis poses a challenge the narrative of victimhood and explores the agency of Rohingya women in India.



Samanwita Paul, February to April, 2021

RESEARCH QUESTIONS/AIMS

Narratives of the forcibly displaced show the manner in which the 'refugee experience' is a fundamentally disenfranchising process. While one cannot deny the loss, deprivation and violence suffered by Rohingya women, feminist research has revealed that conflict and displacement directly or indirectly open up spaces for women to develop agency even if it is for a very short period of time.

This study aims to look into the impact of displacement on the agency of Rohingya women in India. It assesses the manner in which women's agency manifests in the refugee camps and its impact on the needs, demands and aspirations of women. It also aims to assess the nature of representation practiced in the camps.

METHODOLOGY

In India, the settlements in Delhi and Mewat were chosen for the purpose of the study. Heterogeneous purposive sampling was used to capture maximum variations within the sample. Rohingya women above the age of 18 years were chosen for interviews. 120 in-depth interviews with Rohingya women were conducted. Oral history accounts documenting their lives in Myanmar were also collected from women who were at least 15 years of age before leaving Myanmar.

Key Informant Interviews with Rohingya men, camp leaders, religious clerics, humanitarian workers, government officials and law enforcement agencies were conducted to understand their access to services. Focused Group Discussions were conducted with women leaders, and volunteers to generate an understanding of the socio-cultural norms of the camp and their perceptions regarding everyday negotiations, policy needs and the overall changes in the camps.

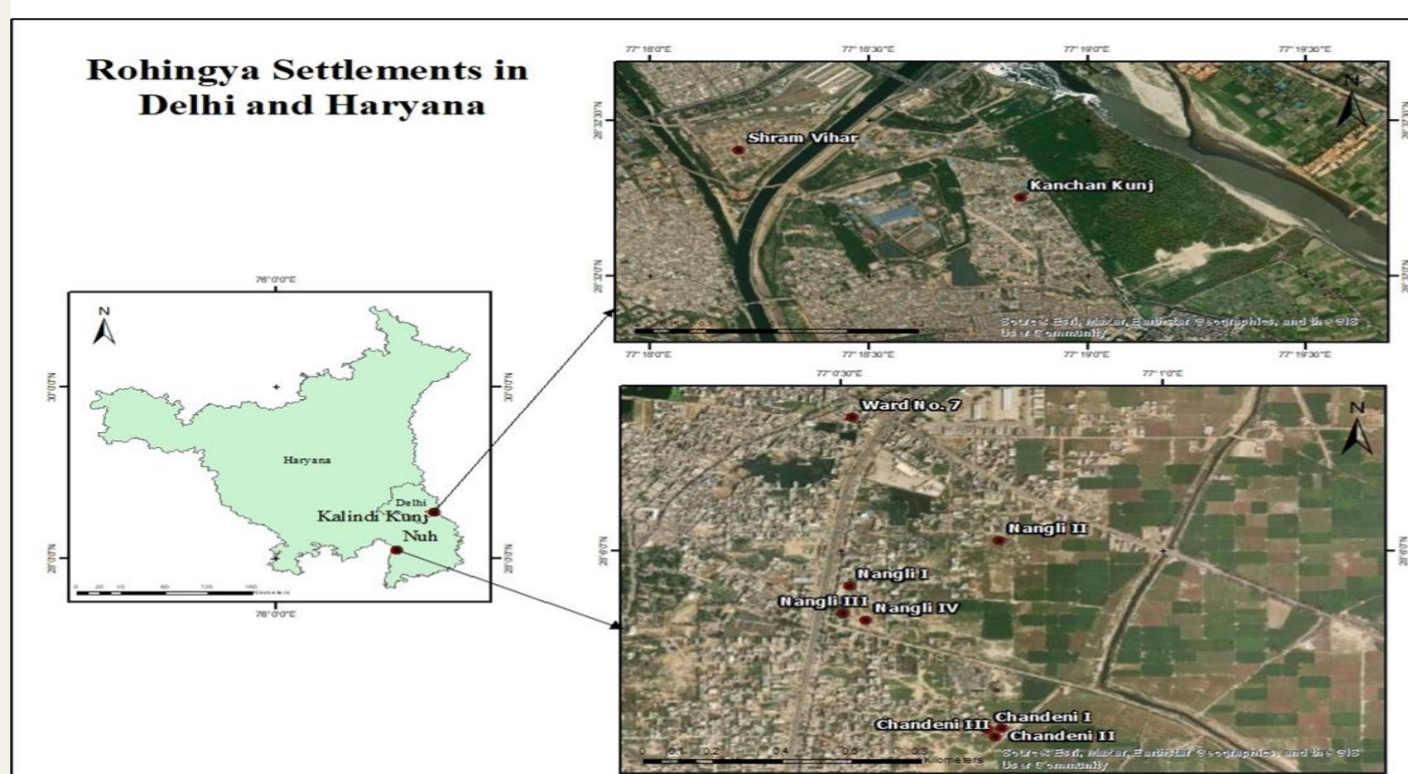
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This study challenges stereotypes associated with Rohingya refugee women. Erasing their history of oppression creates a misleading narrative, while focusing solely on victimhood casts them as helpless. The research finds women leaders emerge within refugee camps, engaging in official governance, creating alternative systems, or voicing dissent. Women leaders also play a crucial role in overcoming cultural barriers and gaining acceptance within the community.

However, resilience for these women is complex. While they demonstrate strength in the face of protection challenges, it's not about simply "bouncing back" but rather "moving on." This resilience is a process built on collective support from other women. Together, they seek help from legal and civil society organizations, building a network for protection and personal transformation.



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OUTPUTS/PUBLICATIONS

- [Triple marginalisation: The Plight of Rohingya refugees in India \(routedmagazine.com\)](https://routedmagazine.com)
- [Rohingya Women Refugees and Threats to Protection in India \(themigrationinitiative.ca\)](https://themigrationinitiative.ca)
- [What Life After Displacement Means For Rohingya Women In India? \(outlookindia.com\)](https://outlookindia.com)
- [The Rohingya Crisis Human Rights Issues, Policy Concerns and Burden Sharing \(grfdt.com\)](https://grfdt.com)
- [To Fall or to Fly: A Rohingya Girl's Dilemma \(thewire.in\)](https://thewire.in)

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