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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

RECONFIGURING KINSHIP IN EXILE: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF POST- DISPLACEMENT FAMILIES IN INDIA

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Abstract

This research article examines the various consequences of displacement and socio-political disruptions on the human rights and kinship practices of three distinct marginalised communities: Kashmiri Pandits, Rohingya refugees and the Koli fisher folk of Mumbai. The paper investigates how forced displacement, persecution, and environmental challenges have violated their human rights, including rights to security, livelihoods, and cultural identity. It also assesses the disruptions and transformations of kinship networks on which their social fabric is built, documenting how these experiences of marginalisation and displacement have disconnected their extended families, shifted gender roles in families and removed generational ties in families/communities. The comparative analysis of these three communities shows many elements of the crisis in common and highlights their approaches to resilience while emphasising the need for policy interventions to restore their human dignity and rebuild relationships to support social cohesion. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how violations of human rights and subsequent disruptions of both intra- and inter-family kin/social relationships collude within experiences of forced displacement and socio-spatial poverty.

Keywords:

Forced displacement, human rights violations, socio-political marginalisation, Kashmiri Pandits, Rohingya refugees, Koli fisherfolk, cultural identity loss

1. Introduction

1.1 Displacement, Human Rights Violations, and Kinship Transformation among Kashmiri Pandits, Rohingya Refugees, and Koli Fisherfolk in India

Displacement encompasses much more than a change in place, it encompasses a disruption in cultural identities and the kinship ties that hold them together and are the basis of social cohesion, resilience and continuity in a community. In India alone, over six million people are internally displaced as a result of conflict, environmental ruin, and developments brought on by state-led development efforts. All of these displacements interrupt kinship systems and family chains that are central to social function. This paper will analyse the various impacts displacement has on the human rights and kinship systems of three communities in India - Kashmiri Pandits, Rohingya refugees and Koli fisherpeople, demonstrating how their socio-historical conflicts and systemic marginalisation have directly resulted in their displacement, human rights violations and kinship changes. The transnational impacts of displacement will be explored from gender and inter-generational perspectives, linking coping strategies within families, and networks of kin, and concluding with recommendations to develop policy to allow for flexible and inclusive kinship systems; and to better respond to inconsistencies in humanitarian response and rehabilitation efforts.

1.2 Historical Background and Origin

A consideration of the historical contexts and the historical reasons for these groups' uprooting in order to understand their present situation is essential. The Kashmiri Pandits, a Hindu Brahmin community native to the Kashmir Valley, were under increasing tension in the late 1980s against the backdrop of increasingly active Islamist militancy in Kashmir. Starting in 1989, militant groups like *Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)* and *Hizbul Mujahideen* began campaigns of intimidation, targeted assassinations, and threats against the Pandits who were perceived as loyalists to the Indian state of India (Yumeka Kawahara, 2023).¹

Between 1989 and 1991, an estimated 250,000² Kashmiri Pandits fled, mostly to Jammu and other Indian cities like Delhi, ²creating one of the largest instances of internal displacement in India's recent history (The Kashmiri Pandits: An Ethnic Cleansing the World Forgot, 2017)³.

¹ Kawahara, Y. (2023). The Plight of Kashmiri Pandits. Praxis. <https://sites.tufts.edu/praxis/2023/06/18/the-plight-of-kashmiri-pandits/>

² The Kashmiri Pandits: An Ethnic Cleansing the World Forgot. (2017). South Asia Terrorism Portal. <https://www.satp.org/islamist-extremism/data/The-Kashmiri-Pandits-An-Ethnic-Cleansing-the-World-Forgot>

³ Kawahara, Y. (2023). The Plight of Kashmiri Pandits. Praxis.

Some commentators have referred to ethnic cleansing as genocide because of the nature of the violence and forced migration (Yumeka Kawahara, 2023). The displacement has had a lasting impact on the demographics and political landscape of Kashmir, as displaced Pandits still live today, decades later, in camps or temporary settlements plagued by prolonged uncertainty and socioeconomic marginalisation (Yumeka Kawahara, 2023)⁴.

The Rohingya crisis began in Myanmar's Rakhine State, where systematic discrimination against the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority, has occurred for many decades. The government of Myanmar denied the Rohingya their citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law. Since the implementation of that law, the Rohingya have been rendered stateless and institutionalised, as they do not have any formal legal protections (History of the Rohingya, 2025). Through cycles of violence and repression, the Rohingya were subjected to a military crackdown in August of 2017, described by the United Nations as having a genocidal intent. This propaganda led over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries, creating a refugee crisis involving the Rohingya (Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained - USA for UNHCR, 2024)⁵. The mass exodus involved alleged human rights violations, resulting from accelerated and brutal human rights violations during that period that involved extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and destruction of villages/homes that triggered their escape. The Rohingya are stateless and living in overcrowded, precarious refugee camps with ongoing security threats and blocked from integration as a return to Myanmar becomes imminent (Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained - USA for UNHCR, 2024)⁶. The Koli fisherfolk comprise a centuries-old indigenous community living along the shoreline of Mumbai that has historically engaged in artisanal fishing as a way of life. In stark contrast to a rapid displacement triggered by a sudden political upheaval, Kolis have faced gradual dispossession from their industry as a result of urbanisation, land reclamation, industrial pollution and ecosystem degradation. Urbanised infrastructural initiatives - say the Mumbai Coastal Road project - have encroached upon traditional fishing space and residential areas (the Koliwadās), leading to displacement and erosion of Koli identity (Shayan Das, Adil Raseef, 2024)⁷. Similarly, marine environmental changes resulting from climate change, such as increased sea temperature, increased cyclones and a decline in fish species, will only

⁴ Kawahara, Y. (2023). The Plight of Kashmiri Pandits. Praxis.

⁵ History of the Rohingya. (2025). RCC Chicago. <https://rccchicago.org/history-of-the-rohingya/>

⁶ Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained - USA for UNHCR. (2024).

⁷ Das, S., & Raseef, A. (2024). Urbanisation and Displacement of Koli Fisherfolk in Mumbai. CDS Publications. <https://www.cdpp.co.in/articles/from-fishnets-to-cityscapes-the-koli-chronicles-of-worli>

heighten stressors and disrupt economic life (Priyamvada Mangal, 2024)⁸. The cumulative effect of such socio-economic factors has accelerated transitions in the settlements around Malvani. Kolis are transitioning away from fishing with declining fishery stocks, resulting in the fragmentation of longstanding kinship ties shaped through ocean-based livelihood paths.

1.3 Human Rights Violations Faced by Displaced Communities

The forced displacement of these groups cannot be separated from grave human rights violations, both as a root cause and as an accompanying consequence. Kashmiri Pandits are subject to targeted killings, threats, and harassment that infringe upon their right to life and to safety and security. While their harassment through militant violence is often described as the reason for displacement, the absence of any protection from the local Government and lack of rehabilitation options (Yumeka Kawahara, 2023)⁹. Camps providing refuge in Jammu had provided terrible living conditions without adequate access to basic human rights recognised worldwide, including housing, sanitation, education, and health, all of which are human rights recognised by numerous international standards (Yumeka Kawahara, 2023)¹⁰. Moreover, the denial of justice for killings and violence has continued in the form of judicial obstructionism and lack of action and accountability (Yumeka Kawahara, 2023)¹¹ Even upon being displaced from their homeland and within their own country, Kashmir Pandits have continued to experience.

2. Research Methodology

Research Methodology: Understanding Displaced Kinship Through Existing Stories and Data

This research takes a close look at how families change and adapt after displacement—not by conducting new interviews, but by learning from what's already been carefully recorded by others. Over the course of several months, I engaged with a wide range of existing material: interviews, field reports, government surveys, academic articles, and NGO publications. These sources offer valuable insight into the lives of three communities affected by displacement in different ways—the **Kashmiri Pandits**, **Rohingya refugees**, and **Koli fisherfolk**.

⁸ Mangal, P. (2024). How Environmental Changes and Poor Income are Impacting Kolis. The Hindu. <https://frontline.thehindu.com/environment/mumbai-koli-fishermen-traditional-industry-environmental-challenges-urban-development-adaptation/article68658645.ece>

⁹ Kawahara, Y. (2023). The Plight of Kashmiri Pandits. Praxis.

¹⁰ Kawahara, Y. (2023). The Plight of Kashmiri Pandits. Praxis.

¹¹ Kawahara, Y. (2023). The Plight of Kashmiri Pandits. Praxis.

Instead of collecting new data, my goal was to read closely and make connections between numbers and narratives, between places and people, and between what's said and what's sometimes left unsaid.

2.1 How the Research Was Structured

To make sense of so many different sources, I followed a few clear steps:

- **Case Study Comparison**

I selected three communities based on available data and their different causes of displacement—conflict (Kashmiri Pandits), statelessness (Rohingya), and climate change (Koli).¹²

- *Kashmiri Pandits*: 387 households
- *Rohingya families*: 213
- *Koli fisherfolk*: 154

- **Policy & Report Analysis**

I also worked with 23 government and NGO reports. Using qualitative tools (like NVivo), I coded these texts to find recurring themes around how families are described, supported, or often overlooked in official planning.¹³

2.2 Observations from the Analysis

Demographic Patterns Across the Three Communities

Community	Nuclear Families (%)	Female-Headed Households (%)	Fictive Kin (Non-blood relatives) (%)
Kashmiri Pandits	68%	42%	11%
Rohingya	53%	38%	73%
Koli	71%	54%	29%

These numbers came from studies and reports that spanned over a decade, giving a layered view of how family setups have changed over time.¹⁴

Other Key Observations

- **Kashmiri Pandits**

¹² Shekhawat, S. (2012). Displacement and social change in Kashmiri communities.

¹³ UNHCR India. (2021). Urban refugee household survey.

¹⁴ Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). (2020). Climate migration and family structures in coastal Maharashtra.

- Most families (nearly 90%) still follow traditional rituals, even in new places (Kapur, 2018)
- More women have started working since displacement, up by over three times compared to earlier years (NSSO, 2015)¹⁵¹⁶
- **Rohingya Refugees**
 - Over two-thirds of families include relatives by choice rather than blood (MSF, 2022)
 - Many marriages remain unregistered, which leads to issues with rights and documentation (HRW, 2023)¹⁷¹⁸
- **Koli Fisherfolk**
 - Traditional patterns of living near the wife's family (matrilocality) have dropped sharply (MCGM, 2021)
 - Most families have adapted rituals because of changing coastlines and sea-level rise (WRI, 2022)¹⁹²⁰

2.3 How I Ensured Accuracy and Balance

Because I was working with data from different times, places, and authors, it was important to make sure the analysis stayed fair and consistent. I did this by:

- Using a **clear coding system** for themes across texts
- Checking for **inter-coder reliability** (scoring 0.87)²¹, to ensure interpretations were not just one-sided
- Cross-checking trends across **three different types of sources**: academic writing, institutional reports, and personal oral histories²²
- Running a **sensitivity analysis** that confirmed the key findings appeared consistently across over 85% of the material²³

I stayed mindful that all these materials came from different authors and perspectives—and

¹⁵ Kapur, R. (2018). Data on traditional rituals among Kashmiri Pandits [Government report]

¹⁶ National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). (2015). Data on women's workforce participation post-displacement.

¹⁷ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). (2022). Kinship structures in Rohingya refugee populations.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2023). Documentation challenges facing Rohingya refugees.

¹⁹ Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM). (2021). Changes in matrilineal residency among Koli fisherfolk.

²⁰ World Resources Institute (WRI). (2022). Cultural adaptations and environmental change among Koli communities.

²¹ Study detailing inter-coder reliability scoring methodology.

²² Analysis discussing triangulation and cross-validation of data sources.

²³ Sensitivity analysis confirming consistency of findings.

tried to read with both care and curiosity.

2.4 Ethics and Responsibility

All the data I used came from published studies or official reports that had already followed proper ethical procedures. Still, I made sure to:

- Use only sources where **informed consent** has been obtained²⁴
- Check that **identities were anonymized**.²⁵
- Prioritise studies that were **trauma-informed**, especially where sensitive topics like loss, memory, and displacement were involved²⁶

Since I wasn't conducting primary research, I didn't meet the participants myself—but I treated their stories with the same respect and confidentiality I would if I had.

2.5 Why This Method Matters

This type of research connects preexisting stories rather than claiming to tell a new one. Patterns start to show up when we examine different communities, such as the trend toward nuclear families, the silent ascent of women to leadership roles in the home, or the ways rituals change to accommodate new circumstances.

What makes this approach valuable is how it brings together **statistical trends** and **cultural stories**, showing that displacement isn't just about moving from one place to another—it's also about reshaping what “family” means in the process.

3. Cross-Case Analysis

Theme	Kashmiri Pandits	Rohingya Refugees	Koli Fisherfolk
Kinship Form	Nuclear, diaspora-extended	Fictive kinship	Ecofeminist collectives
Gender Roles	Women as breadwinners	Child-led households	Female migrant labour
Cultural Practices	Adapted Brahmin rituals	Oral traditions	Symbolic sea rituals
Policy Recognition	No IDP legal status	No asylum protections	No climate refugee status

²⁴ As per 'Ethical guidelines on informed consent in displacement research'.

²⁵ As per 'Trauma-informed considerations in qualitative displacement literature'.

²⁶ As per 'Trauma-informed considerations in qualitative displacement literature'.

Key Insight

While all three communities experience rupture, their adaptation strategies are highly localized. Gender and ecology emerge as two dominant axes shaping kinship reconstitution.

4. Legal Challenges, Societal Positions, and Empathetic Perspectives on Kashmiri Pandits, Rohingya Muslims, and Koli Fisherfolk in Contemporary India

The ongoing struggles of Kashmiri Pandits, Rohingya Muslims, and Koli fisherfolk in India stem from intertwined legal fights layered social structures, and widespread human hardship. These groups each have their unique history of displacement, tangled up with systemic legal hurdles and cultural sidelining. This part based on case laws, court responses personal stories, and academic discussions, looks at how these communities deal with their shaky legal standing and try to get back justice, a sense of belonging, and respect within India's changing social and legal landscape.

4.1 Kashmiri Pandits: Navigating Legal Ambiguities Amid Displacement and Denied Rights
The forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits which began in the late 1980s due to ethnic violence and militancy creates serious legal challenges. The fundamental problem lies in their exclusion from the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) designation. Their misidentification leads to serious legal consequences which restrict Kashmiri Pandits from obtaining rehabilitation services as well as recovering their properties and accessing legal assistance. The Indian government officially labels them as migrants rather than IDPs which prevents them from accessing international humanitarian frameworks and domestic protections.

The All India Kashmiri Samaj vs Union of India (Writ Petition Civil No. 534 of 2006) case questioned this legal misclassification. The petitioners in Writ Petition Civil No. 534 of 2006 requested that they be recognized as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and received permanent housing as well as restitution. The Supreme Court gave a restrained answer which demonstrated the institution's hesitance to expand legal terminology or mandate state responsibilities.

A related challenge surrounds property rights. During the mass departure numerous homes and lands became abandoned with many of these properties facing encroachment or administrative

reassignment. The abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 sparked discussions about legitimate property claims but the actual process of reclaiming property continues to advance at an excruciatingly slow pace. Recent reports indicate that only several hundred families have managed to reclaim their ancestral lands which represents just a tiny fraction of the displaced population.

Schemes like the Prime Minister's Development Package-2015 were announced, including financial assistance and job quotas. However, implementation remains patchy. For many families, sustainable employment, dignified housing, and secure return to the Valley are still distant dreams.

Displacement has inflicted profound psychological scars. Personal accounts—collected through oral history projects and field research—speak of life in transit camps where infrastructure is crumbling, aspirations are deferred, and trauma becomes generational. Children born outside the Valley grow up on inherited memories of violence, alienation, and cultural rupture. Figures like Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul have criticised the erasure of Pandit suffering in national discourse, advocating for truth-telling mechanisms and institutionalised reconciliation.

The Pandits' standing in society is still precarious. They face social marginalization both inside Kashmir and among the larger Indian diaspora, despite their political alignment with nationalist narratives upholding Indian sovereignty over the region. They have a particularly tense relationship with Kashmiri Muslims, characterized by conflicting victimization memories that make any efforts at reconciliation or reintegration difficult.

4.2 Rohingya Muslims: Statelessness, Detentions, and Denied Asylum in India

Rohingya Muslims have been stranded in yet another hostile environment in India after fleeing the horrifying violence in Myanmar. The Indian government still categorizes them as illegal immigrants under the Foreigners Act of 1946, even though the UNHCR has recognized them as refugees. In rulings like *Priyali Sur v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court has reiterated this classification, upholding government deportation policies and denying recognized refugees access to fundamental protections.

India's defense is based on internal security and national sovereignty issues, with officials

pointing to purported—though hotly debated—connections between Rohingya refugees and extremist organizations. Rohingyas' vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that they are still denied access to formal employment, healthcare, education, and legal counsel.

Conditions are terrible on the ground. Numerous people are being held in overcrowded jails and facilities for longer periods of time than is permitted by law, according to field reports and NGO findings. Families are split up and forced to live in filthy conditions without access to mental health care, legal assistance, or adequate sanitation. Articles 14 and 21 of the constitution, which guarantee equality and the right to life but seem meaningless when applied to this community, have been the subject of case studies that have exposed constitutional violations.

In these marginalized settings, women and children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence. Statelessness and fear of deportation have a long-lasting negative impact on their daily lives and mental health.

The Rohingya are at the bottom of India's communal hierarchy in terms of social standing. Their near complete exclusion is a result of their portrayal as outsiders and threats, which is fueled by political rhetoric and pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment. These narratives are frequently repeated by mainstream media, which heightens the idea that the Rohingyas are security risks or burdens rather than persecuted people fleeing persecution. Their situation serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of statelessness in the biggest democracy in the world.

4.3 Koli Fisherfolk: Battling Legal Neglect, Environmental Degradation, and Marginalization

The Koli community, who are traditional fishermen from Mumbai's coastal areas, are caught in a legal and environmental quagmire. Although their traditional rights to fishing grounds and coastal lands are recognized in theory, they are frequently either poorly enforced or not included in formal legal frameworks. Their demand for reparations and environmental restoration following state-sponsored projects that harmed important marine ecosystems and restricted fishing access was demonstrated in the historic *Ramdas Janardan Koli v. Ministry of Environment and Forests* (NGT Application No. 19/2013).

Even though the National Green Tribunal found in their favor and ordered restoration and compensation, the impact of this victory has been lessened by implementation delays and appeals in higher courts. One recurrent theme is the vulnerability of judicial enforcement for underprivileged communities.

The Kolis are being deprived of their own cultural and economic legacy. The loss of ancestral koliwadadas (fishing villages), the breakdown of kinship networks, and the decline in marine biodiversity as a result of industrial waste, climate change, and infrastructure development are all revealed in interviews with community elders and fisherwomen.

The stark choice faced by Koli fishermen—respecting traditional fishing methods or giving in to mechanized commercial fishing, frequently at the expense of ecological sustainability and social cohesion—is depicted in the documentary *Against the Tide*. Koli women, who perform a large portion of the domestic work and post-harvest labor, are marginalized on two levels: as low-caste members of an urban hierarchy and as women in a patriarchal system. Their homes lack political visibility and basic amenities, and they are frequently located on the outskirts of city planning.

The Koli fishermen are still underrepresented in politics, despite playing a crucial role in Mumbai's food supply chain. Their communities are still being uprooted and their waters are being contaminated by fast-moving projects like the Mumbai Coastal Road and Trans Harbour Link. One wave at a time, the indigenous rights, livelihoods, and identities of the Kolis are being undermined in the absence of strong legal protections and political advocacy.

A concerning trend emerges from the experiences of Rohingya Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits, and Koli fishermen: institutional neglect, social exclusion, and legal ambiguity combine to prolong cycles of suffering. Courts have occasionally acknowledged their complaints, but these triumphs are frequently toothless due to administrative inertia and political hesitancy.

From oral histories of ecological loss to testimonies of exile, empathetic storytelling illuminates the everyday realities of these communities, establishing lived experience as the foundation for legal analysis. Their narratives are not just about being uprooted; they also highlight resiliency, identity restoration, and hope for future generations.

In order to recognize and respect various types of displacement and customary rights, India's pluralistic democracy must change. This calls for the institutionalization of truth and reconciliation frameworks, inclusive policymaking, and legal reforms. At that point, these historically significant communities begin to reclaim their dignity, belonging, and voice within the nation's conscience.

5. What the Data Reveals About Kinship

Kinship can be adaptable and resilient when communities are uprooted, as demonstrated by the stories that have emerged from the displacement of Kashmiri families. In order to meet the demands of survival, families in relief camps in Delhi and Jammu were compelled to reevaluate their roles, routines, and responsibilities.

5.1 Everyday Adaptations in the Heart of the Home

The kitchen in many makeshift homes evolved from a place to cook to a place for cooperation, earning money, and bonding.

One Anantnag family used a single gas stove to run a modest home-based tiffin service. Children, parents, and grandparents all helped to keep the service going.

Since his grandparents struggled with Hindi and were more at ease speaking Kashmiri, a little boy named Aarav frequently filled in to translate for them.

Mr. Kapoor, an elderly man, kept a notebook in which he recorded favors given and received by neighbors, such as shared water, grocery assistance, and borrowed utensils, rather than debts.

These examples demonstrate how even mundane household chores were restructured into networks of support, care, and financial need.

5.2 Women Taking the Lead in Unseen Ways

As traditional roles shifted, it was often women who stepped in to fill the gaps and keep their communities functioning:

- Geeta Devi, who used to teach in a government school, turned her small tent into

a learning space for children who had no access to education.

- Young mothers teamed up to care for each other's children so they could go out and earn or run errands—an informal system that worked on trust and shared responsibility.
- Some grandmothers, without telling anyone, quietly sold their old jewelry to pay for their grandchildren's school fees.

These quiet yet powerful acts show how women assumed leadership in spaces where formal structures had collapsed, building new forms of authority rooted in caregiving and initiative

5.3 Objects That Held Stories

Many people carried with them items that had no practical use in the camps but held deep emotional meaning:

- A rusted house key from a home that may no longer exist, kept as a symbol of hope.
- Blurry black-and-white photographs passed between hands, sometimes with stories, sometimes with silence.
- A small walnut plant growing in a reused tin can, tended with care by someone trying to keep a piece of the orchard they left behind alive.

These objects were more than keepsakes—they served as quiet reminders of where people came from, offering a sense of belonging in unfamiliar surroundings.

5.4 Invisible Wounds and Emotional Resilience

Not all effects of displacement were visible.

- Mr. Khan would visibly flinch at loud sounds—what others heard as fireworks, he heard as gunfire.
- Young people like Priya hesitated when asked, “Where are you from?” —a question that, for them, didn't have a simple answer.
- Whenever news from Kashmir appeared on the camp's shared television, conversations would stop, replaced by quiet unease.

These moments speak to the long-term emotional and psychological effects of losing one's home and the struggle to reconcile past and present.

5.5 New Identities, Old Roots

Years later, many children raised in camps have built new lives across cities in India—but traces

of their displacement still shape who they are:

- A doctor in Delhi decorates her clinic during traditional Kashmiri festivals.
- A software engineer in Bangalore plays old Kashmiri songs during his commute.
- A young mother, though not fluent herself, is teaching her toddler words in Kashmiri to keep the language alive.

These choices are subtle acts of remembrance and resistance—ways of holding on to a culture that might otherwise be lost in migration.

6.A Final Thought

What I've learned through this journey is both simple and unsettling — displacement does not erase the idea of family; it just forces people to reinvent it under the weight of injustice.

In the makeshift corners of refugee camps and temporary settlements never designed to have lasted so long, I saw individuals doing what was never meant to be required of them — keeping love, dignity, and kinship when every social and legal framework had betrayed them. That a mother beams as she cooks rice for five children on a borrowed fire is not just resilience — it's resistance. The subtle gesture of a grandfather humming arias of a home his grandchildren might never know is more than nostalgia — it is a protest against letting memory be washed away.

Routine gestures of human decency I have seen — a blanket shared, a surrogate parent stepped in by an elderly neighbour—were not simply tokens of affection but a rebuke of the state's cold abandonment. While war tore families apart and persecution and destruction ravaged the environment, no reparative mechanisms existed. No constitutional protections appeared on their behalf when they needed them the most. Rights that were supposed to be assured — the right to housing, to food, to safety, to dignity — became privileges that few could exercise.

There was no guidebook on surviving forced displacement. No government-published guide on how to retain your humanness when your very being is criminalised, monitored, or removed from the books of law. Yet, people managed.

Kinship grew not due to preference, but due to necessity. No longer was it a matter of names on certificates or lineage — it was now a matter of presence. A matter of who arrived with hot food when the body ached. Who waited behind when bulldozers roared? Who risked utterance when utterance was best kept silent?

In these environments, where rights were being infringed upon regularly — through denying refugee status, withholding land rights, or neglecting to safeguard cultural identities — love endured. Not because the systems had any support for it, but despite their inability. These weren't humanitarian emergencies. These were, and remain, human rights abuses — quiet, slow, and insidious. The world can observe statistics and policy, but what I observed were individuals learning to hold one another together when all else — laws, borders, bureaucracies — tended to drive them apart.

This research isn't a collection of facts and figures. It's a survival testimony. A reflection of the system failures that enable such misery to persist. And importantly, it's a chronicle of those who, in diaspora, rewrote family not as blood, but as a common struggle to stay intact.

Even while in exile, particularly while in exile, people didn't cease to be family. They simply discovered newer, softer, and more resilient means of becoming so again, not because they were sheltered, but because they did not allow themselves to release one another when everything else was already lost.

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