

# The Representation of Refugee life experiences in literature: A Critical Study

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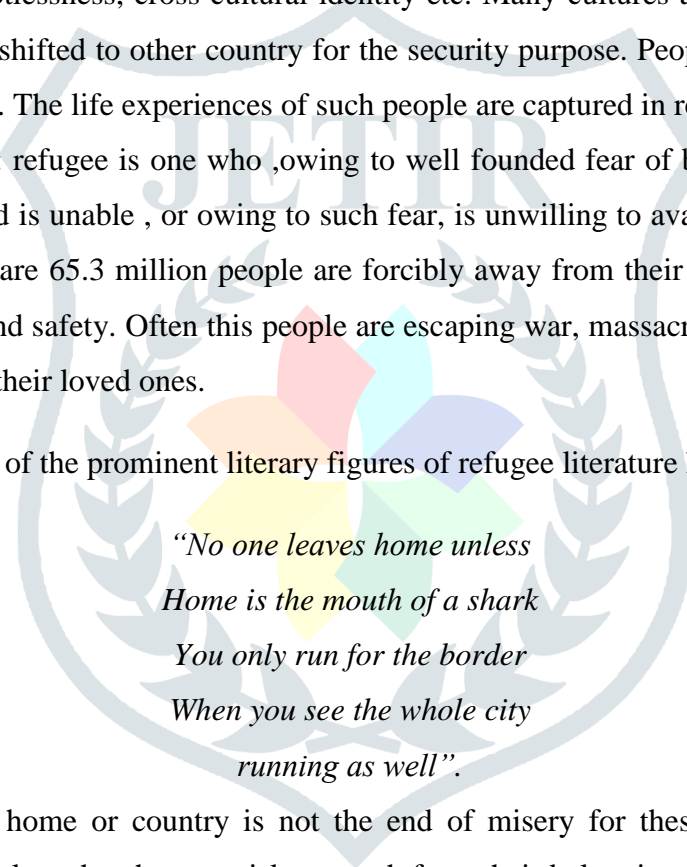
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Introduction:

After two world wars, literature has taken new leap as it includes the life experience of people's suffering, migration, homesickness, rootlessness, cross cultural identity etc. Many cultures and traditions had been erased from the face of the earth or shifted to other country for the security purpose. People had to take refuge to other country for their better future. The life experiences of such people are captured in refugee literature. According to the 1951 refugee convention: refugee is one who, owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. Presently there are 65.3 million people are forcibly away from their home and are on the move in search of stability, security and safety. Often this people are escaping war, massacre or political turmoil to insure safeguard of themselves and their loved ones.

As Warsan Shire, one of the prominent literary figures of refugee literature has said:



*“No one leaves home unless  
Home is the mouth of a shark  
You only run for the border  
When you see the whole city  
running as well”.*

Escaping from their home or country is not the end of misery for these innocent migrants. In their attempt to migrate into safer place they have to risk so much from their belonging to beloved and even their own life is at stake during this journey. Migrants have to face brutal weather, starvation, physical labor, mental trauma, and uncertainty all the time. Even after reaching their destination only their journey ends, not misery. They are not always welcomed by the natives and have to struggle for adjustment and identity. The refugee literature is the saga of the struggle of such people who are considered outsiders in the other country and feel unsafe in their own country.

## Literature and Refugee crisis:

As it is said, literature is the mirror of society. Literature reflects the joys and miseries of society. Literature written by or about refugee tells the stories of such migrants and explores the heart and mind of such people. Literature written about refugee is the lance through which one can get firsthand experience of what a migrant have to go through and what he has to sacrifice without any guilt. Numerous books have been written to carve miseries of these dislocated people on the pages especially during world wars to recent Syrian crisis. Refugees possess no land of their own to settle down and develop for their and their family's' wellbeing.

The concept of migration and insecure residence had its root in ancient literature too but it was not as cruel as we find in the modern world where crisis for identity and dislocation has reached to its climax. Virgil's epic hero Aneas flees an ancient war in west Asia and crosses the Mediterranean Sea in search of safety. He eventually finds it in Italy and founds the dynasty that would later spawn the Roman Empire. The bible is instinct with themes of migration. The book of Exodus contains such themes and so are the gospels. Luke's first gospel portrays the infant Jesus as a kind of migrants, shunned by the innkeepers of Bethlehem. In the gospel of Mathew while depicting Jesus' escape from king Herold, Mathew later highlights the flight of the family to Egypt. Serrailier's novel 'The silver sword' depicts the journey of four young poles attempting to find their parents in destroyed Europe after Second World War. 'City of thorns' by Ben Rawlence is a treasure of heart melting stories of migrants rotting without hope of re-settlement at world largest refugee camp, Daddab, Kenya. One of the most appealing pieces of literature depicting refugee feeling is Warshan Shire's poem 'Home'. In her poem 'Home' the poet tries to express why people stake their lives at sea.

“you have to understand  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than land”.

Thus, we can say that the theme of migrant and dislocation in literature is as old as literature itself.

### Major themes in refugee literature

Refugee literature generally highlights the themes like struggle to be alive, homesickness, search for better life, identity crisis and re-creation of life. These themes emerge from the war or social, political, or natural crisis. Some minor themes like hunger, abuses, and travel are also considered.

## Plots and geographical settings

Literature written on refugee generally tells the story which begins with the depicting life before crisis which is very normal and peaceful but gradually crisis or war starts to erupt which starts affecting life of people and finally forced them to flee the home to survive war or crisis. The journey is seldom easy. Natural and geographical odds make it tiresome and uneasy. After reaching their destiny identity and adjustment in new culture and homesickness is another battle to overcome for migrants. Most of the novel or memoir written in this genre follows this similar plot along with some sub-plots.

These stories are often set in the midst of war or political, social or natural crisis. The study is focused on the time, place, culture and geography of the story and its characters. Refugee literature deeply discusses the setting of the books. For example *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* is set in Rwanda and other African countries during Rwanda massacre. The other book *Weary Generations* is set in India and Pakistan at the time of partition while another two books *All The Light We Cannot See* and *The Kite Runner* is set in France during second world war and Afghanistan during Soviet invasion respectively.

## Conclusion

This research article attempts to create overall impression of refugee literature. The article studies, analyses and compares facts which are found after the study and refugee experiences expressed through literature. The characters are usually found in trauma and struggling for the life. Setting of such literature is thrilling as people struggle to sustain their identity and they exist instead of living. Refugee stories prove that the narrator has undergone a psychological disturbance and live in the state of mental imbalance.