

VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM- LIVE AND LET LIVE

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CONTEXT :

As a grim situation unfolds in Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul, post the withdrawal of foreign troops, the world stares at a humanitarian crisis. Countries with their citizens stranded in Afghanistan are burning the midnight oil to ensure their safe evacuation. Since August 16, over 800 Indians have been evacuated back under “Operation Devi Shakti”. Indian Armed Forces are engaged in evacuating not just Indians but also foreign nationals.

INTRODUCTION- ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF AFGHAN CRISIS

- With a sizable Indian population still stuck inside Afghanistan and many Afghan Hindus and Sikhs seeking asylum in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi **began the rescue and evacuation operation** by calling a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security.
- With the situation unfolding fast in Afghanistan, the **Centre is keeping a close eye even as the relief** and rescue operation continues in top gear.
- At this crucial juncture, when India has a crucial role to play in its neighbour Afghanistan, India has been leading from the front — be it the rescue and evacuation of our citizens, providing relief and aid to the citizens of the war-torn country or for rebuilding Afghanistan. **India has always enjoyed close ties with Afghanistan** and has been actively engaged in its rebuilding and development.
- **India believes in “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (the world is one family)** and all its humanitarian missions have been guided by this principle. In Afghanistan, too, India led from the front in evacuating citizens from India and across the globe.

VALUES ASSOCIATED WITH VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

- From **Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi, India’s leaders have often evoked the phrase vasudhaiva kutumbakam** (the world is one family), taken from the Maha Upanishad, to elucidate the country’s global outlook.
- **Values associated with Vasudhaiva kutumbakam**
 - promote peace
 - strengthen democracy
 - fight corruption
 - create greater awareness on sustainable development
 - encourage social harmony

REFUGEE CRISIS IN THE WAKE OF MIDDLE EAST TURMOIL

- During 2015-2018, The **European migrant crisis**, also known as the **European refugee crisis**, was a period of significantly increased movement of refugees and migrants into Europe during the 2010s.
- Different European countries sealed their borders due to the higher influx of refugees in their particular countries.
- **Ranging from Cyprus and Croatia to Hungary**, some applied wired fences with soldiers on the borders to restrict movement.
- In the light of humanitarian values, this move is condemned as to it was a personal pursuit irregardless of the predicaments of lakhs of human lives.
- Again, **haunted by a 2015 migration crisis fueled by the Syrian war**, European leaders desperately want to avoid another large-scale influx of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan.

INDIA'S ROLE IN PROMOTING VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

- In early 2020, when the Covid-19 outbreak shook the entire world and left people stranded, India launched the **"Vande Bharat Mission"**. By July end last year, India had operated over 88,000 flights across the world, taking every health precaution and following the WHO guidelines. Over 100 nations were covered under the Vande Bharat Mission and around 70 lakh Indians were brought home. And that is not all — several Indians were also evacuated from Wuhan, the epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak.
- **"Operation Sankat Mochan"** of June-July 2014 in which 46 Indian nurses were rescued from a Tikrit hospital from the clutches of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in war-ravaged Iraq. It was a big diplomatic win for India.
- In April 2015, the Indian Navy and Air Force became the saviours of 4,600-plus Indians and over 950 nationals of 41 countries as India carried out **"Operation Raahat"** to evacuate its citizens after the Yemen crisis following the military intervention by Saudi Arabia.
- Simultaneous rescue operations from the port of Aden by the Indian Navy, Air Force and Air India from **Sanaa** were a follow up to the successful Indian diplomatic intervention.
- Similarly, in March 2016, India carried out the successful evacuation of 250 Indians following **multiple bombings at Brussels airport in Belgium**.
- The Afghan Sikhs and other nationals who have been evacuated are full of praise for the Indian government for saving them. **One important highlight of the rescue mission has been the evacuation of three of the last six "Swaroops" of the Sikh holy scripture — Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, considered as the "Living Guru" — from the Kabul airport.** They were received by Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in Delhi.

CURRENT ISSUES VIOLATIVE OF VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

- But, after the tremendously positive role played by India in the International arena for refugees, it's own actions are in red light now.
- Issues related to **CAA and NRC** came in limelight as discrimination in granting citizenship is against the principal of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (World is one family).

- Also, **against the backdrop of military coup in Myanmar** and sudden influx of refugees to India, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) directed Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh to check illegal influx from Myanmar into India.
 - It has also called for **sealing the border with Myanmar so as to curtail the influx.**

REFUGEE CONVENTIONS AND ISSUES WITH INDIA

United Nations Refugee Convention, 1951:

- The 1951 Refugee Convention or Geneva Convention is a United Nations multilateral treaty for the protection of refugees.
- The convention defines a refugee as a person who fled their homes and countries. Especially due to a well-founded fear of persecution of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
- The Convention also mentions people who do not qualify as refugees, such as war criminals.
- The Convention builds on Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. The article recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries.
- non-refoulement: The cornerstone of the 1951 Refugee Convention is the principle of non-refoulement. According to this principle, a refugee should not be deported to a country where he or she faces serious threats to his or her life or freedom.
- The 1967 protocol of the convention allowed even the non-Europeans to get refugee status. Thereby making the convention more comprehensive.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- It was created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes.
- It is a global organization for saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future. The organisation covers refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people

Global Refugee Forum (GRF)

- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency, and the government of Switzerland together host the GRF.
- It aims to debate and discuss the response of the world's countries to the global refugee situation.

Refugee Problem in India

- India does not have a separate statute for refugees. Until now India is dealing with refugees on a case-by-case basis.
- India is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention on Refugees or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- However, India is a signatory to a number of United Nations and World Conventions on Human Rights. Such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It affirms basic rights for all persons – citizens and non-citizens in the same manner.
- Still, India has been generous to refugees and asylum-seekers. The two largest Refugee Influx in India are including some 62,000 Sri Lankans and some 100,000 Tibetans are directly assisted by the Government of India.

Factors behind Refugee Problem in India

Direct causes for Refugee Problem

- To **escape persecution**, migrate towards safe havens like India.
- **Accommodative approach**: Despite being a non-signatory to the 1951 refugee convention, India has welcomed refugees since 1947. This includes Tibetans, Bangladeshis, Afghans etc.
- **The multi-religious, multicultural and multi-ethnic diversity of India** creates social bonds with numerous foreign citizens. For instance, it was the Tamilian Bond that induced Sri Lankan Tamils to look towards India for migration during the civil war. Similarly, the kinship between Myanmar people and Manipur people is attracting the Myanmar refugees towards India.

Indirect causes for Refugee Problem

- **Open Borders** facilitates movement towards India.
- **A deficiency of Personnel**: The government's order to curb the refugee influx from Myanmar was not implemented effectively. As the Assam Rifles wasn't able to effectively monitor the border with just three battalions.
- **Favourable Agreements**: The majority of refugees from Myanmar are holding their position around the Free Movement Regime. It is a region of 16 km on either side, where there is unrestricted access as per a pact between the two countries.
- **Unstable Neighbourhood countries**: India's neighbourhood countries are facing one or other problems since their formation. For example, the Civil war was now followed by Human Rights Violation in Sri Lanka. Similarly, the Bangladesh liberation war later followed by military rule, etc.



Arguments in favour of permitting Refugee Influx

- **Humanitarian Rights:** India has an implicit obligation under UDHR to protect the human rights of non-citizens as well. Thus, the refugees facing persecution threat should be allowed into India.
- **Prevent Civil War:** The armed rebel groups have threatened Myanmar's military with retaliation if the atrocities do not stop. If India returns back the Myanmar, then more hatred will be generated that might trigger a civil war in future.
- **Responsible Regional Power:** The country aspires to be regional and global power that itself calls for adopting an accommodative stance towards refugees.
- **Champion of Democracy:** The world's largest democracy has a responsibility of protecting the rights of people who put their lives in danger for upholding democracy. This was seen recently in Myanmar.

Arguments against permitting Refugee Influx

Refugee Influx poses many challenges to India's internal security. This include,

- **Social consequences of permitting refugees:**
 - Refugees might create an identity crisis with the indigenous people. For example, Bangladeshi refugees in Assam and Arunachal threaten to overtake the indigenous population of the region.
 - Difficult to identify and deport them back to their country after a few years. For example, the Rohingya refugees entered through the North-East. But later they spread to all other states.
- **Economic consequence of permitting refugees:**
 - Increased financial responsibility of the state. According to the UNHCR report in 2014, there were more than 200,000 refugees in India. India at present does not have the financial capacity to satisfy all their basic needs.
 - Decreases domestic wage level and replaces the native people. Since illegal immigrants and refugees require food and shelter, they also work at very low wages in their settling areas.
- **Political consequence of permitting refugees:**
 - Issue of terrorism: These refugees, since not accepted by governments, are vulnerable to join terror outfits for work and revenue.

Suggestions to solve refugee issue:

- Need to formulate a **comprehensive refugee policy** that would provide greater clarity in differentiating between a refugee/illegal migrant.
- A **National Immigration Commission** can be appointed to frame a National Migration Policy and a National Refugee Policy for India.
- The government has to **strengthen the Foreigners Act 1946** and also sign **bilateral agreements** with neighbourhood countries regarding deportation.
- The **states must cooperate with the centre** on the refugee problem. The states should follow the **MHA guidelines of 2018** to identify illegal immigrants. The MHA recommendations include,
 - Restrictions of Illegal Migrants specific locations as per provisions of law
 - Capturing their biographic and biometric particulars
 - Cancellation of fake Indian documents
 - Initiating legal proceedings including deportation proceedings as per provisions of law

WAY FORWARD

The successive successful handling of crises situation across the globe by India have represented India as a strong government and a global leader in the International arena. The people demanding refuge are in a vulnerable situation and see a last ray of hope in an inclusive and tolerant country like India. Considering this, there should be an intake of refugees but not at the cost of the native population. So, It is high time for India to define a clear-cut refugee policy. Everything has to be done keeping in mind the values that golden histories of the Indian subcontinent reflects. Indeed, the world is a family.

Sources

- The Indian Express
- The Hindu
- Business Standard
- Hindustan Times

