ETHNIC CONFLICT INDUCED DISPLACEMENT
AND WOMEN IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF RWANDA

Abstract submitted to the Department of African Studies, University of
Delhi for the Award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECEMBER 2012
ABSTRACT

Rwanda is an ethnically-fragmented socio-political unit that has continued to draw the global attention. Presumably due to long drawn ethnic strife, that has crippled the efforts in development especially in relation to women. The thesis tries to capture few series of tragic moments of 1994 genocide in Rwanda. It represents the historical events which have turned the future life of Rwandan women. The thesis basically is focused on different dimensions & events of genocide which ultimately led to huge massive displacement of refugees towards neighboring countries. The thesis gives a different interpretation and symbolic representation of the ethnicity in particular context of Rwanda. Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict induced Displacement, Gender, Migration, Citizenship issues, Question of Identity and Government policies continue to be of great importance in the Rwandan politics. Recently the debate on these matters has intensified due to the fact that it had started when the entire Rwanda was governed by colonial politics. The growing importance of women participation in Rwanda in post-genocide society has transformed the intellectualism & thinking process for women at large. Where at one side ethnicity is used to be the prime dominating factor in Rwanda’s history but at the same time at present, women and gender has taken those positions in contemporary times. Despite the fact that the needs and strengths of women in ethnic conflict induced displacement are not yet fully addressed in Rwanda, the move towards a more gendered approach has focused attention on wider issues. The aim of this thesis is to influence gender role to eliminate inequalities, problem of poverty, to resolve migration and displacement issues and simultaneously a greater attention needs to be paid to the impact of policies and programmes on the displaced population in general, and women in particular. The thesis also interpreted the feminist theories in context to Rwandan women. Rwanda represents the unique case of feminist theory which explains the relevance of the ethnic induced displacement changes in gender and generational relations feminist theories, somehow in the different time & situation applicable to the country in specific. Feminism remains a positive, movement-based term, with which every woman is happy to be identified. It signals a refusal of oppression, and a commitment
to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression—internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical. We cannot understand Rwandan feminism without the context of historical background of ethnic conflict, Rwandan genocide, racial and colonial influence on Rwandan women. Women are the worst sufferer and at the same time women have immense power for transforming the society. Secondly, male female relation is equally important for the transformation of the Rwandan society. Gender is basically not about woman and man as separate and independent categories but it is a relational concept. Here the study focuses on what women do during and after the wartime has revealed that conflict has directly and indirectly opened up spaces for women to develop agency, affecting structural social transformation and producing new social, economic and political realities that redefine gender in ethnic countries and how women has emerged in Rwanda as ambivalent empowerment as it is born out of loss and devastation. The later part of the study focuses on the transformation of Rwandan society in the post-Genocide period and the role of women in particular in that society. The main aim is to explore real nature of women, which always construct and nurture life. Rwandan women have proved themselves as the life line of Rwanda, which has given a new meaning to their life. The ethnic conflict have changed the role, responsibilities, priorities of Rwandan women, forcing them into what traditionally were men’s responsibilities and many of them are demonstrating remarkable ability to handle the problems of the aftermath. Beyond ethnicity, they proved that there are other values of humanity and family ties, marriage and friendship that are stronger than ethnicity. The different initiatives taken by Rwandan women, conglomerate themselves, unite themselves and motivate themselves for the huge change in their ideology, thinking, and living pattern. They fought against the worst situation during genocide and created the history of development in limited time period. That’s creating a wonderful example before the world. Rwandan women faced the time of separation, potential fragmentation, and alienation, at the same time that it was a period of profound change for women. After the genocide, gender roles in the society have changed; new cultural practices and norms have been acquired by the Rwandans. Women who lost their husbands and children became the head of households and hence they migrated to urban cities searching for jobs to improve their income. . Women started doing
formal, informal, traditional, non-traditional all kinds of activities for the sustainable development of the society. Males automatically accepted this new role of women. This changed situation opened the new door for women forever with full freedom, development, and progress. Women came forward with full vigor and proved as the agent of change. After all this happened men in Rwanda also automatically accepted the new rules and regulation in context to gender equality. Women in conflict and post-conflict situations show themselves willing to learn and apply new skills, even in non-traditional areas. In post-genocide era, women have started working as decision makers, administrators, exporters, reporters, nation builders, project managers, NGOs coordinators. Women have also seen in intellectual roles in teachers, academicians, thinkers & philosophers. Women’s contribution to the income generation has been observed to be crucial for the growth of the society ie they have been associated with NGO’s, rehabilitation projects, micro credit institutions and also with informal sectors like handloom and handicrafts items. In response to the precarious economy, women tended to group themselves to secure a land, build houses and formulated in savings and credit clubs and schemes to finance their reestablishment. The numbers of women who are professionally educated have been increasing and they are associated with fields like law, medicine, education & training, the civil bureaucracy, and informal business in production and services. Rwandan women achieved the unbelievable success in limited time period, in various fields and their role in upliftment of the post-genocide society has been remarkable.