

SPECIMEN FORMAT FOR THESES OF MONTH

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Agency in Select refugee Narratives

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(ii) In roman Script -

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University's Name & Address : Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher
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Abstract within 300 words:

Refugee narratives in English literature encapsulate the extensive problems of the individuals on becoming non-citizens due to several reasons. These narratives examine the factors that lead to statelessness and explore their predicament as refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers or immigrants. The narratives written by refugees themselves or an author with personal interest and proper research on refugees, provide an authentic depiction of their ordeal. Further, these literary works advocate for solutions, urging those in power and society at large to take meaningful steps toward improving the lives of refugees. As a result, the present thesis scrutinises seven such refugee narratives: *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* by Atia Abawi, *The Boat People* by Sharon Bala, *First, They Erased Our Name* by Habiburrahman, *Little Daughter* by Zoya Phan, *City of Thorns* by Ben Rawlence, *How Dare the Sun Rise* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana, and *The Milk of Birds* by Sylvia Whitman, which includes memoirs, biographies and fiction. The thesis makes a modest attempt to investigate into the refugee crisis with special focus on human agency. It uses Hannah Arendt's theoretical concept, namely, 'statelessness,' 'right to have rights,' 'banality of evil' and 'plurality'. The thesis identifies that refugeehood remains a profound challenge, stripping individuals of their political, social, cultural, economic, legal, and bodily agency. It critically examines the erosion of these forms of agency and explores refugees' resilience through the assertion of autonomy and through their continuing struggle for survival in the face of systemic and enduring adversity with the help of political theories of Hannah Arendt. It also tries to contemplate on a few possible solutions for alleviating the hardships of refugees all over the world.

i) Major Objectives:

1. To explore the concept of refugeehood, its historical and contemporary significance, and the characteristics of refugee narratives, including a brief survey of contemporary refugee narratives.
2. To examine the loss of political, social, cultural, economic, and legal agency experienced by refugees, applying Hannah Arendt's concept of statelessness and the 'right to have rights'
3. To analyse the loss of bodily agency among refugees, using Arendt's idea of the 'banality of evil' to understand the corporal impact of displacement.

4. To investigate the resilience of refugee agency through survival, applying Arendt's concept of plurality to explore how refugees persist and navigate adversity within diverse social contexts.

ii) Thesis statement:

Amid the escalating global refugee crises, refugeehood remains a profound challenge, stripping individuals of their political, social, cultural, economic, legal, and bodily agency. This study critically examines the erosion of these forms of agency and explores refugees' resilience, not through the assertion of autonomy, but through their ongoing struggle for survival in the face of systemic and enduring adversity.

iii) Methodology:

Methodologically, the research will employ a qualitative approach, with an emphasis on close textual analysis of the selected narratives. This analysis will seek to uncover how themes of agency and resilience are represented in the texts, paying particular attention to how the loss of political, social, cultural, and bodily agency is portrayed. Further, the research will explore how resilience is depicted as a form of agency, particularly in the face of dehumanisation and statelessness. A thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring motifs, characters, and symbolic structures that reflect the lived realities of refugees, while also drawing upon secondary literature to contextualise the findings. All sources will be documented according to the *MLA Handbook (9th Edition)*, ensuring proper citation and adherence to scholarly standards.

iv) Findings:

1. The experiences of refugees from these regions share common patterns, despite their geographical and cultural differences. The suffering endured by these refugees and their processes of resistance are strikingly similar. The study emphasises the central role of ethnic conflict and hatred in the displacement of refugees from Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Sri Lanka, and the Horn of Africa. The crisis in these regions is driven by ethnic discord, which, despite the different settings, produces remarkably similar outcomes: forced migration, loss of identity, and systemic exclusion. The research highlights how hatred and violence are not confined to one region but contribute to a global refugee crisis. The findings suggest that addressing these underlying causes - ethnic hatred and violence - could significantly mitigate refugee displacement worldwide.

2. The influence of power politics - especially biopolitics - in creating and sustaining refugeehood. Hatred, often cultivated within communities, is worsened by the misuse of power. The research contends that when power is used to oppress and marginalise vulnerable groups, it deepens ethnic divisions and leads to displacement. In the absence of such oppressive structures, communities would have a better chance at peaceful coexistence and equality. The thesis maintains that power should serve the collective good by nurturing inclusion and stability, not by reinforcing divisions. The study stresses that power and representation must be exercised with responsibility, especially in protecting and uplifting marginalised communities.

3. Refugees constantly struggle with identity politics. Identity politics keeps them on the margins and denies them the basic things they need to survive. The discrimination they once faced becomes part of who they are. Their identity turns into a lifelong struggle. True freedom does not come from finding a new land but from reclaiming the one that was lost. They resist and fight not just to survive, but to take back what was unfairly taken from them.

4. The loss of identity often leads to permanent alienation. Once refugees lose their identity in the eyes of society, it becomes extremely challenging to regain a sense of belonging. This loss creates an ongoing battle to establish an identity, as they are constantly dehumanised by society. The migrants, upon leaving their homelands, often carry the weight of being perceived as 'nobodies.' The sense of alienation follows them, lingering even when they eventually gain citizenship or attempt to rebuild their lives in a more welcoming country.

5. Education is identified as a vital tool of resilience, serving as a key way to challenge the cycle of oppression and break down barriers that limit refugee agency.

6. Asylum seekers face enormous struggles to attain refugee status. There is a long journey for people in exile, from being considered nobody to becoming recognized, at least, as refugees. It is often misunderstood that a person becomes a refugee simply by losing citizenship and leaving their homeland. However, the reality is that stateless individuals must go through many procedures to gain the official title of refugee upon reaching a host country.

7. The act of 'walking on' by refugees, which symbolizes resilience. When refugees have no other options, they keep moving - walking to escape their problems, face new challenges, and build a better future. Their long journeys are powerful signs that they are alive and full of hope. The act of continuing to walk, despite losing loved ones along the way, shows the refugees' incredible resilience and will to survive.

8. The refugees live with persistent and immediate threat of death every day. A significant number of refugees, particularly children, die due to hunger and malnutrition. Fleeing from their homes due to ethnic conflicts, they often face the grim reality that their survival depends on escaping their homeland. The oppressors not only aim to force refugees out of their lands but also seek to eliminate them entirely. In asylum centres and camps, they continue to live under the constant threat of starvation and illness. This relentless fear of death shapes their lives, making it a constant battle to remain alive amidst a world of violence, deprivation, and uncertainty.

9. Despite showcasing resilience through plurality, refugees employ various tools for survival, such as storytelling and self-representation, to highlight their community's struggles. Achieving the capacity to voice injustices requires overcoming significant obstacles.

10. Migrant women and children are often viewed as commodified bodies by the oppressors, subjected to brutal violations and treated worse than animals in their homelands, on route to camps, and within the camps itself. The violence against women also serves a strategic purpose for the oppressors—violating the women associated with resistance groups to quell any thoughts of rebellion. This form of exploitation severely hampers the refugees' capacity to work for their own improvement, as they are consumed with the need to survive.

11. The study also underscores that refugees face constant hatred and unfair treatment, which makes it hard for them to fight back or solve their problems.

12. The intentional economic marginalisation of refugees serves to increase their dependence on external aid and make them easier to dominate.

13. Furthermore, the study highlights the normalisation of violence against refugees, where killing, typically considered a crime, becomes an unchallenged act. In many cases, the deaths of refugees are not questioned, as they are perceived as collateral damage.

14. The theme of silence, particularly the silencing of refugees, is pivotal in the narrative. This silence is not just a personal loss but a reflection of the systemic oppression that seeks to erase the voices of the oppressed

15. Another finding is the commonality of experience among refugees from different regions such as Myanmar, Syria, Sudan, and Sri Lanka. Despite their varied ethnic and national backgrounds, refugees share similar struggles of displacement, violence, and survival.

Violence, typically regarded as abnormal, becomes normalised in the context of forced migration. The constant exposure to violence in their home countries and refugee camps transforms it into an everyday reality, intensifying their suffering and further entrenching their trauma.

16. There is significant lack of protection for refugees, both from their home governments and the international community. Refugees are left highly vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and neglect, with little intervention or support to ensure their safety. This absence of protection is especially evident in refugee camps and asylums, where they face daily threats to their well-being, including insufficient food, healthcare, and shelter. The lack of legal safeguards and deep-rooted marginalisation further exacerbates the suffering of all refugees, IDPs and Asylum seekers.

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