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## **The Evading Solution to the Refugees Question Today: A Case of Roma in Europe**

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### **Abstract**

*Roma constitute the largest minority in Europe after Muslims and a good majority of them reside in the Balkan states. The question of the basic rights of about 15 million Roma people in Europe is the one which needs serious attention today. The minority character of the community and its splintered image never allowed it to evolve a compact identity of nationalist character. They have suffered over the centuries a deliberate neglect and racial discrimination that kept them at the outer fringe of the civilized life. Though European Union has declared them as European citizens yet they still wander around the continent as non-citizens, stateless people or refugees. Consequently they are faced with the challenge of the neglect of their basic civilian rights like housing, education, health and social security. The current paper attempts at critically analyzing the question of Roma rights and the possible alternates that can meet up the prime requisites of the community.*

Keywords: *Refugees, Roma, Europe*

### **1. Introduction**

The refugee question continues to mar the world today as millions of refugees strand around the borders leading miserable lives and perishing without availing proper civilian rights and state care. According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) by June 2017 about 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from home out of whom nearly 22.5 million are refugees mostly youth and young children. Continentally Africa homes 30% of refugees largest in number followed by Middle East and North Africa 26%, Europe 17%, Americas 16% and Asia and Pacific 11%. There are about 10 million stateless people who are bereft of basic civilian rights and the number exceeds as precise information is not accessible. (UNHCR 2017)

The Roma people are Europe's largest ethnic minority. Of an estimated 10-12 million in the whole of Europe, some six million live in the EU, most of them EU citizens. Many Roma in the EU are victims of prejudice and social exclusion, despite the fact that EU countries have banned discrimination. (Director General EC 2017)

## 2. Roma: Citizens, Stateless or Refugees

Citizenship refers to the relationship between state and an individual on account of which a person enjoys all the rights in a state. A citizen can be natural and naturalised. A citizen and a national though used interchangeably may have distinct meanings in municipal law as all nationalities fall under citizenship but not all citizens are of the same nationality. Many states like China constitutionally recognise several nationalities and use it in narrower sense but all of them are Chinese citizens. Internationally they are known as Chinese nationals. In international law nationality in certain contexts represents belongingness to a culture, ethnicity or history. It is on the basis of *jus soli* (nationality by birth) and *jus sanguinis* (nationality by descent from a national i.e. parent, in many cases father only) that nationality is conferred. Then naturalised citizenship is also granted after a fixed period of residence in a state.

The question of statelessness is a complex one. When a person is not a citizen or a national of a state as per the law of the land he turns either stateless or a refugee. Article 1(1) of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* declares a person stateless who is "not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law" (UNHRC 2003).

There are millions of stateless persons in Europe on different accounts. However, not all are refugees since the latter have nationality and crossed borders of their home states out of fear of persecution and violence. According to a UN estimate out of about 1000,000 stateless persons in world about 680,000 stateless persons are only in Europe. (result of WW II xenophobic forces) These statistics are not always correct and the number can be far higher. After the disintegration of Soviet Union the non-recognition of certain minorities in newly emerged states let several thousand people stateless mostly Russians in states like Latvia, Ukraine and Estonia.

A refugee is a person who escapes his home state on account of fear of persecution, violence or circumstances that don't allow him lead a secure life with basic amenities. Cambridge Dictionary defines a refugee as a person who has escaped their own country for political, religious or economic reasons or because of war. (Cambridge 2017)

According to the *United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* amended by its 1967 Protocol (the Refugee Convention), a refugee is a person who is outside their own country and has a well-founded fear of persecution due to his/her race, religion, nationality, member of a particular social group or political opinion, and is unable or unwilling to return. (Ohchr2017)

Roma are one such people who have remained stateless in Europe due to various reasons like non-sedentary way of life, the emergence of ethnic nationalism in Europe and the integrative

and disintegrative processes of the states. The breakup of Yugoslavia, one of the largest inhabited states by Roma into six independent units also turned thousands of Roma stateless as the municipal laws of the many of the disintegrated states didn't absorb them. The same story was repeated after the disintegration of Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia when thousands of Roma faced the same crisis in some of the states like Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, Slovakia and Czech Republic.

In the post-Yugoslav situation Roma found themselves in forced in-betweenness. This was on the one hand characterised by the fact that they were often not considered to be legal aliens with permanent residence. On the other hand, they de jure possessed citizenship of another Post-Yugoslav state, which was ineffective. Therefore, while in the Post-Yugoslav contexts the phenomenon of en masse de jure statelessness was avoided (due to legal continuity between the former Yugoslav republican citizenship and the citizenship of post-Yugoslav independents states), a large proportion of Romani individuals found themselves de facto stateless. As they had citizenship, albeit it was ineffective, they were also not protected by the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. In the case of Post-Yugoslav Romani minorities, de facto statelessness became an inter-generational issue and it turned into a vicious circle in which a large number of the Romani population fell into the group of legally invisible persons (Sardelic 2013). While section 8 of the Croatian constitution by making the knowledge of Croat language and Latin script mandatory to become Croat citizens targeted the Serbs including Roma, the decision of the Slovene government in 1991 to erase the names of those who couldn't register within 6 months turned many stateless. Similarly the poor economic status, lack of money to pay for citizenship formalities and deliberate neglect by state administrations to leave Roma outside the citizenship zone have pushed the community to the state of statelessness.

### **3. Roma: The Origins**

Roma is the term commonly used in EU policy documents and discussions, although it encompasses diverse groups that include names like Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti and Boyash.

The Indian Diaspora abroad today constitutes a big section of the total population of many states. It has not only carried the Indian culture and wisdom to different parts of the world but has contributed significantly in different fields. Broadly the Indian diaspora is defined in terms of the people transported or incorporated by the British Empire during their 200 year long colonial rule. The exodus continued even in the post-World war II era largely in the fields of cheap unskilled labour, business and professionals who not only helped in the task of reconstruction of war torn Europe but also in the major fields of business, industry and science.

However, when it comes to the old migrations most of the writings and studies keep silent since it would be under significant pressure to take into fold a wide range of people scattered around over the centuries and even millenniums. Gypsy migration constitutes one such group that left

the North-West India over a millennium back. The exact time of the migration is still under scrutiny but it is largely agreed upon by the scholars and historians that the migration took place at different phases instead of being a onetime exodus.

Needless to say that the economic condition of the Roma in Europe is worse than the life of impoverished people of the third world states and the official lethargy towards this minority is the biggest challenge. This is an irony of the time that the continent that stands for the principles of democracy and human rights is so apathetic towards the millions of people of Romani community.

The Roma are the one whose millennium-long relentless struggle for a dignified place among the global citizenry still continues and poses a stupendous challenge to the basic tenets of democracy and human rights. Leaving the horrid acts of past apart the latest currents of events emanating from the violation of basic human rights<sup>1</sup> to the official apathy and suppression of Roma people evoke global attention. The democratic Europe with just few exceptions now has no alibi left to clandestine its dual face when it comes to the question of basic rights of a people who have lived, served and struggled there for centuries. Even in the twentieth century there have been a large number of refugee exoduses and settlements with most of them resolved or under resolution but in a humanist way.

The institutionalized apathy towards a people today earns no good credentials to a continent that seems to lead the world in a newer way (in the changed global scenario and the emerging economic patterns). The question of Roma origination and migration from India to the West and the emergent issue of catering to the basic needs of 15 million Roma people in Europe and the rest of the world are the one which need serious attention today. Their minority character and splintered existence never allowed them to evolve a compact identity of nationalist nature. It's not the time to recount the centuries old obscure references rather to take the issue as a social challenge to be resolved with wisdom, of course not in older jingoistic vein. The current paper attempts to critically analyze the patterns of Roma migration, their culture and challenges they are faced with.

#### **4. Roma Migration**

The history of Roma people is now but conspicuous as there is a huge stock of literature referring to the incessant migration from the Indian mainland, especially from the north-west India. But to have a deeper insight into the historical movement in either way, one has to have sufficient information about the history of India and vice-versa.

To take the history, culture and state of society of Roma it would be quite difficult to assess the community in its holistic character. Needless to say that the huge spill over of the community in the past while migrating through Central Asia to different parts of Europe has gathered a wide range of characteristics, local and regional, evolving a unique character of Roma culture. In the process of continuous movement of the community (partially because of its historic traditions

and nomadic character and largely because of ruthless non-acceptance by the states they entered in) a good deal of cultural part was lost. Still the Roma as a community share some strong cultural heritage and of late there have been some serious attempts at its preservation.

The earliest accounts throwing some light on the history of Roma migration seem to be wrestled over by the scholars today. They take inferences from the various accounts, travelogues and regional epithets and literature about the Roma exodus from India. Not only is there dearth of unanimity over whether it was a single compact move by Roma or a fragmented departure from India but even over the time of actual departure. Ian Hancock and few others see it as a single migration out of India and the consequent split into Domari, Lomavren and Romani (Hancock 1998).

To come up with the conventional testament it would be useful to take a few. Some of the earliest accounts that history offers us are of Firdausi's *Shahnama* and Hamza's *History of Sassanides*. Infact, Hamza wrote few decades before Firdausi and held that Berham Gour, a Persian Monarch received about 12000 musicians (both male and females) mostly Jatts for the entertainment of its subjects. Even today the gypsies of Arab of Damascas are known as Zott, a deviation of the Indian word Jatt. The Arabic dictionary *Al-Kamus* also defines the word Zott as Jatt Arabicised, a word of Indian origin (Warner And Warner 1905)

Firdausi's *Shahnama* also informs us about the same event. It tells us that the musicians that Berham Gour received were known as Luris. The Gypsies of Persia are even today known by Luris and this is widely acknowledged fact that they are descendents of musicians. Now the references apart about the Luris or Zott these nomenclatures still exist that lend credentials to the theory of their being from the community of Jatt, the one in majority in the north-west of India. The designation Zott occurs time and again in different writings and accounts. Then there are a good number of theories about the gypsy origin of India largely relying on various accounts and travelogues.

Quite late, about in 1763 was it established by Stefan Valye, a student of Theology at Leyden that there was a strong similarity in the language spoken by Gypsies of Kormon district of Hungary and the language of Indian sub-continent such as Hindi, Punjabi or Rajsthani (Shashi 1990). With the help of three Indian students he also compiled about 1000 words of commonality and this was followed by a series of studies of linguists like Pott (1844), Miklosisch (1872-80), Paspati (1870), Von Wlislöckli (1890), Turner (1926-27), Rishi (1974), Shashi (1990), Ian Hancock (1997) and many more.

Today the Romani language comprises of a multiplex of derivations gathered over a millennium long past. There are many theories about the Roma migration from the Indian mainland towards west. The movement and spread of the Roma through the land of Persia and, Armenia to Byzantine seems to be authenticated by the fact that a large number of Armenian words

have entered into the Romani dialect when compared with the other languages. So is true of Egyptian and Greek presence.

Franc Mikolotic's (1813) theory offers a similar derivation as he avers "Roma travelled through Kabul, Iran and Armenia from where they arrived via Frigija and Lakonija to Byzantium empire. Some groups settled in the Arab lands whereas other smaller groups reached Egypt and North Africa via Syria. The Roma stayed for a long time in Armenia, a fact which is proven by the presence of a large number of Armenian words which have been preserved in the Romani language until today" (Rajko Duric 1987)

The *Jat Theory* is also quite popular among many Roma scholars. *Jats* are primarily farmers (exceptions in profession are there) in north India, a community spread over greater Punjab (now includes region of Indian and Pakistani Punjab, Haryana and parts of Himachal Pradesh) and Rajasthan. Michael Jan de Goje (1862-1909), a renowned scholar of Arabian culture, and some Indian linguists like V.R. Rishi, Pyare Lai, G.S. Pathania, Dev Bhardwaj and Pakistani scholar Khurshid Ahmed Khan are also the supporters of the theory.

One of the argument known as *Rajput Theory* is by J. Kochanowski and W.R. Rishi who hold that the defeated army of Rajputs (from Mohammed Gauri in 1192) split into three groups and the third group, the wandering one, later escaped into Afghanistan and consequently to other parts of Middle East and the Balkans.

However, *Jat* in India are not only a people living in the above mentioned areas. Even today there is a community known as *Jatt Ghumantu*,<sup>1</sup> a nomadic tribe that wanders around the deserts of Rajasthan and parts of northern Gujarat. These people move in caravans and are dependent on the services of camel, flocks of sheep and some sundry items for sale. They claim this mode of life for centuries and reasons they attribute for this are harshness of the weather and infertility of the land.

There are several deviations and twists in the theory in the sense that for many *Jats* originally were Aryans who moved from Eurasia to North India in the early past and then there was a boomerang situation with reversal of the community to the places of its origin. *Jats* came to India in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The whole exercise incorporates historically wide alliterations ranging from Aryan move eastward to the nomadic movements and human traffic westward. However, this would be confounding to draw a line of similarity between the Aryan movement and the Gypsy migration since the latter took place quite late in the sequence of events.

Besides the lexical evidences there are lots of resemblances and traces (anthropological) that people confuse with the Roma. In the long history of Roma there is probability of a partial communal confluence at different junctures of time. The evolution of physical features like the Egyptian and Indian (skull of many Romas like the Egyptian one or like the Hindu one) is to some extent hypothetical in nature but with the probabilities of possible occurrence. (Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German anthropologist and Weissbach believe in the Egyptian shape

of the Roma skull while Isidor Kopernicki and A. Olevak are of the view that Roma head is hardly different from the one of Hindus. Eugene Pittard is also of the view of Roma's Indian origin. Babu Rajendra Lai Mitra believes that Roma are most close to the Bedyas people of West Bengal) Within India the hypotheses doesn't approve of the single origin from Rajasthan, Punjab or Uttar Pradesh. If *Jats* are mainly from Punjab *Banjaras* and *Rajputs* are from Rajasthan and Bedyas from Bengal.

Among many scholars the *Kannauj Theory* is also quite popular. The advocates of this theory hold that in the winters of 1018-19, a raiding force came from Ghazni (now in Afghanistan) and captured the population of Kannauj. They sold the captured people as slaves. It was not the Sultan's first raid, but the previous ones had reached only as far as Punjab and Rajasthan. This time he moved on to Kannauj, a major city of more than 50,000 inhabitants, and on 20 December 1018, captured the entire population, 'rich and poor, light and dark...most of them 'nobles, artists and craftsmen' to sell them, 'entire families', in Ghazni and Kabul (James, Allison et al 1997). Later, according to the same text, Khorassan and Iraq appeared to be 'full of this population'. The theory of Kannauj seems to have many drawbacks since there are multiple of dimensions of the Roma's Kannauj link. Besides Gaznavi's intrusions and enslavement at Kannauj it is worthwhile to note that Kannauj was under the occupation of *Sen* dynasty of Bengal, the dynasty that later ruled in the areas of Punjab and Jammu (Hutchinson and Vogel 1933).

Then there is the argument, and quite serious too, that the Roma have strong *Bedyas* features. Bedyas, are a people from Bengal who have certain anthropological features that resemble to the Roma. But this is not enough to contend about the argument that Roma came all along from Bengal. However, a deeper study of the subject reveals that history has something different to offer here which could be significant to the *Bedyas* and *Kanauj* theories.

There are enough evidences about the sale and purchase of entertainers, slaves and artisans. This is compounded by the facts that there were, at the same time, caravans at the move, of course as traders, artisans, entertainers. If Firdausi and Hamza refer to the purchase of entertainers by Berham Gaur the Jat version is equally true since lexical evidences in Romani would strengthen such argument. Jat could be part of such purchases or even extension of the caravan mobiles of the *Jatt Ghumantus*. If the descendants of Alexander<sup>2</sup> can be found in certain areas of Ladakh in the state of Jammu and Kashmir then the *Rajput Theory* is another interesting addition to the history. The Kannauj theory is signatory of the enslavement of the Kanujians but with some newer dimensions to be explored with the mergence of *Sens* (a ruling clan from Bengal) and *Bedyas* into it. This is on records that even Moughals kept on selling the poor farmers irrespective of caste (when failed to pay Jazia) as slaves or workers into the land of their origin. Hence the exodus from the Indian mainland seems to be sequential then one time efflux guided by time and circumstances.

## 5. Roma Identity, Roma Rights and the Issue of Citizenship

Cultural derivations primarily owe to the socio-economic structure of a society. Since Roma are the people who have been identified, of course evidentially, with their Indian linkage, the society and the occupational engagements they exhibit are quite apparent.

Rena Colbert (Clebert) offers a large list of gypsy occupations where he derivates certain most common occupations of the community with a few variations, the gypsies are first and foremost smiths and workers in metal, musicians and mountebanks, horse-coppers and dealers and exhibitors of animals and fortune-tellers" (Rena Colbert ). With the passage of time there has been a significant shift in the occupational patterns of the gypsies. The newly emerged patterns largely rely on the changed socio-economic conditions, means of communications and transportation and the construction and repair works. Gypsies are mostly peddlers, tin workers, gutter makers, metal workers, peg makers, hawkers, horse traders (now second hand motor sellers), animal trainers, entertainers and fortune tellers (Shashi 1990).

What is more significant is the loss of distinct separate identity of the Roma of Europe and West. Although, the Roma had in general a common cultural tradition (social interaction, values, marriage ceremonies, beliefs and occupation) intervened by their varying experiences over the centuries in different regions, yet with the advent of modernisation and globalization their socio-economic structure is undergoing a huge transformation. This might bring more prosperity and development to the Roma but in the trail would certainly be the cultural lag and decline.

Now the problems are multi-pronged about the issue of Roma rights and culture due to a huge variation in perception about them in different states and people. Within the state-systems there are established lines of thought which think otherwise i.e. total extinction of the minority from their national map or deliberate extraction of the people and their forceful expulsion from the national territories without having any concern for the human values and respect for international law. For this purpose almost all the states of Europe and West are engaged in clandestine ethnic census guided by the motive of ethnic cleansing, as feared by many Romas.<sup>3</sup>

This has been a larger issue among several states and Roma, are no exception to this especially when they are confronted by the dilemma of constitutional recognition and award of citizenship by the states of their current residence. Until very recently the official reluctance to take Roma into the mainstream is consistently reflected leaving aside a few states like Finland, Sweden, Australia and Netherlands. In rest of the Europe the events of persecution, discrimination, humiliation and repression are noted frequently. Amnesty International has consistently maintained that European governments continue to actively discriminate against the Roma in all the spheres of life health, education, housing, jobs and citizenship. Hammarberg regrets that 'Europe has a shameful history of discrimination and severe repression of the Roma. There are still widespread prejudices against them in country after country on our continent' (Hammarberg 2008).



The concern over the loss of values and language by the Roma (The Spanish would prefer to call them Gitanos, a word of Egyptian origin) of Spain is but obvious from the words of John De Dios Ramirez Heredia, the member of the Spanish Parliament who remarked, ' We Spanish Gitanos know that we are part of the world Romani Community. Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Gitanos all are one people, one community with a common history, similar traditions, same language (unfortunately almost lost by Spanish Gitanos) and one similar lifestyle. And all the Roma of the world today suffer and still suffer neglect...and discrimination. We have been persecuted by authorities for centuries, looked down upon by the majority society and considered thieves, vagabonds and liars by large section of the population...' ( Heredia 2005). Heredia grieves not only over the loss of cultural values in Gitanos but also among Roma in general as they have absorbed into local cultures and societies over the centuries.

The same views were expressed by Jovan Damjsojovik, Member of Parliament of Serbia. On October 27, 2008 while addressing an Indian delegation of writers he remarked 'We the Roma of the world are the sons of India. History tells us that we have undergone the gravest of the tests of all the times but now a days we are struggling on two fronts- promotion of Roma rights and protection of their culture.'<sup>4</sup> For the promotion of the cause of culture and values of Roma with special reference to their history of Indian origin he also announced the opening up of an Indo-Roma Study Centre in Zemun city near Belgrade of Serbia.

There are open public announcements by the responsible public figures (politicians, scholars, activists and nationalists) against the Roma in states like France, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Italy, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Germany and many more. The nonaccomodative state systems and the unwilling leadership to absorb millions of Roma in Europe is one of the biggest concerns of the contemporary times. Not only that the Roma have suffered a huge development lag due to continuous neglect but even at the cultural side they have been undergoing continuous pressure resulting in the loss of their distinct culture.

Quite recent is the declaration by the French Government about the expulsion of Roma from France. This is not only a blatant disregard to the human rights and European rights to free movement but also a message to the marginalized people all over the world. The centuries old repetition of Roma being a non-native people, criminals and miscreants are the bases on which the recent state order has been decreed (web 2010). The same rationale did Nazis use against the Roma and Jews in the early twentieth century. But today there is a deliberate silence over the question of Jews and other minorities except Roma, a community taken for granted for a long time.

Not only have they been maltreated politically, socially and economically but even at the literal front too. Literary writings are expected to be vehicles of ethical values and norms. There are many literary volumes which blatantly speak against the Gypsy cult. So deep has been the impact because of myths and stories fabricate about Roma that one can guess the prejudice in an instant. The general impression of the Roma has been severely tarnished. 'The stereotypes about the Gypsies are so insidious that even some human rights activists share the tendency to

minimize the extent of Roma mistreatment, to react defensively when their national governments are criticized for their Roma policies, or to blame the Roma for their own troubles (Goldston 2002).

Even against the decision of the French government to expel Roma by just handing over a paltry sum of \$300 for every adult member and \$100 for every child of the community, the official criticism is quite subdued and alarming since it tacitly approves with the decision of the President Sarkozy. Furthermore, the silence of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI over the expulsion of Roma people by various European countries has been taken seriously by the Roma. The exodus of Roma from Romania and Bulgaria on account of miserable lives has been deterred inhumanely by Germany, France and Italy for which their ministers were called by European parliament and condemned for the acts for violating EU laws and regulations.

A study of Roma women (Romnis) by Hedina Tahirovic Sijercic reveals some prime hardships of the Roma. According to Sijercic "the plight of the Romani women displaced from Bosnia & Herzegovina and settled in Germany, France, Belgium, Netherland and Italy is not good. Most of them have the common problem of having no knowledge about the languages of the countries they live in. Most of the women are forced by their men to beg on the streets, to rob, and to work as prostitutes. After 'work', the men take the money, drink alcohol, and beat the women. Since many of them are caught while doing these illegal acts they have to suffer in jails too with no family sympathizers" (Sijercic 2010). "Racism is present throughout the state institutions like the police and the courts. For decades, Roma children were put into schools for mentally disabled children. Both Bulgaria and Romania had to fulfil various criteria regarding minority rights to join the European Union – but when it comes to the Roma, most of these rights and protections only exist on paper. As a result, it is hardly surprising that the Roma populations have a deep and historic mistrust of state representatives and institutions" (Kirova 2014). In the last decade, especially after the free travel grant by EU in Europe, Roma of poorer Balkan states like Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Serbia have been migrating to Italy, France, Germany and other western states for brighter livelihood chances and this has resulted in stern hand dealing from these states and strong public reaction. In Romania, a far-right group in January 2014 called for the sterilization of Roma women. Bulgaria also saw anti-Roma demonstrations in 2013 in the capital Sofia. In 2012, a mob in the Czech Republic chanted "gas the gypsies" after a 15-year-old claimed he had been beaten up by Roma people. In March 2011, far-right militants occupied Gyongyospata, 80 kilometers northeast of Budapest, for several weeks. Neo-Nazis marched through the streets threatening and beating up Roma people. The government didn't intervene against the racists. When an aid organization took hundreds of children from the village, the government described the rescue as an "Easter vacation" (Diel Jorg, 2014).

An important judgement was passed by an Irish court in 2011 regarding the educational rights of the Roma children. The court delivered the judgment claiming that the denial of access to basic primary education of a Roma child in Serbia violates his basic human rights and amounts to persecution according to the Geneva Convention (Karolína Babicka 2012).

The Court said that while the present case certainly falls outside the classic types of persecution envisaged by the Geneva Convention involving violence and threats of violence, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that the denial of even basic education amounts to a severe violation of basic human rights (to adapt the language of Article 9(1) of the Qualifications Directive). In that respect, therefore, the finding that the denial of basic education in such circumstances amounts to persecution within the meaning of the Sec. 2 of the Refugee Act 1996 ("the 1996 Act"). This judgment is significant to understand persecution especially in relation to Roma who are the prime sufferers in Europe in Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.

The question of literacy is equally alarming. According to a recent United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) study only one Roma (Gypsy) child out of four is enrolled in primary school in Europe (UNICEF 2010). As per World Bank report 2003 the life expectancy of Roma in Europe is about 10 years less as compared to rest of the Europeans. According to the UN development Programme report 2003 in many states like Serbia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia the infant mortality rate is almost double to their counterparts. The report further holds that in south-eastern Europe an estimated 25 per cent of Roma live in shacks, compared to 3 per cent of non-Roma, and 55 per cent of Roma homes are not connected to a sewage system. Another startling report was presented by European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) in 2006 according to which a survey of 402 working-age Roma men and women in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia revealed that only 38 per cent Roma were in paid employment. Rest of the two-third majority of Roma reported that they had been refused employment because of their Roma identity. Another survey of 3,510 Roma in seven European Union countries, 15 per cent of respondents were illiterate and 31 per cent had received less than six years of formal education (EU Fundamental Rights Agency: 2008)

The list of such travails is quite long and what is more distressing is the continuous nonchalance of the European states over the state of Roma people. Most of the Roma conventions, summits and meets that are meant for serious dialogue over the plight of Roma largely remain unattended by European government representatives, holds Diaz-Jogeix from Amnesty International (Szilvia Malik 2010).

Political neglect apart, the other prime concern of Roma all over the world is about the erosion of their values and culture. It's time to focus upon the education and awareness among Roma so that the future of the whole community could be made brighter, of course ingrained in their rich cultural heritage. The continuous neglect of such a big community could cause larger social disruption and economic havoc in Central and Eastern Europe. Zoltan Barany rightly warns when he says, 'Gypsies are having trouble keeping pace with change. If they aren't educated, they could become a population time-bomb. They'll have nothing to loose, and could create social havoc or a social-services crisis' (Zoltan Barani 1998).

In its report the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) also criticised France, urging Sarkozy to 'avoid collective repatriations in particular

and work towards lasting solutions to challenges with the Roma based on the complete respect of their human rights' (UNCERD 2010).

Of late the European Union has been striving towards Roma integration. It holds that the member countries have a collective responsibility to progress towards this objective. EC recognises Roma as citizens of Europe and has recently worked towards evolving national strategies, policies and way outs for integrating Roma by 2010. On December 9, 2013 it also adopted a recommendation on the effective Roma integration measures among the member states. The 2013 assessment report focused primarily on the structural preconditions needed in each country. These yearly reports (until 2020) use information provided by each country, NGOs, international organisations and the EU (EC 2017).

Though the problem can't be solved overnight yet the right steps taken in time might change the whole scenario and bring bright future to the Roma. One thing that continues to hinder the evolution of a staunch Roma identity is the splintered Romani image as there are several Roma groups like *Gitanos* of Spain who don't identify themselves with the Roma of Indian origins. Of course there are different groups which emerged in the different territorial and communal interlacing over the centuries (in fact over a millennium long efflux) but Roma need to develop one single coherent identity based on common history, traditions and culture that provides them a singular cohesive element. This might help them to strengthen the bond of oneness and rescue the community from the disintegrative tendency.

The argument is not to look for a compact land for the whole community, which is not feasible unless EU takes some serious steps, but to evolve a platform for the cause of the community by organizing them so that there can be a democratic way of settlement of prime needs of the Roma i.e. citizenship and civil rights in all the states of Europe. World Roma Organization (WRO) and IRU have fallen to the internal rifts and factionalism of the Roma and have failed to channelize the funds disbursed by EU for the upliftment of Roma. From 2010 to 2015 about €26.5 billion Euros were made available to help integrate Roma. This is the general grievance of the poor Roma people against the organizations. Recently the offer of Naguiri Saviris, an Egyptian tycoon to purchase an island for the settlement of about 30000 refugees in the Mediterranean has met sheer neglect from Italian or Greek governments (Morgan 2015). If states are hesitant in extending the rights of settlement of refugees by individuals the idea of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) can also find solutions for the refugees settlement in general and Roma in particular.

The role of Indian government in this regard can be significant but after Mrs. Indira Gandhi's supper of consolation, "I feel kinship with the Roma people," there has been no serious effort in this connection. At the second International Romani Festival in Chandigarh in 1983 she was all praiseful of the way the Roma had preserved their culture, despite the efforts of time and human agency to wipe it out. It was, she said, "an example of nationalism within internationalism, beyond prejudice...", and she concluded in both Romani and Hindi: "Upre Roma! Roma Zindabad! Sastipe!" (Tribune 1983). But her assassination in 1984 and consequent

non-pursuing of the issue dint yield much. The need of the time is to work for securing the positive role not only of Indian government but all the concerned states.

Quite recently addressing the International Roma Conference and Cultural Festival organized by ICCR, an organ of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Feb. 2016 Sushma Swaraj again called Roma "children of India" and pitched for the preservation and documentation of the links of the now 20 million strong migrant community spread over 30 countries with India (Pooja Khati 2016).

Therefore, the larger corrosion of the cultural fabric of Roma together with the anti-Roma state system of Europe needs a serious overhauling. The study of the ancestral groups of Roma in India and their current socio-economic status is also desirable vis-a-vis their European counterparts. Like the other Diasporas they can also get the state support from India, both diplomatic as well as economic (The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs looks after the diaspora issue but it limits the migration from India up to 1830 which needs to be expanded). The federal structure with decentralized autonomous units of governance (as for French in Qubec in Canada and for Kashmiris in Jammu & Kashmir in India et al for the protection of the cultural identity of these people) for the Romas could be chalked out theoretically.

The European Union that is gradually expanding economically and politically can be a sincere protagonist of human rights, democratic values and communal fraternity in whole of Europe. The further induction of newer states into its fold could be conditional so far as the integration of Roma, grant of citizenship to them and protection of minority rights are concerned. It's the duty of every member of EU to consolidate its legal system theoretically by making it action oriented. The mandatory education tor Roma children together with the provision of basic civil rights can transform the whole scenario. "After all it's for the man the states work and not the states for whom man".

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A tribe still living in parts of Rajasthan and northern Gujrat.

<sup>2</sup> There is a community in Baltistan of Ladakh region that calls itself the progeny of the scampering soldiers of the defeated army of Alexander.

<sup>3</sup> At Zagreb during the IRU Congress held w.e.f. October 26 to 29, 2008 author personally met two Portuguese officials getting the numeric data about the Roma.

<sup>4</sup> Speech Delivered by Jovan Damjsojovik, the then Member of the Parliament of Serbia, while addressing the writers Delegation from India at Belgrade on October 26, 2007. Author was part of the delegation.

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