

Sri Lankan Refugees and Internal Security – A Study

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Abstract - Sri Lankan Refugees and Internal Security – A Study, This study deals with refugees, the term Refugee is an international phenomena becomes regular day to day news for international community, this article deals with refugees and their impact on receiving country and what are the other way in which it affects the neighbouring nation in cultural, economic, political and internal issues. The primary data's where received from non-governmental organizations and refugee people. Descriptive and analytical method has been used to produce this article. The above information helped to find the real threat of the Refugees, and how they to be treated in future international community.

INTRODUCTION

Man cannot live in isolation. His needs are numerous and varied. He has to realise these needs through his family and society. Majority of the people live in society. Over a period of time man has created the institution of state to maintain law and order, render justice and protect the weak against strong.

Today the population in states are not of single ethnic origin. We find pluralistic state where different ethnic groups co-exist. Unfortunately, in some states where the majority population happens to be from a particular race / religion / language/region/class/ caste, dominates the rest/others. The clash between the majority and minority leads to a social strife as equality of opportunity is denied to the minority in all aspects of life. Sometimes this leads to an open conflict and the suppressed population has to flee from this place of living to another place/state where they are known as "Refugees".

These refugees face more human tragedies in this century. The impact of the refugee problem is felt worldwide. These refugee exoduses are commanding the attention of high-level policy makers, not only for humanitarian reasons but also of the serious

consequences of mass displacement on national stability of the state'.

Refugees in India

The movement of refugees and displaced persons has not spared India. Such movement of refugees has seriously affected India. For instant 15 million people crossed India - Pakistan border till date. Out of the 15 million refugees, 10 million refugees came from east Pakistan and they were sheltered in different parts of India. Apart from this about 53,000 Chakma refugees have crossed over Tribura, Arunachal Pradesh and other northeastern states. India has also sheltered 19,000 Afghan refugees and a small number of ethnic Nepalties. Further in 1980's over 2,00,000 Tamil refugees came to Tamil Nadu from Srilanka and out of which many of them are still in the various camps situated in the state of Tamil Nadu'.

It is estimated that more than 80,000 refugees are still living outside the camp and only a very few returned to Srilanka between 1991-1995³. On the whole the problem of refugees is a serious one which has to be dealt with effectively by the government. Any lapse on the part of the receiving state will have far-reaching consequences. This may have a serious implication on the security of the state. The present study focuses on the plight of Srilankan Tamil Refugees in Tamil Nadu. These Tamil refugees were forced out of their lands and moved to the Indian territory. Particularly to Tamil Nadu, where they were accorded refugee status. In Tamil Nadu they were housed in different camps with the help of the Indian government and the local state government i.e Tamil Nadu.

WHO IS REFUGEE?

Refugee is

(a) any person who is outside the country or in his or her country, and who is unable to obtain protection for

that country for fear of persecution because of his or her race, religion, gender, nationality, national identity, ethnicity, membership of a particular party or political party, or,

b) any person who, because of foreign violence, occupation, foreign rule, gross violation of human rights or any other serious violation of public order in any part of his country or country, is compelled to leave his place. accommodation to seek refuge in a place other than his or her country of origin°.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE

The moment Srilanka gained its independence in 1948, chauvinist tendencies manifested in various forms. The United National Party (UNP) came to power after independence. The UNP tried to maintain itself in power by adjusting to the Sinhala nationalistic feelings. Sinhala was enforced as the sole official language of the Srilankan State. The Tamils who Protested against this policy were suppressed. Which paved way for ethnic crisis.

Indo-Srilankan Agreement 1987

In July 1987, events changed abruptly and unexpectedly with the signing of the Indo-Srilanka agreement between the governments of India and Sri Lanka. The agreement was intended to resolve racial tensions through a regional division that would give greater regional independence to the Tamil, while India ensures national unity and integrity ". As per the Indo-Srilankan agreement the Indian Peace Keeping Force was sent to Srilanka mainly to restore peace, order and normalcy. The Indian Peace Keeping Force through the operation power tried to achieve the above objectives.

Operation PAWAN'

Operation 'PAWAN' - was the code name given to the IPKF venture in Srilanka was to swift, cut and dry military operation to be tackled by a Brigade strength (5000) like a breeze (literal meaning of PAWAN). For over 32 months, the presence of Indian soldiers in the North and East of Srilanka was costing India rupees one crore and 150 casualties a day. Due to this condition, the agreement did not immediately bring about an end to the conflict nor restored peace but paved the way for the return of many refugees.

During the four years period from 1983-87 a large number of Tamils (approximately 1,30,000) came to

India as refugees. Following the Indo - Srilankan agreement of 1987, refugees began to return to Srilanka. Between 24th Dec 1987 and 31st August 1989 around 25, 585 refugees and non-camp Srilankan Tamils returned to Srilanka by chartered Ships. The Second Eelam war commenced in June 1990 and resulting in the second wave of refugees. Approximately 1,22,000 Srilankan Tamils came to Tamil Nadu. Of these 1,15,680 were destitutes and were accommodated in refugee camps. The repatriation of refugees started on 20th January 1992. According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) 54, 188 refugees were voluntarily repatriated to Srilanka by chartered ships and flights from 20th January 1992 to March 20th 1995. The third Eelam war commenced on April 1995 and once again, refugees started coming to Tamil Nadu. By the end of December 1999, around 20, 196 Srilankan Tamils came to India.¹

The fourth Eelam war commenced in May 2000 and the refugees again started coming to India. Thus, the flow of refugees became a continuous process in this region, forcing India to handle the Srilanka refugees without jeo parading the interest of both India and Srilanka. Efforts were taken by the Government in providing refugee status and offering the passible assistance to them. The efforts and living conditions of these refugees are discussed in the following chapter.

SRILANKAN TAMIL REFUGEES IN TAMIL NADU

The Srilankan Tamil arrived at different times, sometimes as a mass migration, sometimes in the immediate aftermath of the influx in July 1983. Temporary camps set up in various parts of Tamil Nadu to accommodate the refugees. Many refugees, who lived along the coast, were housed in hurricane shelters. Local integration, ease of access to boats and racial affiliation made Tamil Nadu a natural choice when a large part of the Sri Lankan Tamil were forced to leave their homeland, New Delhi and Chennai saw the need to provide shelter and accepted them with understanding and compassion.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has accorded refugee status to all those who have come to Tamil Nadu with effect from 18th September 1996. These Srilankan Tamil Refugees may be classified into three groups.

1. Refugees in refugee camps: there are about 133 camps located at different parts of Tamil Nadu, housing more than 66, 498 refugees.²
2. Refugees, who reside outside the camps: these refugees have been asked to register themselves in the nearer police station because of security reasons housing more than 1,50,000.³
3. Refugees, who are identified with militia; about 1962 militant refugees were stationed in five special camps at Vellore, Pudukottai, Salem, Chengalpattu and Chennai. The government of Tamil Nadu had permitted these militant refugees to return to Srilanka, if there was no charge framed against them. Now, only about 270 refugees are living in three camps and others have returned to Srilanka.

Refugees in Refugee Camps

When the refugees reached the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu in small motorboats, they were directed by locals to the arrival office at Rameswaram Port. They were registered at the office and taken to one of the temporary camps in Remeswaram where they were photographed as families. Their photographs have been affixed to a card which gives details of all members of the family. At the same time, the refugees who are identified as a militant were separated from the other refugees and they were camped in the special camps. After three days, the civil refugees shifted to the transit camp in Mandapam where they were stayed until they were provided with accommodation in one of the many camps situated all over Tamil Nadu. The camps are located in old cinema theatre, community halls, small schools, cyclone shelters, or common rest houses. In a few places special housing schemes have been sanctioned to accommodate them. In the beginning most of the camps lacked proper medical aid, toilet facilities, and in few camps there was scarcity of drinking water. The government provided free housing, free medical care and free education etc

Refugees Living Outside the Camps

After Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the government asked the people of Sri Lanka to register at the nearest police station. Police began arresting those who did not register; this resulted in 1,800 arrests, under Foreign Affairs Act. In 1999, the Indian government asked all Srilankans in Chennai, who had arrived between January 1, 1983 and December 31, 1992, to register at the immigration office before August 31,

1999. According to sources only 1943 registered Srilankans more than the actual population. The Serrankan tribes in Tamil Nadu are estimated to have about 80,000.

Srilankan Refugees, who are identified as Militants.

These people have been detained in the special camps. In 1992, 1629 militant were stationed in five special camps in Vellore, Pudukottai, Salem, Chengalpattu and Chennai. Militants against whom there were no specific charges were permitted to leave the country. According to informed sources in Colombo, many militants belonging to non-LTTE groups have gone back to Srilanka. Currently, there are 170 Srilankan nationals in three special camps, namely 1) Tipu Mahal, Vellore Fort, 2) Chengalpattu and 3) Melur. According to a peoples Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) team, which visited the special camp at Tipu Mahal, Vellore in July 1999, security arrangements in special camps are "unprecedented and surpass the security arrangements in any of the central prisons in the state". Though the inmates are not "technically and legally prisoners, their plight is even worse than those prisoners who are convicted and sentenced to specific terms of imprisonment¹².

It has already been mentioned how after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, security consideration became paramount in the perception of all, including the AIADMK Government. The Karunanidhi Government was more sensitive to the humanitarian aspects of refugee lives. From the 1996-97, the Government. had removed the restriction on higher education for the refugees. Educational concessions have been restored, and Srilankan Tamil students are being admitted to Colleges, Universities and professional institutions and the percentage of concession also increased. The restrictions on the movement of refugees have also been removed. The Government of Tamil Nadu has included the refugees among the weaker sections entitled to claim benefits from the state exchequer. They are entitled to free supply of saris and dhotis during festive occasions. The Government has also started giving an additional dole of Rs.20 per family per month, till New Delhi favourably considers the state government's request for the enhancement of various benefits to refugees."¹³ The impact of the Srilankan Tamil Refugees are discussed in the next chapter.

IMPACT OF SRILANKAN TAMIL REFUGEES ON INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

Refugee Movements on Economic and Cultural Aspects

Refugees and immigrants bring political and security issues to the home country of the developing world. The number of survivors will be considered for any threat to its interests or, more often, from the influence of immigrants on the political and social situation of their country. They will be offended by the attention and assistance provided to young people, and fear that overcrowding will reduce wages and create unemployment while increasing the cost of housing and other commodities.

Immigrants and refugees can also be considered a threat to the cultural identity of the host state. In Western countries living in foreign societies establish their own children's schools, their newspapers, religious institutions and cultural organizations. Weiner wrote that the first concern of immigrants tends to preserve their cultural and 'cultural' values in protecting the interests of their communities.

The impact of Srilankan Tamil Refugees on Indian Economy

India being a developing state and the second largest populous state in the world, the influx of Srilankan Tamil refugees would increase her population which in turn would affect her economy as well as the demographic composition of India. Though, India is not a signatory member of UNHCR. She is still spending on an average a sum of Rs. 15.50 crores per year for the past 15 years on Srilankan Tamil Refugees". Thus, India has spent nearly a sum of Rs.232.50 crores in order to maintain the Srilankan Tamil Refugees in Tamil Nadu. This has been done purely on humanitarian considerations. Otherwise, the amount spent on Srilankan Tamil Refugees would have been used to alleviate the masses of Indian Population which are living below poverty line. India cannot afford to maintain Srilankan Tamil Refugees continuously. Hence, it becomes imperative for the Government of India to settle the ethnic crisis with the Srilankan Government in order to mitigate her economic burden as well as the return of the Tamil Refugees to this Due to the cultural similarities between the Srilankan Tamil Refugees and Tamil

Nadu population the Tamil Refugee would not pose any cultural threat to India's National Security.

Refugees as a Source of International Conflict

Refugees can be a source of international conflict, offering sanctuary and support to refugees frequently incurs military retaliation and draws asylum countries into conflict with the receiving states. In many third world regions of conflicts, fighters often mingle with refugee populations, using their camps for rest and medical treatment, and sometimes for recruitment. In response to the real or perceived threats of refugee warrior communities, refugee camps

However, the presence of Srilankan Tamil Refugee in Tamil Nadu would not pose a threat to India's National Security and any rhetoric that the presence of these refugees would lead to an international conflict is only an exaggeration. In Sep 17th 2021, 920 families consisting of 3000 people living in poor condition, at the Gummdipoondi refugee camp in Tamil Nadu ,

Rajiv Gandhi's Assassination

The President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Mr.J.R.Jeyavardene and the Prime Minister of the Republic of India Mr.Rajiv Gandhi met at Colombo on 29 July 1987. Attaching utmost importance to nurturing intensifying and strengthening the traditional friendship of Sri Lanka and India and acknowledging the imperative need of resolving the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka, and the consequent violence, and for the safety, well-being and prosperity of people belonging to all communities in Sri Lanka. The Indo-Srilankan accord was signed in 29 July 1987. The militant was not party to this agreement and was conspicuous by their absence. After signing the treaty more than 25,000 refugees were voluntarily repatriated to Srilanka. On the basis of the Indo-Srilankan accord, IPKF was sent to restore peace in Sri Lanka. The IPKF operation continued for nearly three years. Displeased by the action of IPKF, LTTE plotted the assassination of the former Prime Minister of India Shri. Rajiv Gandhi and were successful". After the assassination of Shri.Rajiv Gandhi, the Government of India had set up a commission to probe into the assassination. The commission report was tabled in the parliament. However, an important question remained un-answered i.e. How did the assassination group entered the shores of Tamil Nadu?

or through any other source. However, these questions still remain unanswered.

From the above, one may conclude that the Srilankan refugees are not a threat to India's National Security, though there may be an economic burden to India. Their cultural similarities with the population of Tamil Nadu makes it easy for assimilation and absorption of the Tamil Refugees in the event of repatriation becomes a question. The assassination of the former Prime Minister of India should be viewed as an aberration, as it is the act of LTTE and not that of the refugees. The humanitarian assistance to the Srilankan Tamil Refugee should continue till the ethnic crisis is resolved.

CONCLUSION

The 19th may 2009 the war came end but not the refugee issue, "Refugee Studies" are developing as an academic discipline in leading Universities in developed and even developing states. Oxford University in England and York University in Canada have excellent Departments of Refugees Studies, doing pioneering work. India since independence has tackled the problems of nearly 25 million refugees and displaced persons'.

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Solution to Srilankan Tamil Refugee Problem

- The permanent solution to this issue is offering Indian citizenship or Dual citizenship.
- Regular inspection of camps and providing basic amenities,
- Financial and education facilities have to provided.
- Work permit must be given in hostel free manner.
- War came to an end by 19th may 2009 , More than 11 years has gone better keep the Militant refugees in civilian camp with observation.
- A high-level advisory committee, under the minister for minorities and non-resident Tamils' welfare have to formed and there suggestions must be implemented.

All developing states are facing social, economic and political problems and India is no exception. Even though India is facing lot of problems, still she provides the basic necessities to the Srilankan Tamil refugees and to improve their living conditions. But however, such efforts or steps taken by the Governments are not adequate enough to meet the

basic amenities nor improving their living conditions. Hence, Non-Governmental Organisations should voluntarily come forward in assisting the refugees

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