

ETHNIC CONFLICT AND REFUGEES IN SRI LANKA

Arun Kumar Acharya

Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey (México)

acharya_77@yahoo.com, akumar@mail.uanl.mx

Resumen: Este estudio analiza el conflicto étnico en Sri Lanka y su impacto en el movimiento de población como refugiados especialmente hacia la India y sus condiciones de vida en los campamentos. Los datos para el estudio fueron obtenidos de los reportes del ACNUR, periódicos y visita personal a los campamentos para refugiados en el año 2006. Actualmente hay más de 100,000 refugiados de Sri Lanka en la India. Los Sri Lankenses que tuvieron la suerte de escapar de la disputa entre Tamil y Sinhalese, actualmente viven en horribles condiciones inhumanas. A los refugiados no se les es permitido salir, y si de alguna manera logran escapar son encarcelados por las autoridades. Asimismo la calidad de vida en los campos es muy deprimente. Ellos no tienen acceso a buena comida, tampoco a un lugar decente donde dormir. Discriminación y explotación por las autoridades y ciudadanos son comunes en su vida cotidiana.

Abstract: This study examines the impact of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in the movement of people as refugee especially to India and their currently living condition in refugee camps. Data were obtained from the UNHCR reports, from news paper and visiting to the refugees camps during the year 2006. At present there are 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees are living in India. Sri Lankan who luckily escapes from the long standing rivalry between Tamil and Sinhalese are currently living in appalling and subhuman condition. Refugees are not allowed to go out, and if somehow they manage it authorities trap and put them in jail. As well as the quality of life inside the camps is grim. They do not have access to good food nor a descent place to sleep. Discrimination and exploitation by authorities and local people are common in their day to day life.

Palabras clave: Refugiados, Condiciones de vida, Discriminación, Sri Lanka e India.
Refugees, Living condition, Discrimination, Sri Lanka and India.

I. Introduction

Migration, whether voluntary or forced, has always been a characteristic of individual and collective human behavior. Today human displacement and refugee flows have been a feature and consequences of conflict within and between societies. Although, there is a growing awareness of the need to respond more effectively to the worldwide crisis of human displacement, the plight of internally displaced population (IDP) remains one of the greatest challenges for the humanitarian community today.

Some statistics indicates that in 2005 the number of internally displaced population was reached to 23.7 million (IDMC, 2005) and it is a major contributing factor in the upward trend of refugee¹ numbers. In the year 2004 the total number of refugees registered by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) comes closer to 9.5 million and one third (3.4 million) of it were from Asia (UNHCR, 2005).

However, no continent, and barely any country in the world is untouched by the global refugee crisis. For example, in some Asian countries refugees are in various contexts both a cause and consequence of ethnic conflicts, war and political disputes. The countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Burma and Nepal are mainly affected by the refugee problem, and among these Sri Lanka remains a country of concern due to larger contribution in refugee number compare to other Asian countries.

In the case of Sri Lanka, since the year 1983 the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamil has already killed off about 60,000 people, and has also produced some 800,000 internally displaced persons and has forced to million of people to migrate as refugees making them one the world's largest groups of asylum seekers (UNHCR-Sri Lanka, 2004). This violent environment in the island has brutalized the civil society, giving rise to a climate a chauvinist hysteria and intolerance. Due to lack of political motivation, the peace talk between the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is getting failure and the vicious consequence of this dispute is confronting by the common people. Over the course of the conflict, the displaced Tamil in Sri Lanka sought refugee in India and hundreds of thousands more in the other part of the world. In India according to official documents there are 100,000 Sri Lanka refugees taking shelter in Tamil Nadu state, whereas unofficial data shows the refugee number may be more than 150,000 (Dasgupta, 2005).

The Indian government has some provision to provide the basic educational and health facility to refugees, but due to not having sufficient bilateral support from Sri Lankan government and lack of political motivation to solve their long standing conflict day by day the refugee camps are getting neglected by the government of India, which deteriorating the living condition of refugees. Most of the time refugees prefer to escape and look for a decent living condition. There are incidences that women prefer to work in prostitution rather than stay inside the camp in an inhuman condition. Exploitation by the authorities is very high (Dasgupta, 2005).

From the above discussion it seems that the ethnic conflict and refugee in Sri Lanka is an antique social problem, however, till date no such systematic research has conduct to understand the reasons of force migration and the problem faced by these forced migrants at the place of destination. This research using multi sources data investigate how the ongoing ethnic conflict resulting flow of refugee in the island, and as well as in this paper an effort has made to explore the present living condition of Sri Lankan refugees in various refugee camps of Tamil Nadu state, India.

II. Theoretical Framework

In this research, I have use the theoretical and empirical body of literature on migration as a framework within which to discuss the possible affects of ethnic conflicts on migration. The literature

¹ A refugee is defined as a person who has fled his or her country and is unable to or unwilling to return because of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The term also includes those fleeing war, civil strife, famine and environmental disasters (www.unhcr.com).

on migration in general has provided a strong support for both macro and micro level determinants of migration. Here, I discuss how ethnic conflict might change the macro and the micro level circumstances that effects people's decisions to migrate. The macro theories emphasis the structural, objective conditions which act as "push" and "pull" factors for migration. In the case of economic conditions such as unemployment, low salaries or low per capita income relative to the country of destination, whereas involuntary displacement and refugees would be explained through factors such as state repression of fear of generalized violence or civil war. Pull factors would include migration legislation and the labor market situation in receiving countries.

On the contrary, micro theories focus on the factors influencing individual decisions to migrate, analyzing how potential migrants weigh up the various costs and benefits of migrating. Costs could include the financial and psychological resources invested in moving and integrating in the country of destination, while benefits could include a higher salary or physical safety.

Both theory and empirical evidence argue that macro level structures affect migration. For example, neo-classical economics theory indicate that wage differentials as a primary determinants of migration (Harris and Todaro, 1970); world systems theory argues that regional and national level changes in the market system can affect migration (Massey and Espinosa, 1997).

Castles argues that sociologist should also consider conflict as a macro level phenomenon that can affect migration (Castles, 2003). In addition to the other macro level factors mentioned above, conflict cause people to fear of physical harm or death, to which they may react by migrating away. People may fear physical harm due to indiscriminate killing from bombs or killing, torture or abduction, and unwanted conscription into military service. They may also fear an apparent lack government stability and security. All of this may intensify the fear of residents in the area, which in turn may increase the likelihood that they will migrate away to escape the dangers, whether real or perceived.

Conflict, whether it is ethnic or armed can cause these economic and social circumstances of people lives to deteriorate. Agriculture activities may be interrupted, transportation may be disrupted, cutting people off from market where they sell and buy their goods, business may be threatened. It may also weaken the government and impinge on its ability to provide education, health and other social services. This heightened economic and social insecurity may also motivate people to move away from violent conflict.

The nature and geographic spread of a conflict may also affect the spatial patterns of migration. If individuals or families make the decision to migrate away from a conflict zone, they are likely to move to an area that is safer. Beyond the initial consideration of finding a safe place to live, other consideration of social contacts (Massey, Alarcon, Durand, Gonzalez, 1987), economic opportunities (Harris and Todaro, 1970, Massey and Espinosa, 1997), and ethnic or linguistic similarities may further direct their choice of destination. Alternately, individuals or families who live in relatively safe areas during a conflict may be less likely than otherwise to migrate away. Consideration of safety during times of conflict may override other considerations of economic or social opportunity that can instigate people to migrate.

III. Data and methodology

To empirically see the problem of refugee during the ethnic clash in Sri Lanka, I use the 2004 data given by United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Some data has also obtained from 2002 report of the Government of Tamil and 2002 annual report of Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. To analyze the living condition of refugees, ten in-depth interviews were conducted among the Sri Lankan refugees during the month of July and August, 2006 in the state of Tamil Nadu, India.

Before beginning the data collection firstly two districts in Tamil Nadu state were selected i.e. Tiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri. These are the districts where highest numbers of refugee camps exist. As we all know, outsiders are not allowed to camps, so firstly, I approached to local government to

get their permission to collect the data in identified camps. Based on my request they only permit me to visit the camp, they didn't allowed to have any interaction with refugees. After getting such kind of response, it was decided to approach the refugees directly outside the camp. Most of the time, I was waiting in front of the camp and when I saw a refugee coming out I was approaching him/her to have a conversation. But, due to constant vigilance of police they were just ignoring my request. After a week without any progress in work, one day I got a contact with a refugee, with whom I had an interaction regarding on motivations for the migration decision, pattern of origin, their current living condition and problem facing in camps. After the conclusion, I requested him to help me to conduct interview with some other refugees. At beginning he declined due to fear of officials but I gave several explications regarding my research and intention of interview and at last he agreed. When ever he was getting time he was managing to coming out from the camp with a refugee (male/female) doe interview. Using this methodology, seven in-depth interviews were conducted in two refugee camps, one camp from selected districts.

IV. Socio-ethnic profile of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an island located in the Indian Ocean off the southeast tip of India, which is about half the size of Alabama. Most part of the land is flat and rolling; mountain in the south-central region rise to over 8,000 ft. Sri Lankan has an ethnically diverse population of 20.22 million. The ethnic breakdown of the population is around 74% populations are belong to Sinhalese, 18% Tamil, 7% Moor and Burgher, Malay and Vedda 1%. The majority of the Sinhalese are Theravada Buddhist religion, and the majority of Tamils are Hindus. However, there is also a large group of Christians within both ethnic groups. The breakdown of the population according to religion shows that Buddhist 69%, Hindus 15%, Christian 8% and Muslim 8% (Government of Sri Lanka, 2001).

To a certain extent in this island, ethnicity and religion also have a regional basis, which is a significant reason why the Tamil militancy has a strong geographical dimension and demanding



Map 1. Sri Lanka and its provinces
Source: <http://www.mapresources.com/>

a separate independent state. Of the ethnic and religious groups, Tamil Hindus predominate in the Northern provinces and maintain a significant presence in the eastern province. The eastern province is an ethnically mixed area where Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese are found in sizeable numbers even though Tamil population is slightly higher statistically (see map 1). Indian origin Tamil population are the descendants of laborers brought from Southern India by the British in the 19th century to work on tea and coffee estates are concentrated in central part of the country and Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces. Sinhalese Buddhists predominate in all parts of the country except the northern and eastern provinces (see map 1). Muslims have a significant concentration in the eastern province, but generally are scattered throughout the country. Christians maintain a significant presence in the coastal areas as a result of over 500 years of constant European colonial presence and the consequent Christianization of significant numbers. Malays are mostly concentrated in and around the city of Colombo and the western province.

Economically, Sri Lanka is a middle income country, where around 22 percent of the population classified as poor and nearly 90% of this poor are reside in rural areas of north and the eastern parts of the nation.²

V. Resistance of Ethnic

The problem of the Upcountry Tamils began earlier than the 1950s. After the independence in 1948 Sri Lankan government felt that the Tamils were not the citizen because they had Indian ancestry. A few of them were given citizenship, but the majority of the citizenship applications from the Upcountry Tamils were rejected. If a parent didn't have citizenship, no one in the family could be a citizen; therefore most of the Upcountry Tamils continued to live in the tea estates without status (Daya and de Silva, 1978).

To solve the statelessness problem of the Upcountry Tamils, in 1964 Sri Lanka and India signed the Srimavo-Shastri pact (amended in 1974 by the Srimavo-Indira Gandhi pact) through which both the government decided the three points solution. The first one is: out of 975,000 Upcountry Tamils, 525,000 people would be granted Indian citizenship and repatriated to India over the course of 15 years along with their natural increase. The second point solution is: 300,000 persons, along with their natural increase, would be given Sri Lankan citizenship; and the third is: status of 150,000 remaining people would be subject to further negotiations between the two governments (de Silva, 1987). The process of repatriation of the Indian citizens, however, was very slow and this repatriations process interrupted during 1984 due to large scale violence in Sri Lanka and a subsequent refugee flow to India, only 337,066 Indian citizens in addition to their natural increase of 125,385 had been repatriated, while 84,141 and the natural increase to their families remained on the island awaiting repatriation to India (de Silva, 1987).

Many repatriated Indian Tamils were not able to find their roots and had to start their lives afresh as foreigners while living in deplorable conditions on tea estates in the Niligiri hills area of Tamil Nadu state, India and in other underdeveloped places (Samrasinghe, 1984). Meanwhile in Sri Lanka the future of the 84,141 Indian passport holders plus their natural increase remained ambiguous for many years until the decision were made by the Sri Lankan cabinet in 2003 to confer citizenship on the Indian passport holders along with 84,000 Upcountry Tamils born in Sri Lanka after 1964 (Dasgupta, 2006).

The Upcountry Tamils cannot call themselves the sons of the soil even though they have been in Sri Lanka for the last 200 years (de Silva, 1987). They were bonded laborers who lived in the estates for generations. Their children did not go to school, and they didn't have facilities such as proper accommodations, health care, and education. Still they are living in the estates and working hard to earn some little money. The Upcountry Tamils remain the poorest among all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. They have never owned land and are the most marginalized section of Sri Lanka's labor force.

Moreover, their situation worsened when Sinhala was made the official language and this also

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Sri_Lanka

causes the large scale discrimination against minority Tamil. The discrimination against the Tamil population continued throughout the 1960s as Buddhism was given the primary place in the state and the number of Tamils employed by the state and admitted into institutions of higher learning was greatly restricted. During this period Tamilians responded to their oppression largely through a political and a non-violent protest movement. In the 1970s, however, there was an increased trend towards Tamil separatism and militancy. By 1978, various militant groups had formed the group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which was in favor of a separate Tamil state. The group demands a separate province for minority Tamils in the island's north and eastern part.

The demand of LTTE was not taken into consideration by the Sinhalese dominated government and in result of this conflict between the Government and LTTE escalated. The Upcountry Tamils were the first ones to be displaced and were forced to move to northern parts of Sri Lanka which is largely Tamil inhabited. Even in this region, they were not accepted by other Tamils and had to live in fringe lands around the local Tamils. They were treated by the local Tamils in similar ways the way they had been treated by the Sinhalese tea estate owners. As the dispute intensified in Tamil territories in northern Sri Lanka, the Upcountry Tamils were forced to flee to India as refugees.

Muslim and Sinhalese people living in Tamil majority region asked to leave due to threats against them. Loss of lives, including that of breadwinners, severe and permanent disability, destruction of personal and productive assets, loss of income, psychological trauma, accompanied by alienation and isolation along with enduring sense of uncertainty the scars of war go deep to produce a sociological reality and complexity that is staggering in its social, economic, and psychological dimensions. Many of those displaced including those living in organized camps continue to be extremely vulnerable to violence and harassment by the Tamil Tigers, other armed groups, and even members of the Sri Lankan security forces.

According to UNHCR the number of internally displaced population in Sri Lanka is currently around 800,000. However, the recent data shows that during the month of January and April 2006 a total of 39,883 Tamil populations were reached to India as refugee (UNHCR, 2006). From this figure we can assume that how much intense would be the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka. Similarly, a report released by Amnesty International also describes as insecurity increases, people who have already been displaced several times are being forced to move yet again. Many have been unable to return home for decades and the increase in military activity is a major barrier preventing them from resettling and rebuilding their lives³.

As the conflict getting more intense, people living in the Tamil community are facing brutal massacre, displacement from time to time and are affecting in their social life and economic activities. The deprivation in the countryside in relation to the destruction of agriculture, lack of health, education and transport facilities, and non-maintenance of roads is due to the colossal amount of money spent on the war⁴. As a result of this, people do not have any alternatives to maintain their life and family, as well as fear of violence forcing the people to migrate as refugee.

VI. Internal displacement and flow of refugee

Millions of people have been forced to leave their homes because of conflicts between Tamil and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. The data indicates that in the year 1997 there were 200,000 people were displaced by the conflict, whereas in 1998 the number was increased to 603,025, in 1999 there were 612,518 displaced population from Sri Lanka and during the 2000 and 2001 the number of IDP grows dramatically (706,514 in 2000 and 731,838 in 2001) due to intense conflict between government and LTTE. But with the cease-fire agreement between Sinhalese and the LTTE in the month of February 2002 ended 19 years of ethnic dispute, the security situation has improved significantly and this resulted in decline the number of displacement. Thus, in 2002 there were 462,826 IDPs and subse-

³ <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa370042006>

⁴ A developing country like Sri Lanka where 50% population have around US\$95 per capita income per month today is spending US \$880 million for the war.

quently in the years 2003 and 2004 there was a steep decline in the number of uprooted population (386,104 in 2003 and 352,374 in 2004) (see table 1).

Table 1. Total displaced population in Sri Lanka during 1997-2004

Years	Number of displaced population
1997	200,000
1998	603,025
1999	612,518
2000	706,514
2001	731,838
2002	462,826
2003	386,104
2004	352,374

Sources: 2004 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook.

The main bulk of IDPs live in the provinces of north and eastern part of the country. The provinces where majority of population uprooted are Mullaitivu, Jaffna, Puttalam, Vavuniya, Mannar, Batticaloa, Klinochchi and Tricomalee (see table 2 and map 2).

Table 2. Sri Lankan displaced population in 2004 according to location

Location name	Number of Displaced population
Mullaitivu	55,540
Jaffna	54,960
Puttalam	61,760
Vavuniya	39,810
Mannar	26,80
Batticaloa	20,450
Klinochchi	19,750
Tricomalee	17,190
Others	56,104

Sources: 2004 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook.

On the other hand, the violence has uprooted to both sexes of population including all ages. The data shows that people of 5 to 17 years and 18 to 59 years of ages have been more affected by this brutality. Also, more women have displaced compared to male population (see table 3), also more female has displaced compared to the total male population.

The conflict as well as political and socio-economical discrimination against the Tamilian population in Sri Lanka has forced to flee the people as refugees in search of a peaceful life. The fear of death, mass destruction including the failure of parliamentary politics and the entrenchment of ethnic politics lead to frustration among the Tamilian, eventually they preferred to run away from their home to seek refugee status in other countries. Every day the volume of Sri Lankan refugees is big. With reference to UNHCR data in the year 2000 there were 124,160 Sri Lankan refugees originated due to the ethnic clash, whereas in 2001 a subsequent decline (122,420) has observed in total number of refugees but in 2002 it has again increased to 133,239, in 2003 and 2004 there were 122,010 and 114,050 refugees originated due to ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka (see table 4). This indicates, there is



Map 2. Regions affected by the ethnic conflict and displacement in Sri Lanka

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of Sri Lankan displaced population in 2004

Age groups	Male	Female
Less than 5	12,352	11,950
5 to 17	49,504	47,420
18 to 59	99,718	106,462
more than 60	12,751	12,328
Total	174,325	178,160

Sources: 2004 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook.

a continuous up and down in the origin of refugee due to uncertain climate in the peace movement by the Sinhalese government and LTTE. As a consequence it resulting lack of confidence among the Sri Lankan Tamilian for their future and obligating them to escape from their place to seek refugee status in different countries.

Also, military occupation in the area making difficult for people to have a peaceful life and it is almost impossible for them to cultivate their land. This induces them to migrate as a refugee, which can be observe in the case of Raju, a refugee in India.

“Raju described the situation in his hometown of Vavuniya, which is controlled by the Sri Lankan military. Whenever a claymore mine exploded, the Sinhalese army started to shoot indiscriminately, so I decided to come here with my wife and child. I am a

working as a construction worker and we cannot get any work there. We sold whatever we had, and came here. We thought we could do any job here and live peacefully. This

Table 4. Total Sri Lankan refugees population during 2000-2004

Years	Total refugee population
2000	124,160
2001	122,420
2002	133,239
2003	122,010
2004	114,050

Source: 2004 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook.

is second time I am here in India; I had come here with my parents in 1995. When the things improved in Sri Lanka we went back in 2002, rather than being a refugee here. Staying in other country is very difficult, because you will just treat as a third grade citizen. We do not have same freedom and rights like as we have in our country. In Sri Lanka I had to work every day to survive. If there was work I could earn up to 450 rupees (US\$9) per day. With this hard earned money I built my own house. But Sinhalese people destroyed my houses. There (*Sri Lanka*) the food prices had raised dramatically. The government is spending millions on the military. As a result, a good country is being ruined. We have sold all our things and come here (India)".

In other case a young lady named Bira described:

"My family paid a large amount of money to escape. I paid 8,000 rupees for my travel. The boat charged for adults 6,000 to 10,000 rupees, and 3,000 rupees for children. We had to sell all our belongings even our jewelry, all at low prices. The boat in which I came had been crammed full with seven people. In another boat there were ten. It capsized and I think they lost their lives. We never thought we would reach shore. We want to live in freedom, like people live here in India. The Sri Lankan government is responsible for this. They talk about peace in the parliament, but then continue the war. They are abducting innocent people in white vans. Nothing good will come out of either side (LTTE and Sinhalese). In a two hour fight, 50 LTTE's and 50 Sinhalese might die, but 100 ordinary people will also be killed".

Like Raju and Bira, Manu is another refugee in India and he described:

I was married just nine month ago, but I fled leaving my parents behind. In Sri Lanka, I was hiding from the army, but one day military arrested me on suspicion that I was a LTTE member. Later, I detained without charge for 14 days, before the International Committee of the Red Cross intervened. I fled as part of a group of 20 refugees. For five days before we left for India, we had no food. There was nothing left my house. Both the LTTE and the army think we should support them. We are trampled in between. The army is camped in our rural agricultural society building. They are stealing from the abandoned houses. It is impossible to stay in that place. My entire life has been affected by the war and now I am here to get a peace life, at least I can sleep quietly. Later I will bring my family here also".

Like Raju, Bira and Manu, there are so many cases in Sri Lanka who were prefer to migrate to

other countries in search of a peaceful life. Once they arrived to their destination they directly goes to refugee camp office to seek refugee status. The important destinations countries for Sri Lankan refugees are India, France, United Kingdom, Germany and Canada (see table 5), where India remain the most favorable destination for these refugees since the last two decades. For example, in the year 2004, there were more than 57 thousands island refugees in India which is nearly 4 to 5 times higher than any other country.

Basically these refugees are poor farmers, laborers and fisherman. They had scraped together several thousand rupees to pay for their boat fares. In many cases, this was their ultimate life saving, some sold their property to meet the cost, as we have observed in the above cited cases. They packed essential items into polythene covered suitcases and bags for voyage. For most of them it is the last journey in their life. Dozens of people died making the risky journey in improvised boats.

VII. Sri Lankan Refugees in India

The flow of Sri Lankan refugees to India can be divided into three broad categories. The first influx began in 1983 and continued till 1987. During this time about 1,40,000 refugees arrived in Tamil Nadu to escape ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. Out of these refugees, 43,000 were repatriated between 1987 and 1989, after the signing of a peace accord between Indian and Sri Lanka (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1991). The second exodus took place in 1989 when the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) withdrew from Sri Lankan war-torn areas, most of these refugees were repatriated in 1991-92, after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The third and the final flux began in April 1995 and it coincided with the declaration of Eelam War III, the battle between Sinhalese and the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The influx can be divided into three phases (see table 6). The story of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees rotates around three large-scale displacements, rehabilitation and repatriations on two occasions.

Table 5. Sri Lankan refugees in main countries of asylum during 1995-2004

Asylum country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
India	64,743	64,061	63,767	60,922	57,274
France	15,183	15,774	15,938	15,062	15,304
Germany	-	-	17,403	15,121	12,850
Canada	10591	13,161	12,873	12,563	12,062
United Kingdom	10,605	11,760	9,545	7,993	8,064
Other	23,038	17,664	13,713	10,349	8,496

Source: 2004 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook.

Today, around 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees are in India, where 57,000 are residing in 111 government run camps in Tamil Nadu state. The refugee camps are located in 23 out of 29 districts of the state (see table 7). Some are large camp accommodating more than 1000 families. Whereas in six districts the number of families in camps exceeded 1000: Tiruvalur, Vellore, Tiruvannambalai, Erode, Maduri and Shivaganga. Each of these districts accommodated 3,500 or more refugee persons. After 1983 exodus of the Sri Lankan refugees, the then chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M.G. Ramachandran

Table 6. Influx of Sri Lankan refugees

Phase	Period	Number of refugees
First	1983-1989	1,34,053
Second	1989-1991	1,22,078
Third	1996-2001	21,940

Source: Annual report, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2002.

drew up a plan to send refugees to as many districts as possible so that they are not confined in few places. Accordingly, the district collectors were informed to allot land for their rehabilitation. This kind of dispersal gave them more space and job opportunities especially to those who managed to get shelter near the district head quarters or small town. However, one of the drawbacks of the plan was meeting relatives and friends living in far off places. Many camps were located far away from the city or in unhygienic and congested cyclone shelters.

Table 7. Total number of Sri Lankan refugees in different refugee camps in Tamil Nadu during 2002

Sr. number	District	N. of Camps	No. of families	Total refugee
1	Kancheepuram	1	88	98
2	Tiruvallur	2	1031	4148
3	Vellore	8	1109	4210
4	Tiruvannamalai	13	1095	4158
5	Tuticurin	4	397	1534
6	Villupuram	2	372	1482
7	Dharmapuri	10	988	3810
8	Salem	8	813	3181
9	Namakkal	2	424	1540
10	Coimbatore	9	990	3788
11	Erode	4	1254	4835
12	Tricchy	2	804	3017
13	Karur	2	552	2128
14	Perambalur	1	70	287
15	Pudukottai	3	840	2997
16	Dindigul	7	831	3160
17	Madurai	4	1382	5177
18	Sivaganga	7	1035	3339
19	Virunagar	6	902	3341
20	Ramanathapuram	1	523	1578
21	Tiruelveli	8	753	2778
22	Tripnukudi	3	373	1553
23	Kanniyakumari	4	330	4308
Total		111	16955	63941

Source: Report of the Government of Tamil Nadu, 2002.

The Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu have three different kinds of shelter. The first is the camp refugees or those who took shelter in camps mostly located in the rural areas. They were sent from the Mandapam transit camp to different locations. The second group is non-camp refugees are those living in tented house with relatives and friends without any assistance from the government. Nearly fifty thousand refugees lived outside camps; most of them are staying in big cities⁵. The third group

⁵ According to a Rehabilitation Department Official, this may be an underestimation. The figure includes only those who have registered their names with the local police stations, there may be more staying without registration.

consisted of those who supposedly posed security threats since they were involved in subversive activities in Sri Lanka. They were sent to special camps where they had to live under constant surveillance. These special camps came into existence in 1991.

VIII. Living condition of Sri Lankan refugees in India

Once the victims of island conflict made decision to migrate, they sell their property, jewelry etc. to meet the cost of their embarkation. The journey is not easy for them. There is always a fear of marine accident due to tidal waves and getting arrest by the police, as the Sri Lankan navy patrolling the straits between the two countries has arrest the refugees and handed them over to police. But, if they manage to reach to shore of Tamil Nadu, India, they directly go to Mandapam refugee camp⁶ and registered there. Later they shifted to one of the 111 camps administered by the Tamil Nadu government.

Once they get admission in any one of the refugee camp they themselves accommodate in side the camp, although camp situation is pathetic. For example, the 287 acre camp at Mandapam has high walls with electric barbed wire fencing. On the other side is the sea, patrolled by Indian coastal guards. In this camp the refugees live in a dilapidated row of houses. Bathroom and toilet facilities are virtually non-existent. Most of the 830 toilets are blocked and have no roofs. Similarly, the bathrooms have no pipes, just open drains. Residents collect water from four outside wells. Even the streets are unlit. A 20 bed hospital runs without power and has limited medical facilities. Each refugee gets five liters of kerosene in a month. Adults receive 500 grams of uncooked rice per day and children 400 grams. In addition, adults are expected to survive on monthly stipends of 144 rupees (US\$3) and children on 45 rupees (US\$1). This amount of stipend they receive is inadequate for survival.

Refugees also have strict restrictions on their freedom of movement and are treated with some degree of suspicion by the Indian government. It is due to assassination of former Indian Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by a suspected member of the LTTE. After that some refugee camps were moved away from coastal areas to isolated interior regions of Tamil Nadu state so as to prevent contact amongst the refugees belonging to different camps. The camps have morning and evening curfews. Families are often shifted from one camp to another in what is apparently a security precaution. The Government of India does not permit international NGOs and aid agencies, including UNHCR, access to the camps. Refugee who disobeys the rules may have their monthly stipend and rations cut off as punishment. Some of the refugees describe the camps as being nothing more than jails.

For refugee children, there is no proper educational facility. Also the government's restriction on movements of refugees resulting in preventing them from going to work to supplement their meager dole to make ends meet. Sometime they also arrested by police and put in locked up in sub-jails designated as (special camps) without stating reasons or inquiry or trial. Refugees are also not allowed to access to necessary information regarding their country situation, which enable to make refugee a voluntary decision. They are also not getting adequate medical facilities.

Moreover, the exploitation and racial discrimination by the Indian authorities, corruption and abuse of power upon these poor and innocent conflict victims are very high. Once the refugees from Sri Lanka who land in the southern shores of India are classified into ordinary refugees and those suspected to have been former militants. Ordinary refugees are sent to one of the 111 refugee camps in India while those suspected to be former militants are sent to the so called special camps which are totally six in number. Some corrupt police treats the refugees with an oppressive attitude, they arbitrarily decide who should go to the special refugee camp, and they asked the money and belongings. If the refugees fail to pay up the bribe demanded by cops they may end up in the special refugee camps as "suspected militants".

Any refugee with any wound or a scar is branded as a militant and sent to the special refugee camp. If any ordinary civilian with wounds, fractures or scars irrespective of his age, sex or medical condition is sent to the "special" refugee camps where they are deprived of their freedom and made

6 It is 15 kilometer from Rameswaram on eastern coast of India.

to live in conditions that are worse than a concentration camp. The special refugee camps are nothing but virtual prisons. Those refugees suspected to be militants are imprisoned in these camps without any arrest, prosecution or trial. Refugees are living in very bad conditions in these special camps. They are not provided with any medical attention. There is no sanitary facilities as well as they are given horrible food to eat. The rice which is provided in these special camps is of very bad quality. Most of the time refugee protest by fasting to highlight the bad food and living conditions. They are not allowed to talk leisurely to friends and relatives who come to visit them. They are severely harassed by the state “Q” branch⁷ police who are always on the look out to arrest somebody under the charge of militancy.

The inmates of special refugee camps are forced to confess to being militants or falsely accuse somebody else of being a militant just to satisfy the repressive measures of the “Q” branch police. Whenever a refugee from the special camp is taken to a hospital he/she is heavily chained and transported with policemen armed with heavy fire-arms. Even in the hospitals the refugees are kept bound in chains. There has been instance vigilance when a refugee without limbs had both his arms tied to his body while being taken to the hospital. In other word the living condition of these refugees is far from our imagination. Upon their arrival they become a matter of exploitation. As they cited that living inside the camp just living likes an animal. One refugee told:

“...You have a cow.... go and see; your cow must be living in a better place and must be eating good, but here our condition is far from your cow’s condition.... If I tell you won’t believe, the street dogs have more respect then us....”.

IX. Conclusion

It is perhaps ironic that one of the most unfortunate ethnic disputes of recent times should occur in Sri Lanka. This is an island reputed to have had a peaceful transition from “model colony” to stable third world state achieving international praise for its excellent quality of life and democratic institutions and these were factors which made Sri Lanka a country of concentration for several aid donors, and increased in private foreign investment. After the year 2002 cease fire, it was expecting that Sri Lanka could solve the problem and gain the development momentum, but due to failure of address the substantial issues the peace movement didn’t give any fruitful results. During the talk Tamilians issues were underestimated and they were severely marginalized for which they felt they are loosing their place. Consequently, talk failure leads the resume of ethnic fight and as a result people are continuing to displace and migrating as refugee to India including other countries.

The earlier analysis indicates that there is a continuous flow of Sri Lankan refugee to India. The basic aim of migration is to get a peace and better life. To help the island refugees the government of India has open 111 refugee camps. Though the government is extending some kind of help to refugees but it is just symbolic. Inside the camp the life of refugees is very miserable. They are suffering from food shortages and malnutrition. Their living condition is extremely deplorable; the food grains provided to the refugees in camps are of very bad quality. Moreover, if anybody protests against the bad food and degrading living condition runs the risk of being branded as a militant and sent to the “special refugee camp”. There is no proper toilet, housing and electricity facility available in any of these refugee camps. Refugees are living in halls, regulated market places, poultries and even cyclone shelters. There is no medical aid for the refugees inside the camps. They are also becoming a source of cheap labor, exploited ruthlessly by local employers. In some instances, women have been forced into prostitution and drug running.

Extortion by the police is rampant in these refugee camps. When any friend or relative visiting a refugee and family gives any money, police come immediately demanding a cut or the entire amount from the helpless refugee and if he/she does not pay police put false charge and send to special camp.

⁷ “Q” branch is a special branch of the police in the Tamil Nadu state that was initially assigned the function to curb the activities of the communities. Later on they were asked to look after the refugee related matters.

Some refugees cited that television sets given to them have been taken away by the cops. The refugees are not even permitted to make proper electrical lighting in their dwellings which is imperative for children who may study or for the physical safety of the refugee family.

Refugees from Sri Lanka are made to suffer the most inhuman treatment and tortuous conditions because of the political animosity of the Indian state towards the Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. The Indian state and central governments does not seem to realize that the ordinary helpless refugee cannot be victimized to settle scores with the Tamil militant movement in Sri Lanka. All the state sponsored oppression on the refugees fleeing Sri Lanka is justified in the name of Rajiv Gandhi's murder allegedly by Tamil militants.

Refugees also have strict restrictions on their freedom of movement and are treated as third grade citizens. If any one disobey the rules may have their monthly stipend and rations cut off as punishment, so for them camps are nothing more than jails. As India has not signed the international convention for refugees, the terrible plight of the Sri Lankan refugees in India is not brought to the scrutiny of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and no other major human rights organization has taken note of the suffering of the Tamils languishing in the "special camps" in India which are nothing but concentration camps.

References

- CASTLES, Stephen
2003 "Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social Transformation", in *Sociology*, 37(1).
- DASGUPTA, Abhijit
2005 "Long term camp life and changing Identities of Sri Lankan Women Refugees in India", in *Bangladesh e-journal of Sociology*, vol.2, no.2, July.
- DAYA, and de Silva, C R
1978 *Sri Lanka (Ceylon) since Independence (1948-1976)*, Hamburg, Institute of Asian Affairs.
1979 "The Constitution of the Second Republic of Sri Lanka (1978) and its Significance", in *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, XVII (2), pp 192-209.
1992 *Sri Lanka since Independence: A Reference Guide to the Literature*, New Delhi, Navrang.
- DE SILVA, H L,
1992. "The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement-1987 in the Perspective of Inter-State Relations", in *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol. X, No.2, July, pp 10-17.
- DE SILVA, K M
1988 "Buddhist Revivalism, Nationalism and Politics in Modern Sri Lanka" in James W Bjorkman (ed.), *Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence in South Asia*, New Delhi, Manohar Publication, pp 107-58.
- FAIST, Thomas
2000 *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA
2001 Census of Population and Housing-2001, Department of Census and Statistics.
- HARRIS, J.R. and Todaro, M. P.
1970 "Migration, Unemployment and Development: A two sector Analysis", in *American Economic Review*, Vol. 60(1): 126-142.
- INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT MONITORING CENTRE (IDMC)
2005 Global Statistics, <http://www.internal-displacement.org> (11-01-2007)
2006 "Internal Displacement 2005", *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 26, August, Refugee Studies Centre, UK, ISSN 1460-9819, pp71.

- JAMES, W Bjorkman
1997 "Multi-Culturalism in Sri Lanka-Historical Legacy and Contemporary Political Reality", *Ethnic Studies Report*, 15(1), January, pp 1-44.
- KUNZ, E.F.
1981 "Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory", *International Migration Review*, vol.15, pp.42-51.
- MASSEY, D.S., R. Alarcon, J. Durand and H. Gonzalez
1987 *Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from western Mexico*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- MASSEY, D.S, and K.E. Espinosa
1997 "What's driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Analysis", *The American Journal of Sociology*, number 102(4).
- SAMARASINGHE, S W R de A
1984. "Ethnic Representation in Central Government Employment and Sinhala-Tamil Relations in Sri Lanka, 1948-81", in R B Goldmann and A Jeyaratnam Wilson (eds), *From Independence to Statehood*, London, Frances Pinter, pp 86-108.
- SAMARAWEERA, V K
1987 *Sri Lanka*, World Bibliographical series, vol 20, Santa Barbara, Clio Press.
- UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR)
2004 *2004 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook Country Data Sheet-Sri Lanka*, <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/44e5c77611.pdf> (17-01-2007)
- 2005a *UNHCR Global Report 2005 – Sri Lanka*, UNHCR – Sri Lanka.
- 2005b *2005 Global Refugee Trend: Statistical overview of population of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and other persons of concern to UNHCR*, Oxford University Press.
- 2006a *The State of the World's Refugees – 2006: Human displacement in the new millennium*, UNHCR, Oxford University Press.
- 2006b *UNHCR Global Appeal 2006 – Sri Lanka*, UNHCR-Sri Lanka.
- 2006c *Statistical Summary of IDP movements in North-East Sri Lanka*, UNHCR – Sri Lanka.
- UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
2005 *Human Development Report-2005*, UNDP, New York
- U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES
1991 *Sri Lanka: Island of refugees*, Issue Paper: Washington D.C.

