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Deprived outlander in India: An analysis of Sri Lankan- Tamil refugees

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Abstract

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has produced refugees in India. For the past two decades Sri Lanka has been entangled in conflict for independence of the minority Tamil population. The battle between the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) resulted in displacement of communities in the north- east. The conflict has left approximately 70,000 people was dead and one million people are displaced. Tamils from Sri Lanka have been fleeing their home country for India since 1983 when the conflict began. The armed conflict has stepped up since the beginning of 2006 and in March 2007, after four years of negotiations, the peace process between the warring factions officially collapsed. The displaced people, especially Tamil Sri Lankans had found their shelter in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has been a natural choice of location to seek refuge for migrating Sri Lanka Tamils. There is a common heritage, the comfort of a common language and habits, geographical contiguity, and ethnic affinities. The study gives a helicopter view on Sri Lankan Tamil refugee's history in India and analysis their demographic pattern.

Keywords: Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, refugee's influx, camps life in Tamil Nadu, repatriation, demographic composition

Introduction

India has witnessed a massive influx of Sri Lankan Tamil's since 1983 and they found their accommodation in various camps in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. The decision of Sri Lankan government regarding the enactment of the official language act which built Sinhalese as the official language of Sri Lanka. The presence of Tamil community in the island was scorned and a mighty resistance was staged against the discriminatory decision. The setting of Sinhalese as official language had commenced the first spark of violence between Sinhalese and Lankan Tamil's. The Sinhalese ascertain in the Tamil demand for autonomy or decision of the separate country. Gradually the island has victimised furious insurgency between Tamils and Sinhalese. Tamil speaking community in Sri Lanka had constituted 13 percent of the population in 1981 and are located in the north eastern part of island. The conflict reached at its peak in 1983, where Tamil communities in Sri Lanka has displaced and coerced to move. This has resulted in Sri Lankan Tamil fleeing to India, seeking safety among 55 million Tamil populations in the southern state.

Background of the Study

Sri Lankan refugees have more than twenty year's history in India. Their socio-economic conditions are being changed and they led an integrated way of life with local people. The refugees had found their source of earning and livelihood from the local market. But they are bounded to the camp surroundings and freedom to move is restricted from morning 6 Am to evening 6 Pm. Therefore, they does not find job away from the camp. Sri Lankan refugees do not have the legal right to buy properties in India. Thus they are leading deprived life and suffer a lot. The educated refugees do not have the access to seek employment in public sector and they rely on manual works to meet daily needs. An analysis on strength and composition of refugees and its year wise fluctuation is requisited for implementing refugee's management policies. The present study deals with an analysis of demographic composition of camp living refugees in Tamil Nadu.

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Objectives of the Study

Refugees, especially Tamil Sri Lankan camp living refugees in Tamil Nadu has emphasised several human development issues and the demand for citizenship and release from camp life have not brought to a conclusion. The study gives a helicopter view on Sri Lankan refugee's history in India and analysis its demographic pattern as well.

1. To analyse the population composition of camp living refugees in Tamil Nadu.
2. To study the phases of Sri Lankan Refugees Influx to India and pattern of repatriation.
3. To study the year wise trend in refugee's population in Tamil Nadu.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Apart from the numerous literary books, electronic journals, newspaper reports, articles etc. which can be put into the category of secondary sources. Subsequently, this study is relayed on field data and official reports on Tamil Sri Lankan refugees from the Department of Rehabilitation in Tamil Nadu. Direct interviews were conducted to know the current situation of camp living refugees in Tamil Nadu. There are 113 ordinary refugees' camp and two transit camp in Tamil Nadu. The primary information about camp life has been drawn from refugees of Mandapam (transit camp) and Madurai camp (Uchapatti). A few refugees were interviewed outside of the camp and acquire the details about camp life.

Phases of Sri Lankan Refugees' Influx

Temptation for exodus resulted in crossing the narrow Palk Straits and flip through assylum in India. Immediately after landing the shores of Tamil Nadu, refugees are subjected to registration and had been accommodated in various camps (Jayapalan, 2012) [7]. Sri Lankan Tamil's belongings to a wider Tamil speaking population and historically there has been a reciprocal relationship between communities on the both sides of Palk Strait. The mass influx of Sri Lankan refugees had commenced on 24.07.1983 and had held prolonged history of asylum in India. The refugees had arrived in four phases to Tamil Nadu. In the first phase 1,34,053 refugees arrived to Tamil Nadu which was begin in 1983 and continued to till 1987. Table 1 shows phases of Sri Lankan refugee's influx to India.

Table 1: Phase of Refugees Influx

Phases	Period	Inflow
Phase – I	24.07.83 to 31.12.1987	1,34,053
Phase – II	25.08.89 to 30.04.1991	1,22,078
Phase – III	31.07.96 to 31.08.2003	22,418
Phase – IV	12.01.06 to 04.01.2010	24,527
Total		3,03,076

Source: Department Of Rehabilitation, Tamil Nadu

The second wave of refugees arrived in 1989 and ended in 1991. The third wave of refugee's influx began in 31.07.1996, coinciding with the declaration of Elam war III. As a result Sri Lankan army and Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Elam (LTTE) have combat together in Sri Lanka. The direct battle between Sri Lankan army and LTTE, fourth wave of refugee's influx had commenced in January 2016 and continued till January of 2010. 8,450 families consisting of 24,527 persons including 18,222 adults and 6,305

children have arrived at Rameswaram during the fourth phase. As a whole, 3,03,076 are came to India since 1983 and about one lakhs of refugees are repatriated in Two phases (First phase- from 1987 To 1989 and Second phase from 1992 To 1995).

Camp and Non Camp Refugees

Refugees entered in India are admitted in Transit Camps for registration and then shifted to camps which are scattered over 28 districts of Tamil Nadu. On other hand, some refugees are staying outside the camp and they are required to report nearest police station for registration. If refugees are living outside of the camp without proper registration has been arrested and jailed for violating the Foreigners Act. On the basis of where they have finally been accommodated, or where they live, the Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu can be broadly divided into two categories.

The first group may be called the camp refugees. These are the refugees who have been given space in one of the camps established for them, most of which are located in inner part of the state. The basic amenities such as food, shelter, cloths, health facilities and cash assistance are given by government. Camp refugees do not have the right to go outside of the camp due to security reasons. The camp refugees are allowed to go out of the camp for employment purpose with a condition to return before 8 Pm. The second group may be called the non camp refugees. These are the people who are currently residing in homes, usually rented, with the help of relatives or friends, and without any kind of cash or kind assistance from the Indian government. The refugees in this category, those staying outside the camps, currently number close to fifty thousand, live mostly in the larger cities and usually belong to the better off sections of society. Non camp employees are labours of factories, private companies and also engaged in manual works. They have the right to work (unofficially) and movement in the state.

Refugees Camps in Tamil Nadu

The legal status of Sri Lankan refugees in India is officially governed by the Foreigner's Act 1946 and India's Citizenship Act 1955 which defines all non-citizens who enter without visas to be illegal migrants, with no exception for refugees or asylum seekers. Sri Lankans refugees who are considered to be a threat to national security are deemed to be militants and detained in special camps in Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur or Trichy districts. Besides these special camps, there are 110 ordinary camps located in 25 districts of Tamil Nadu.

Refugees living within the government camps are housed in warehouses or in temporary shelters. Each adult refugee receives a small monthly stipend. Though not officially permitted to work in India, the refugees worked as unskilled labour in the informal sector to supplement their incomes. The Indian Government provides basic medical care and education for school-age Sri Lankan children as well as subsidized food grain for the camps' inhabitants. Despite these provisions, conditions in the camps are generally poor with insufficient health and sanitary facilities available for the refugee population.

Total 2: No. of Refugees in Tamil Nadu as on 04.01.2010

Category	Families	Persons
Camp Refugees	19,916	73,251
Non Camp Tamils	11,478	32,242
Total No of Ordinary Camps (in 26 districts)		110
Total No of Special Camps (sub- jail)		3

Source: Department Of Rehabilitation, Tamil Nadu

Sri Lankan refugees remain largely in Tamil Nadu and live in refugee camps scattered across the state. At present, more than 66156 thousand Sri Lankan refugees live in over 113 camps in Tamil Nadu. In addition to this, a further 30,000 Sri Lankans are living outside the government camps. Those

that choose to live outside must register with the local police and visit the camps on a fortnightly basis to register their attendance.

The issues related to human right violation is Sri seems to be very high in refugee's camps. Their right to movement and right to life have been treated blindly and the administration of some refugee's camps is similar to prisons. In the earlier years of arrival, refugees are welcomed by local people and given support. Since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi had spread the fear of militant activities. Nowadays refugees led a integrated life with local people and camp regulations are removed gradually.

Total 3: Details of Refugees Camps in Tamil Nadu

Sl. No	District	No. of Camps	Total Families	Single Families	Total No. of Persons
1	Coimbatore	4	1029	150	3221
2	Cuddalore	4	439	65	1390
3	Dharmapuri	8	698	79	2433
4	Dindigul	7	1016	120	3407
5	Erode	3	1209	151	4713
6	Kanyakumari	4	425	51	1420
7	Karur	2	637	85	2052
8	Krishnagiri	2	329	23	1151
9	Madurai	3	1570	170	5881
10	Namakkal	3	701	122	2247
11	Perambalur	1	76	12	260
12	Pudukkottai	3	1009	142	3369
13	Ramanathapuram	1	629	0	2125
14	Salem	8	864	98	3457
15	Sivaganga	6	1061	138	3486
16	Theni	2	5	0	24
17	Thiruvallur	2	1364	193	4562
18	Thoothukudi	3	496	0	1659
19	Tiruchirappalli	2	926	136	2951
20	Tirunelveli	9	852	133	2717
21	Tiruvannamalai	13	1109	155	3574
22	Tiruppur	5	321	65	992
23	Vellore	6	1085	116	3690
24	Villupuram	2	518	63	1800
25	Virudhunagar	7	1081	0	3522
	Special camp				
26	Kancheepuram	1	40	0	40
27	Thiruvallur	1	8	0	8
28	Trichy	1	5	0	5
	Total	113	19502	2267	66156

Source: Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation.

As of now, there are as many as 66156 Sri Lankan Refugees living in about 113 refugee camps in Tamil Nadu alone that are situated in 28 out of 32 districts within the state. Some of these camps are quite large, and can accommodate more than 1000 families. Such large camps with a capacity of housing over 1000 families are located in the following six districts of Tamil Nadu like Tiruvallur, Vellore, Tiruvannamalai, Erode, Madurai, Shivaganga and Mandapam. Each of these six districts has absorbed and accommodated 3,500 or more refugees over the years (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2008) [4]. The planned in initiative by the ruling government has helped to avoid problems related of mass exodus. During the 1983 exodus, when the arrival of Sri Lankan refugees was at a peak, the incumbent Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr M. G. Ramachandran had the foresight to draw up a plan that sent batches of arriving refugees to as many different districts as possible. This would ensure that they were not all confined

in a few places and no particular district bore the entire financial and social burden. Under the plan, the various District Collectors of all the districts in the state were directed to allot land and resources for the rehabilitation of refugees. This policy of dispersal has managed to give the refugees a number of advantages as well. It allowed them to have more living space, and ensured better job opportunities – especially for the people who managed to reach a shelter near one of the District Headquarters or one of the small towns.

Total 4: Permanent Transit Camps in Tamil Nadu

District	Transit Camp	Population as on 04.01.2010	
		Families	Persons
Ramanathapuram	Mandapam	906	2,980
Tiruchirappalli	Kottapattu	454	1,498

Source: Department Of Rehabilitation, Tamil Nadu

There are two permanent transit camps in Tamil Nadu-Mandapam and Kottapattu. Refugees are initially accommodated in these two camps. Later they are sent to

the 113 government administered camps in 28 districts of Tamil Nadu. These camps are isolated in nature and refugees do not have opportunity to find employment.

Total 5: Age Wise Distribution of Refugees

Sl. No	District	Children					Adults				Total No. of Persons
		0 to 8 Years		Between 9-11 Yrs			Between 12-17 Yrs.		18 Yrs. & above		
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1	Coimbatore	221	166	118	115	620	454	533	843	771	3221
2	Cuddalore	102	116	56	48	322	108	77	439	444	1390
3	Dharmapuri	180	174	109	95	558	251	224	710	690	2433
4	Dindigul	272	227	147	102	748	355	492	991	821	3407
5	Erode	676	661	116	104	1557	470	431	1148	1107	4713
6	Kanniyakumari	111	96	68	65	340	115	109	434	422	1420
7	Karur	210	228	14	17	469	251	234	509	589	2052
8	Krishnagiri	104	77	70	66	317	185	129	272	248	1151
9	Madurai	527	547	139	160	1373	1190	995	1068	1255	5881
10	Namakkal	188	173	59	65	485	164	150	699	749	2247
11	Perambalur	13	13	13	16	55	23	23	81	78	260
12	Pudukkottai	300	319	91	93	803	426	358	834	948	3369
13	Ramanathapuram	263	279	42	17	601	445	407	286	386	2125
14	Salem	234	225	216	174	849	511	538	838	721	3457
15	Sivaganga	321	325	109	131	886	333	348	935	984	3486
16	Theni	2	4	1	3	10	2	2	5	5	24
17	Thiruvallur	357	323	144	217	1041	735	543	951	1292	4562
18	Thoothukudi	278	247	11	41	577	125	104	420	433	1659
19	Tiruchirappalli	271	284	30	11	596	301	301	846	907	2951
20	Tirunelveli	253	240	103	80	676	158	160	847	876	2717
21	Tiruvannamalai	282	274	121	114	791	368	368	1110	937	3574
22	Tiruppur	93	83	36	20	232	65	51	317	327	992
23	Vellore	367	338	80	92	877	466	369	918	1060	3690
24	Villupuram	225	191	43	77	536	174	190	384	516	1800
25	Virudhunagar	321	272	156	114	863	461	445	874	879	3522
	Special camp										
26	Kancheepuram	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40	0	40
	Thiruvallur	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8
	Trichy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	5

Source: Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation.

Large numbers of refugee's camp are located in Tiruvannamalai district, which occupies thirteen camps followed by Tirunelveli (9), Selam (8) and Dharmapuri (8). Likewise, Madurai districts have accommodated 1570 refugee families, where three camps are occupied in the district and are biggest camps on the basis of family size. The number of families in Tiruvannamalai district is 1109, thus refugees camps in Tiruvannamalai collectively holds the fourth position in family size. Largest number of refugees is admitted in three camps of Madurai district namely Anaiyur (2440), Thiruvathavur (1761) and Uchapatti (1680) and total refugees in Madurai district is 5881 persons. Three special camps are located in Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur and Trichy districts. The special camps are established since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and militants are admitted to special camps for internal security. Total number of family in these three district camps is 53 and total population is 53. Kancheepuram camp has the large number of refugees, which accommodates 40 persons. Special camps are set up

for accommodating militant and criminals, which are locating inner parts of Tamil Nadu for avoiding contact with outsiders.

The age wise distribution of refugees is shown in table 5. The refugees in between 0-8 years has comprises 6171 male and 5882 female. Large number of children below the age of 8 is recorded in Erode district. Children in-between 9-11of age constitute 16182. Out of this, 2092 are male and 2037 are female. Large number of children in this age is located in Selam. Total adult population of refugees in Tamil Nadu constitute 49974 persons. Out of this, 15717 people are in between 12-17 years old and 34257 are aged above 18. From the adult population, total male is 24948 and number of female is 25026.

Year wise camp data is given in table 6, exhibiting a decline in total number of camp living refugees. During 2009, the dispute between Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and LTTE was come to an end. With the assistance of UNHCR, the situation in Sri Lanka has recovered and sustains a peaceful atmosphere.

Table 6: Camp population abstract from January 2009 to January 2016

Year	Family	Adult Male	Adult Female	Child Male	Child female	Total
01/2009	19593	27889	26832	9542	9090	73353
01/2010	19995	27631	26525	9663	9107	72926
01/2011	19741	26502	25245	9160	8663	69570
01/2012	19964	25698	25091	8699	8391	67879
01/2013	19658	25168	25138	8532	8080	66918
01/2014	19575	24871	24993	7958	7726	65548
01/2015	19647	25008	25345	7346	7102	64801
01/2016	19435	25157	25380	6766	6776	64079

Source: Department Of Rehabilitation, Tamil Nadu

The number of refugee’s family in 2009 was 19593, which was increased to 19741 in 2011 and declined to 19435 in 2016. The adult male and female ratio is fairly stable and declining. Number of child male and female in 2011 was

8699 and 8391, which was 9542 and 9090 in 2009 respectively. In January 2016, child male and female difference is 10.

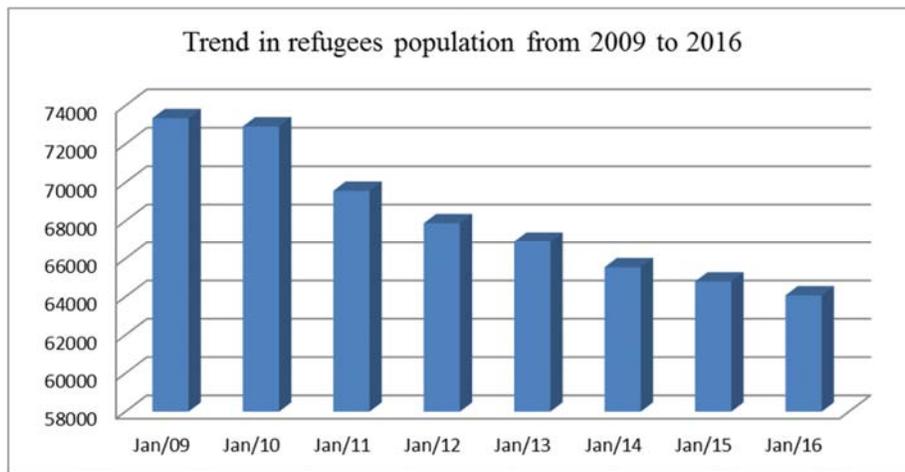


Fig 1: Trend in refugee’s population from 2009 to 2016

The total number of refugees has declined from 73353 in 2009 to 64079 in 2016. Large number of refugees leaved the country during 2011-12. Refugees are not cognized about the real situation in Sri Lanka and conflict area was devoid of communication, electric and water supply facilities. During the conflict period, refugees are displaced and scattered over various places. Members of same family are staying different countries and they are mentally and physically faint. The refugees who entered to Indian coast are required to register and obey camp rules. Government has now providing a monthly dole 1000 as a financial assistance and free education to children. But the demand for citizenship not receives serious attention from various governments. The non segregated life with local community and their cultural and linguistic affinity have brought the possibility. Refugee’s right to move is restricted to camp surroundings and the absence of socio, economic and political rights have intensified the severity in surviving camps. There is a need to empathize the refugee’s desire before forming every policy. Then only the existing problems resolved. The improvement in standard of living compared to earlier has induce the refugees to return.

Repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees

Due to the geographical and ethnic affinity with the Tamil Majority regions of Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, refugees initially considered Tamil Nadu was a safe heaven and for several years, the Indian government accepted the

influx of refugees. But due to pressure on the centre from the State Government, a programme of Registration and Repatriation commenced in 1992.

The first repatriation took place in 1987 as a result of signing of Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on May 21, 1991, actuated the government to take action for repatriation. In all, 99,469 refugees were sending back during 1987-89 and 1992-95. The repatriation was a debacle and no assay was made to evaluate the situation of Sri Lanka ahead of repatriation (Dasgupta, 2003). Table 7 deals with the details repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from India. As a whole, about 2,10,386 refugees were send back till 2012.

Table 7: Reverse flow of Refugees

1.	Through Government sponsored arrangements (During 1987-89 and 1992-95)	99,469
2.	Their own arrangements	100,000
3.	Through UNHCR assistance (from 2002 to Aug'12)	10,917
	Total	2,10,386

Source: Department Of Rehabilitation, Tamil Nadu

According to the UNHCR, 54,188 refugees were voluntarily repatriated to Sri Lanka by chartered ships and flights between 20 January 1992 and 20 March 1995. However, during the same period of time, there were certainly many forced repatriations as well, and even the voluntary ones were often a result of the increasingly harsh treatment meted

out to the refugees in the various camps. This is a blemish on India's social record of internal non-harassment. After negotiations, the UNHCR managed to get the government to grant it access to the refugees at the point of departure in the transit centres, although its officials were not permitted to visit the refugee camps. The recent progress made in the peace process in Sri Lanka has, however, prompted some of the refugees to return voluntarily – the official estimate is that about 1,000 refugees returned from India to Sri Lanka between January and December, 2003 assisted by U.N.H.C.R. It is also estimated that some 4000 refugees also returned to Sri Lanka in the same year. Ironically, the Government takes pains to prevent 'illegal crossings' which are often hazardous; and permits are required before a refugee can legally go back.

Table 7 shows return of Sri Lankan refugees from India during 2011-16. In 2011, 1728 persons were returned to Sri Lanka and it was 1291 persons in 2012. The return of refugees to Sri Lanka has been declining gradually. In 2013, 273 families, including 718 members were returned to Sri Lanka. Likewise, 453 persons were return to their native places in Sri Lanka in 2015. In the beginning of 2016, about 50 families which consist of 163 persons were returned to Sri Lanka.

Table 8: Return of Sri Lankans refugees from India

Year	No .of Families	No .of Persons
2011	557	1728
2012	453	1291
2013	273	718
2014	137	338
2015	208	453
2016	50	163
Total	1678	4691

Source: Ministry of Resettlement, Sri Lanka

The refugees, understandably, were uncertain about their future in Sri Lanka. Fortunately their fears were unfounded. According to a Report published by the UNHCR "the overall picture with regard to the security and protection of returnees was very encouraging." And those who have returned to Sri Lanka are sending letters to their friends in India about the welcome they have received, which has set in motion a favourable climate for the return of the refugees. In this connection, it must be highlighted that there was hardly any criticism against the Indian Government during the latest phase of repatriation which took place in March 1995.

Conclusion

India has initially held out a warm welcome for the refugees because of the perceived shared cultural, language, and religious heritage, especially with the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, it was forced to change these open and supportive policies when the refugee presence began to cause problems for the host country. Soon these problems went far beyond being just a socio-political and security issue which is the normal fallout of any major population movement. In the case of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India, these issues and problems actually culminated in the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Since then, India has been forced to push for early and rapid repatriation of the refugees who have no objection to returning to their hometowns. Nowadays refugees are

returning to Sri Lanka owing to conducive living atmosphere in the country. The refugees were living more than 25 years in India and their demand for Indian citizenship is long term addressed issue. But nowadays living condition of refugees has been improved and they are on the way to achieve self sufficiency. Lack of freedom to move out of the camp, particularly in transit camps has raised some human right issues. The pathetic condition of refugee's camps in Tamil Nadu and violation of human right in these camps is seems to be avoided by medias and socio-political workers. An efficient management mechanism for refugees is needed to avoid various socio economic issues in future.

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