Introduction
A VILLAGE AT BYLAKUPE SETTLEMENT
"Refugee and migration movements have increased considerably in recent decades. This trend will continue in foreseeable future. It is mainly the developing countries which are most affected by refugee and migration movements both as countries of origin and destination countries."¹

The reasons which encourage or compel people to migrate or to become refugees are various and, more often than not, overlap. Some of the conspicuous causes are civil wars, violation of human rights, poverty, domestic and international disparities of income, environmental devastation and natural disasters.

"Developing countries with a low per-capita income . . . are frequently the major destination countries for refugees. This imposes considerable economic, social, ecological and political burdens on the countries. In some developing and many industrialised countries, labour migrants represent an important basis for economic development. In the countries of immigration they are virtually always amongst the weakest population groups".²

¹ Stephan Klingebiel, "Development Co-operation and the Refugee and Migration Problem" – Economics: A Biannual Collection of Recent German Studies, Vol. 52 (Edited by the Institute for Scientific Co-operation, Tubingen, 1995), p. 98,
² Ibid, p. 100.
Broadly speaking migration could be of two types – voluntary migration owing to economic reasons and involuntary migration owing to political reasons. Generally the latter type of migrants are referred to as ‘refugees’. There have been many instances of involuntary migration all over the world. As far as India is concerned, it witnessed exodus of refugees from Pakistan after the partition in 1947, from Tibet in 1959 when Tibet was taken over by China, from Bangladesh when that was freed from Pakistan in 1971 and from Sri Lanka in the wake of ethnic troubles there since 1980.

Refugees are a group of people who have been forced to leave their native land and settle in a place which is alien to them. But the important aspect with regard to Refugees is that their leaving the native land is a forced one and hence absolutely involuntary. In such involuntary displacement of the people from their home land to another alien place, the most crucial problem is that of adjustment and assimilation. “Moving from one social system to another requires that the refugee be resocialized into a new set of groups and norms. In the long run, adjustment implies loss of group visibility as members become indistinguishable from members of the host society. This is accomplished through a process of increasing conformity to the latter’s norms and cultural patterns . . . , Once refugee groups have
accepted certain overall patterns, there is usually an increasing acceptance of cultural pluralism on the part of the host countries".  

Refugees finding a home in the host country have to ultimately make their new found home acceptable not only to themselves but also to the people in the host country. To be in a society one must be able to socialise and this requires a high degree of adaptability on the part of those who seek socialisation. In this context the social, economic and cultural background of the people are the important factors, but the social integration proves to be the most crucial.  

In the case of forced migration the problems of migrants are manifold. Their migration dislocates their social life because they have abandoned their own land to find a place in an alien land. In this process, they are forced to leave not only their immovable property, but also many values that are culture-specific in their home land. Forced migration often splits the families, particularly when the migrants have to travel long and through haphazard routes to find a place of settlement elsewhere. Large scale immigration will make it difficult for the migrants to find a settlement where all could settle together. This will naturally disorganise their community life. The

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chances of families and communities disintegrating is very high in the involuntary type of migration. Such migrants will have to put-up with a lot of physical, mental, social and economic strains for a long time till they get settled down in one place or the other. Even after settlement, it will take a very long period for them to get integrated into the socio-economic environment in the host country. Refugees remain as refugees for a very long time in the host country and it is almost an impossibility for them to totally merge with the socio-economic systems of the host country. By the time they accomplish the fusion with the host environment they would have lost the status as ‘refugees’. It is important that in the course of time, the refugees and the host society should be able to live harmoniously and become an integral part of the society wherein they are mutually acceptable.

Over the years the refugee problem has gained some complex dimensions and one has to approach it with a global perspective. Most of the refugee movements manifest as an ethnic problem in one way or the other. This is evident from the flight of refugees in Bosnia, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zaire, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Tazikistan and Africa. In the Asian context, the examples of ethnic refugees include Sri Lankan Tamils, Bangladeshi Chakmas, Rohingyas and other ethnic groups from Myanmar, the ethnic Nepali refugees from Bhutan and the boat people from Vietnam. These refugees have
attracted global concern. Among the Americans also, the nature of the refugees is not very different from what has been stated above. For instance, the Haitans, the Cubans, and the Central Americans have contributed substantially to the refugee problems in the world. Evidently "most of the Refugee movements . . . have given rise to new classes of people who are homeless and stateless and who live in a condition of constant insecurity which erodes human dignity. They have caused grave political and economic problems for the countries of temporary reception, problems which have proved too burdensome for the administrative facilities and financial resources of private organisations and national governments. The refugee problem has thus transcended national jurisdictions and institutions."1

Because of this ethnic dimension, it is reported that in the western world the receiving States have had to face formidable difficulties in tackling the refugees, particularly because of the tensions created by the refugees in the receiving States.2 In many cases the humanitarian concern, an aspect of the refugee problem, has been completely forgotten giving way to develop tensions and political fighting between the refugees and the host. These


experiences have taught bitter lessons to many nations which received refugees in the first instance purely on humanitarian considerations. This experience particularly of the western countries has its impact on the policies and approaches in the handling of refugee matters all over the world. This has shifted the emphasis from the 'protection' (to refugees) to 'restriction' (in receiving and accommodating refugees). This shift in the emphasis that put the humanitarian aspect on the back burner will help only to add to the tensions and not to achieve the social integration between the refugees and the host.

Every country has tasted involuntary migration at one time or other. However, the dimension of the migration and the related problems may vary from country to country. As far as India is concerned, it witnessed heavy exodus of refugees during 1947, 1959, 1971 and 1980. Just after the partition of the country, India witnessed an exodus of refugees from Pakistan. In 1959, when China took over Tibet, Tibetans fled the country en mass and India had to accept the burden of accommodating a very good chunk of Tibetan population. In 1971, when India helped Bangladesh in its freedom struggle, India had to face an exodus of refugees from Bangladesh to India. During 1980, when the ethnic troubles erupted in Sri Lanka, India had to accommodate a huge number of Sri Lankan refugees in India. According to the officer in-charge – Chennai Division attached
to the High Commissioner for Refugees, as on August 31, 1996 the refugees in India stood at 2,39,963. This includes 1,08,000 Tibetans, 56,829 Sri Lankans, 53,465 Chakmas from Bangladesh, 20,658 Afghans, and 1,011 belonging to other nationalities.¹

According to website information, as on 30th September 1996, there are in total 1,31,000 Tibetan refugees of which 1,00,000 are in India, 25,000 in Nepal, 2,000 in Bhutan, 2,000 in Switzerland, 1,500 in United States and 600 in Canada.² But according to U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1996, the refugees in India are estimated as 3,68,500 which includes 1,19,000 Tibetans, 96,000 Sri Lankans, 50,000 Burmese (Chin), 43,000 Chakmas, 40,000 Bhutanese, 19,800 Afghans and 700 others.³ Notwithstanding some differences as to the number of refugees in India in these sources of information, it can be noted that Tibetan refugees constitute the major group among refugees in the country. Further it should be noted that, of the Tibetan refugees more than 76% are in India alone and the rest (about 24%) are found distributed in five other countries.

Interestingly, though Tibetans in India, being refugees, are technically ‘stateless’, a small percentage of them bear foreign passports.

It is interesting to note that only in the case of Tibetan refugees India adopted a relatively planned rehabilitation programme. The Tibetan refugees are ‘officially’ accommodated in selected settlements by the Government of India itself. In the case of other refugees, there is no particular settlement programme as such and are not rehabilitated or settled in any organised manner. This is mainly because of the fact that the Tibetan refugees came in well defined groups seeking asylum in a foreign land – India.

As against this, in the case of other refugees, for instance-refugees from Bangladesh, Pakistan etc., they crossed the border in splintered groups and mostly they migrated for a temporary stay. Further, these refugees were moving between their home country and the host country depending on the suitability of the situation in their home country. These refugees came not because they were thrown out of their country but because they could not stay in an atmosphere of terror and ethnic violence that erupted in their home country. Further, they were fleeing their country on their own without a proper guidance and leadership. In contrast to this, the Tibetan refugees had to leave their country not because of internal trouble, but
because of another country – China - taking over their land. The choice for the Tibetans was between fleeing the home land or staying back there to suffer torture by the Chinese administration.

Tibetans, being a tradition-bound community with a culture highly based on their religion, are supposedly blind followers of their undisputed religious leader, Dalai Lama. Tibetans’ faith and loyalty to Dalai Lama is such that they simply obey the dictat of their leader. Such a religious leader guided the whole migration process of Tibetans to India and he was able to get them rehabilitated with the help of the Government of India in a well organised way.

No doubt, this sort of a planned settlement of refugees could be accomplished only because of the fact that it was a ‘refugee movement’ directed by a well accepted leader. This aspect is missing in all other refugee movements thus denying a proper organised settlement for them. This difference between the story of Tibetan refugees and other refugees makes Tibetan refugees a distinct group in the host country. They have well defined distinct settlements and they have their own distinct entity in their host country.

As a result of separate rehabilitation programme to the Tibetan refugees, in all, there are now over 34 Tibetan settlements, spread
over 10 states in India, out of which 5 settlements are in the State of Karnataka alone. For the purpose of protecting their culture and tradition, the Tibetan refugees in India follow a centralised system of governance linking all these settlements. Tibetan Government in exile has its own National Flag: A mountain with snow lion and red and blue rays over the sun.

Tibetans have a system of democratic government in exile, of their own, the seat of which is at Dharamsala in Himachala Pradesh in Northern India. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the head of the State. The Assembly and Cabinet elections are held once in every 5 years. They have separate cabinet ministers for Education, Finance, Health, Home Affairs, Information and International Relations, Religion, Culture and Security. In addition, there are independent commissions such as Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission, Tibetan Central Election Commission, Public Service Commission and Audit Commission, which all function independently without the intervention by their government.

Their government in the host country has not accepted nor adopted the principle of compulsory taxation in any form in order to raise revenue. Its income mainly comes from voluntary tax payment by the refugees, business revenue and donations. Their government
utilises the revenue so received for the well-being of the refugees and for the maintenance and promotion of their culture and tradition.

Tibetans are keen on keeping international relations. Accordingly, their government has set up offices in different countries. At present, it has offices at Budapest (Hungary), Canberra (Australia), Paris (France), Geneva (Switzerland), Katmandu (Nepal), London (United Kingdom), Moscow (Russia), New Delhi (India), New York (United States of America), Tokyo (Japan) and Zurich (Switzerland). These offices try to establish cordial relation between their government or Dalai Lama and the respective country in which the office is situated.

In India, the Tibetans have no necessity to have their own military or police force, because they are well protected here as any other citizen of the country. However, to keep their culture alive in this country, they have set up certain institutions like the Institute of performing Arts, Library, School of Dialectics, Medical Institute and Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. Branches of these institutions are set up in all the settlements. Women's Organisation, Youth Congress and Amnye Machen are the other voluntary organisations they have set up for social and community services.
This study is basically on the Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe settlement which is not only the first of its kind but also the largest settlement in India. Initially this settlement was established in an area of 3,000 acres of land. It was further extended by another 2,500 acres. The initial population in the settlement was about 3,000 and the present population is nearly 15,500.

The unique feature of the Tibetan refugees in the settlement in India in general, and the settlement at Bylakuppe in particular, is that they are well organised, highly enterprising, and well disciplined. Another commandable aspect of their society is the co-operative way of life that they have been able to practice in this settlement. It is not an exaggeration that these refugees by sheer perseverance, determination and with a highly positive attitude towards self and society have been able to make their home, which is away from their native home, a veritable paradise on earth. Each Tibetan settlement in India looks like a miniature Tibet representing each and every aspect of the Tibetan society.

In every activity organised and performed by the Tibetan refugees in the Bylakuppe settlement, one can clearly see a “social approach”. They have set up a co-operative society through which most of the activities in the settlement are directed, supervised and
controlled, thus exemplifying a "community setup". They have a liberal concept of society and they have been able to follow a societal approach in all their activities without infringing on the basic individual freedom.

The way in which the Tibetan refugees have been conducting themselves make them stand out for the reason that they are at no point of time made others regard them as parasites. They fall back on their own resources and by making use of everything at their command to the best possible extent have developed themselves without in any way disturbing or interfering in the matters of native population. As a matter of fact, this part of the country has been witnessing tremendous socio-economic developments mainly because of Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe settlement. Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe have more or less made this place their home and have become an integral part of the society in this part of the country. At the time of actual establishment of the settlement for Tibetans, they (as well as the Indians) were of the opinion that they were going to stay here only temporarily, that is, till their country was liberated. But now it appears that, they are going to stay here for ever.

To make a study on the socio-economic aspects of a group of refugees who have been able to settle, develop and progress in a
foreign land by contributing to the development and progress of the area of their settlement would be an interesting, informative and educative proposition for a researcher. Accordingly, it is thought that a socio-economic study of Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe settlement in Karnataka could contribute a lot to the understanding of socio-economic dimensions of life and prospects of a set of refugees who have been able to successfully settle in a land away from their native place.

The main objectives of the study are:

a) To understand the social, economic and cultural background of Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe,
b) To know the present social, economic and cultural conditions of the Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe, and
c) To assess the extent of transformation that has happened in the socio-economic and cultural aspects in the life and living standards of the Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe.

This thesis is prepared mainly with the primary data generated from the field work conducted by the research scholar. For generating the primary data, a comprehensive survey covering 1,000 sample households of Tibetan refugees at Bylakuppe was conducted. A comprehensive questionnaire was prepared and administered by the
research scholar himself. The sample accounts for 74% of the total households and 71% of the population in the Bylakuppe settlement. For secondary data and information, books and journals relevant to the various aspects covered by the study were consulted. The primary data and information generated from the survey conducted are presented in the thesis in an integrated manner. Very important persons like the President and the Secretary of the Co-operative Society at Bylakuppe, the village leaders and the senior lamas were also consulted for data and information pertaining to the settlement.

The relevant data are presented in appropriate tables in this thesis. Some of the relevant and interesting data are presented in the form of charts and diagrams. Averages, percentages, ranking and grade points are the general statistical tools used to project and interpret the statistical data presented in this thesis.

The nature of this thesis is partly exploratory and partly explanatory. This is a micro level study which has covered only one Tibetan settlement in the country; that is at Bylakuppe. The observations made with reference to the area covered by this study may not be fully applicable to other areas. However, it is hoped that the observations would give an insight into the various aspects
relating to a group of people who were forced to leave their country 40 years ago and settle in an alien country.

This study entitled "A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF THE TIBETAN REFUGEES AT BYLAKUPPE SETTLEMENT IN KARNATAKA" is organised and presented in eight chapters.

Chapter I - "INTRODUCTION" - This chapter presents a brief idea of the nature of the topic, causes for migration, India's experience on refugees, flight of Tibetans to India, the objectives of the study, and the research methodology.

Chapter II - "SOME STUDIES ON MIGRATION AND REFUGEES" - This chapter presents some relevant observations collected from literatures available on the studies related to migration and refugees.

Chapter III - "TIBETAN SOCIETY AND THEIR FLIGHT" - This chapter presents a background of the Tibetan society and their flight to India.

Chapter IV - "SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS AT BYLAKUPPE AND THEIR BACKGROUND IN TIBET" - This chapter is devoted to give a description of the Bylakuppe settlement and the Tibetan background of the refugees who have settled down here.
Chapter V – “TIBETAN REFUGEES AT BYLAKUPPE SETTLEMENT: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE” – This chapter delineates the family structure, the socio-economic aspects and the general living conditions of the Tibetan refugees settled at Bylakuppe.

Chapter VI – “INSTITUTIONS AND CUSTOMS IN BYLAKUPPE SETTLEMENT” – This chapter deals with the role of co-operative society in the life of refugees in this settlement. Besides, this chapter gives a brief account of the social institutions and customs and systems practised by the Tibetan refugees in this settlement.

Chapter VII – “GENERAL ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION OF TIBETAN REFUGEES AT BYLAKUPPE SETTLEMENT” – This chapter presents the general attitude and perception of the refugees at Bylakuppe in respect of their life, living conditions, customs, habits, hopes and aspirations.

Chapter VIII – “RESUME” – This chapter is devoted to present a capsule summary of the study.