CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS OF REFUGEES IN TAMILNADU

This chapter is to bring out an actual account of the position of refugees in Tamilnadu today. This research work mainly focuses on the refugees who are basically Tamilian, who went and settled in Burma and Ceylon in the control of British rule. At that time, Burma and Ceylon were under the control of British rule. Upto 1937, Burma and Ceylon were part and parcel of India. Therefore, it was easy for Tamilians to settle there. This was not continued for a long period. When Burma and Ceylon were divided from India, the problem of citizenship arose. Later First World War Japanese occupation of Burma and Ceylon, Nationalisation of Banks and lands widened the gap between those countries. Perhaps it resulted in the left out of Tamilians from Burma and Ceylon.

These Tamils, who came back to their motherland, were not received warmly. In Tamilnadu they were called and treated as refugees. In this chapter, the problems and difficulties whatever they faced in the refugee camps and special camps are duly explained.

Problem of Returns

When compared with the trauma of flight and the uncertainty of exile the journey back home can certainly be a joyful experience. At the same time, however, one should not be too sentiments about the circumstances of the returning refugees. For us, one aid agency worker has observed, “returnees are a displaced people of a special kind. They experience not one, but two relocations, one when they flee and another when they return to their own country. Each relocations, accompanied with a loss of the means of livelihood. Such a land jobs, homes and livestock. And each relocation marks the start of a tough restoration process”.
Physical Insecurity

The most obvious and immediate problem confronting returnees is that of physical insecurity. Social and Psychological Security: Irrespective of the level of violence, returnee situations are frequently characterised by high levels of social tension and psychological insecurity.

Legal Securities

A less evident by equally important form of insecurity experienced by returnees arises from their legal status and access to judicial procedures. Three issues are of particularly importance in this respect, citizenship, documentation and property right 1. With the out break of civil war in Burma and Ceylon lots and lots of Tamils return back to their home places. These people were not called as the citizens of India or Tamilnadu but refugees. This was the pathetic condition of the people who return back to their home place.

These refugees who came from Burma and Ceylon through the ports of Chennai, Visakapatnam and Kanjan, Ramanathapuram, were settled in the Madras Presidency under the direct control of the Refugees Protection Officer. They were sent to various refugees camps, which were scattered in all the district of Madras Presidency. Many of them were died because of poverty, ill health, hunger, sickness and attack of wild animals on their way back to Tamilagam. The conditions of refugees in hospitals and refugees camps were very pathetic. The people who were in these camps were very pathetic.

1. Patil R.V.T. P.R.Trivedi, Refugees and Human Rights, Authors Press, Printed in India at Tarun Offset New Delhi, 2000, p-158
The people who were in these camps were not given full rights. They were treated like slaves.² Many false cases were filed against them and many of them were arrested and jailed for months together and years together without any trial. Without the knowledge of the people, they often shifted from refugee camps to special camps. In these special camps they were not given independence to meet their relatives too. Many women refugees were became prey to the harassment of the higher authorities of these special camps. The Tamils who came as refugees were denied of job opportunities and together educational rights. They were not given any rights to form any kind of unions.³ Therefore, many people in these special camps were mentally upset. These special camps looks like the “Nazi Camps” which were used by the Germans in the Second World War against Jews.

Apart from these factors, racial and religious interrelation too played a vital role in the part of refugees. They had no security to their life and property, they were treated as second class people but not equals. These Tamil refugees could not walk freely in Tamilnadu. The condition of these special camps was pathetic than that of the jail. Journals, newspapers and magazines gave false image that they were terrorists, robbers, pandits and drug smugglers. Very rare social institutions took interest in the case of the refugees. Even then, if the refugees wanted to get the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees or other International organizations like Red Cross Society or any other private institutions, they had to get the prior permission of the Indian Government.⁴

³ Madras Legislative Assembly Debate – Vol – X Feb – March 1948, p-74
⁴ Madras in 1945 outline of the Administration, p-82
There are nearly 15000 agricultural labourers in 133 refugee camps of Tamilnadu. They indulged in various kinds of physical labourers. For example they were engaged in the works of laying roads new railway tracks and repairing of the damaged roads by the contractors. Yet they were not given the fair wages. They were denied of their right to work as they wish. The time span, which they had to spend out side. the camps were drawn up previously. Therefore, they were not able to do the easy works in distant places.\textsuperscript{5} Government put many restrictions to their free movement in the nation or state. The basic medical facilities and helps would not be given properly. Repairing work of the huts of these refugees was denied off. Higher authorities were not ready to repair the Attoor Special Camp, which was damaged by fire four years back.

The help rendered by the non-governmental organisation are stopped. These people were imprisoned for years together in the cells in which, trial prisoners too were not imprisoned for more days. These prisons were not called as cells; but special camps. For there security reasons they were jailed for the whole 24 hours. In this special camp’s rooms, there were no recreation or entertainment facilities. Outer communications also were stopped. The Government often changed the special camps from one place to another. It severely affects the education of the refugee students. Because the Transfer Certificate, which is an essential one or joining into the new school, were not available on the exact day when the Special Camp was shifted.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{5} Madras Administration Report, 1942, Government of Madras, Madras 1943, p-91
\textsuperscript{6} Madras Administration Report, 1947, Government of Madras, Madras 1948, p-90
The conditions of women in these Special Camps were very miserable. To run the family they have to prefer manual labour even as coolies. Higher authorities often used these women as sexual labourers too. Sexual harassment upon the refugee women was so worst.  

Tamil refugees are being denied of fundamental access to education and employment. Even if employed as cheap labour, they are denied of trade union rights. Many of them in the refugee camp suffer from ill health. The ‘special camps’ in Tamilnadu can be compared to the “Torture Camps” led by the Nazis for Jews. More importantly with growing menace of racial ethnic and fascist tendencies in many of the western countries refugees and immigrants happen to be the first victims with no security for life and property. Children of these refugees are thoroughly alienated from their homeland, not being able to learn in their own mother tongue and most of them live as second-rate citizens in these countries.  

The condition of the refugee camp in Tamilnadu reminds us of prisons. The media on the other hand depict an image of the typical refugee as a “terrorist”, “bandit” or as drug smugglers. Due to ethnic conflict and war millions of Tamils today live in India, their future having lost their own land, property and Kin’s. After the 1983 Tamil massacre many of the refugees live in the welfare camps in the state today with the Government having not even accorded official refugee states to them.

Being it in Tamilnadu or elsewhere, different refugees have either not being recognised as refugees or they don’t have a legal status as such with any such initiation from both Central and State Government. The refugees in Tamilnadu are not allowed to seek help from the Virtual Nations Commission of Refugees, or any other International agencies without a official permission from the Indian Government ⁹.

There are about 15,000 agricultural labour today in Tamilnadu refugee camps in some 133 camps involved in many kinds of manual labour. Most of them as control labour. Most of them control labour in the construction industry or wage labour in road maintenance work. Today they are not only employed in these anymore, but are also denied of their wages due to them ¹⁰.

The financial or material support provides to the refugees are extremely inadequate even to satisfy their basic necessities. They have been denied right to work outside their camps. Their mobility outside the camp has been restricted denying them any possibility to seek employment in different places on nighttime jobs. Along with such severe restriction of their mobility police atrocities on them manifest either in making them seeks permission for their movements. Sudden arrests lockups and sudden transfer to so called special camps. Fundamental facilities of health are denied and their huts are not being repaired. All the work done by non-governmental organisation in areas of education and health are suspended and NGO’s are banned in these camps.

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II.

While in Europe, the admitted Tamil refugees are granted support to meet their basic necessities and even citizenship the state of those people in Tamilnadu is terrible. When the United Nations High Commission for Refugees observed and expressed its unhappiness and offered to take care of their welfare the Indian Government refused the offer by the UNHCR 11.

The atrocity of the Tamilnadu Government on Tamils varies in degrees. On the one hand the special camps for the refugees are turning out to be real torture camps on the other, hundreds of Tamil refugees are being subjected to terror in the numerous sub-jails all over the state. These refugees have been kept in such condition for years together denied of fundamental human rights 12.

While legally people arrested for enquiry are not supposed to be in the sub-jails for more than a particular period of time. The Special Camps for the refugees are practically turning out to be prisons, all in the name of internal security. There are no Possibilities for any entertainment, contact with the outside world no access to T.V Radio, or news Papers even if the refugees themselves are willing to spend for these. Most often families are kept in separation in such camps. 13

In ordinary camps people are to leave the camp, they are supposes to sign the register at 6 a.m. and at 6 p.m. in the evening when they are supposed to return.

One the day of the delivery of financial assistance, no ore in the camp are supposed to leave, many refugees labour in such camps due to poverty are entirely dependent on the poor facilities of Government Medical Centers. The children of the refugees also bear the grant of bureaucratic not being provided with necessary certificate to shift schools, prompted by their constant transfer to different camps. The supported rendered to the refugees children from elementary to higher education has not been Stopped till the higher secondary level.

The general principle to any region favoured by Madras emigrants and to group all others together by convenient broad classes. So the five Madras states, Hyderabad, Mysore, Burma, Ceylon and Malaya receive separate mention, for their associations with Madras are considerable. An attempt was made to achieve at this census and enumeration of Indians on the high seas. A Special schedule was produced and arrangement were also bring made to collect and deal with the returns so far as the schedule received in Madras were concerned, the vessels came within the range of the ordinary census as having been within Indian waters. In such an enumeration it is beyond Indian waters on the census.

Another general consideration is the perforce of perennial census date. The latter ought not to have had much influence since the census date is care fully chosen to avoid as far as possible all festival congregations. The first however exercise a continuing effect Thus in Chittor district, Tirupati, Tiruttani and Kalahastri always attract pilgrims Mahasivarathri was only eleven days before the census date have been a residual element of saivite pilgrims not yet departed from their favourite shrine, when the census date arrived. Such centres are found all over South India from Tinnelvelly upto southern Ganjam.

The chief local origins of madras contributes to overseas emigration are indicated by the comparative popularity of the birthplaces. Burma is well represented in Madras, Chingleput and Ramnad, with a sprinkling on the circars coast. A general aspect that appears almost is the increase in the number of persons born in Burma. The depression of trade at the end of the decade resulted in lessened employment for Indians in other countries. The Anti-Indian agitation in Burma, which should it, is the violent riots in Rangoon and which sent back to their native land and number of Indians apprehensive of future development. The causes, which go produce emigration, are many and varied. Apart from unemployment, poor seasons, pressure upon the land and other great fundamental causes, the proximity of prominent trade routes or ports, undoubtedly stimulates emigration.

The difference between Burmese born in Burma is now 2,94,000 in favour of the latter as against 2,71,000 in 1921. The percentage increase in this difference is 8.5 which compares with the 10.3 increase in general population. The movement into Hyderabad as compared with that from Hyderabad to Madras has increased markedly, the 1931 figure being almost twice that for 1921. This differs considerably from that for 1921 as a result of the retrenchment measures and apart from Burma and the five principle states in South India, no individual movement can be studied.

The Burmese attitude towards the South Indian labour influx, it is idle and unfair to dismiss the Telugu or Tamil as a mere intruder in the province across the Bay. The Indian passengers returning in May 1931 from Rangoon as a result of the Anti-Indian riots was 3000 or 40 percent more than in the corresponding month of 1930. This increase was more or less regular feature of the earlier months of 1931, that despite the unfavourable conditions at the end of the decade the lack of employment and anti-Indian troubles, the Madras born enumerated in Burma should be 25000 more numerous than in 1921, indicates the hold that this country has upon Madras labour 16.

Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on 21st of May 1991 at Sriperumbudur near Madras by LTTE men further worsened the situation of the refugees. The LTTE being Srilankan extremist made the Government to put severe restriction on the Ceylon refugees in almost all the matter. Srilankan refugees were suspected in all of their activities. Severe searches and investigations were made about the activities of the Srilankan refugees. Severe investigations were imposed on them and their movements were watched carefully. Due to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi the Srilankan refugees lost the confidence and sympathy of the Indian people as well as the Government.17

Thus many of the Burmese and Ceylonese who originally the inhabitants of Madras Presidency and other parts of India return back to their original home places after the Second World War, when Japan started to attack Burma and Ceylon. In their home country, there were not treated as equal citizens, but refugees. With the term as refugees too, the people from Burma and Ceylon faced many difficulties in Tamilnadu as well as the whole of India.

But after the formation of United Nations High Commission for Refugees in 1951 it took initial steps for the rehabilitation of the refugees all over the world including India and Tamilnadu. Following the footsteps of the UNHCR, the Governments of Tamilnadu and India took efforts to rehabilitate the Burma and Ceylon Indians, who returned back to India from Burma and Ceylon as refugees.