CHAPTER-V

INDIA’S POLICY TOWARDS TAMIL REFUGEES

Most major humanitarian crises tend to provoke the engagement of three “benign forces”¹: International Organizations, Governments, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Each of these actors has an important role to play in giving refuge, protection, and assistance to the forcibly displaced populations.

Once refugees begin to move, they must arrive in, or attempt to enter, the territory of some nation other than their country of origin. Alternatively in what the United Nations calls ‘refugee like’ situations they may be displaced within their homelands, moving later into the territory of other states. This chapter will discuss the management of Sri Lankan Refugees by the governmental and non-governmental organisations in Tamil Nadu.

The state of any refugee camp depends on the government of the state where it is located, and the state of its management depends on the officers in charge. When the intention of the service is based on humanitarian grounds, the well being of the country, and its foreign policy, the temperament of the ruling government both at the centre and the state plays a major role in policy decisions.

Prof. Rahmatullah Khan is of the opinion that, “the Indian experience with the problem of refugees has been rich and rewarding, in the sense that no country in Asia has suffered such massive migration of people or has faced such a stupendous tasks of relief and resettlement of refugees, which has turned out to be comparatively so successful.”²

India is one of the few developing countries, which has had to shelter over 2.5 million refugees, successfully, during its post independence period. It must also be kept in mind that a country’s unity and integrity should not be
affected in the attempt to house, care for, and provide for refugees. Any large refugee influx is bound to be a jolt to the basic structure of any country’s economy. It also affects the social and cultural health of the host nation and may finally lead to an erosion of its sovereignty and territorial integrity as well. In India the ‘Ministry of External Affairs’, ‘Ministry of Home Affairs’, ‘Ministry of Information and Tourism’, ‘Commissioner of Rehabilitation Department’, and the ‘Public (Rehabilitation) Department’, are the major government offices that govern and deal with the management of refugees at the centre and state levels. The final decisions are made with the consent of the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Ministers of the respective states. Normally, people entering India in search of refuge are provided with food, shelter, clothing and medical help for as long as they are willing to stay in the country, subject to the government rules and regulation. India, during the post independence period, has shown that it remains very concerned for the well being of refugees and has taken part in the activities of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). It had also been an active member in the executive committee, which is a governing body of refugees under the United Nations Organisation. But the Indian government did not concern itself with the policies of the existing International Refugee Programme. It did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention or the Protocol of 1967. Since Independence, however, India has been continuously accommodating refugees and India’s refugee policy still rests on bilateral considerations. As regards the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees it is to be pointed out that they have been enjoying the support of the host government in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.³

It soon became apparent that the correct, balanced and efficient management of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in Tamil Nadu was a serious issue concerning India’s prestige and security. The government officials had always made decisions pertaining to these refugees according to the political pressure both at the state and the central level, or, at other times, based on public
opinion at international levels, and the views of the country from which the exodus originated. The grievance of refugees, and the temperament and the feelings of the local people also had a role in this decision making. In many instances, the government had to act according to the need of the hour, particularly in the aftermath of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. The refugees were vigilantly watched and their activities were cautiously monitored. They were also restricted from freely moving outside their camps.

**MANAGEMENT OF SRI LANKAN REFUGEES IN TAMIL NADU**

The Department of Rehabilitation was originally established for the purpose of providing rehabilitation assistance to Indian nationals returning to the home land from Burma, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. However, following the ethnic violence that broke out on 24-7-1983 in Sri Lanka, a large scale influx of refugees began, arriving in India. From 1984 onwards, the above department has been providing all possible relief assistance to refugees coming to India from Sri Lanka.

The role of the police began with the responsibility of receiving the refugees after they received news of such arrival either in the coastal areas of Rameshwaram and Danusllodi or in other nearby islands and shores. The popular local spots for the arrival of refugees were at Nachigna, Vallaipada and other safe spots between Pooneryn and Mannar. The government officials prepared a complete plan and meticulously followed it to effectively carry on the management of the arriving refugees. Accordingly, at the beginning, these refugees were escorted and taken to the transit camps and provided initial shelter, food, medical aid, clothes and other necessities. Later they were transported either by government vehicles or by private vehicles, hired for this purpose by the government, to their shelters. These shelters were exclusively prepared for them to meet their essential requirements to carry on their life as refugees in the host state.
Accommodation

After receiving the refugees at various points on or near the shores of Tamil Nadu, officials registered them and, with the assistance of police personnel, they were taken to accommodation centres in various districts in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Transit Camp

The point at which Indian officials had been receiving the Sri Lankan refugees was called the transit camp. India had started two permanent transit camps in Tamil Nadu, one at Mandapam in Ramamatnapuram district which is nearer to Sri Lanka and another at Kottapattu in Tiruchirapalli district. The transit camp was a shelter provided to all the refugees at the introductory level who entered this country by sea. After crossing the entry point and the verification of their papers by the Indian government officials, all the genuine fugitive were sent to their respective refugee camps.

Refugee Camps: There were two kinds of refugee camps namely normal refugee camps and special camps started in the state run by the government of Tamil Nadu with the Financial Aid from the centre.

Normal Refugee Camps: There were 115 Normal Refugee Camps which existed in various districts of the state by the end of year 2008. These camps were situated in various buildings situated in the districts. In total, in all these camps, some 85,999 Sri Lankan Refugees were accommodated and given help and support by government officials. The refugees residing in these camps varied in number every now and then, depending on the rate of influx of the Refugees. The maximum number of refugee camps was 184 camps during 1987. After the process of the repatriation of the refugees began, a few of these camps were closed down and they had to be reopened to accommodate the fresh inflow
of the refugees in the 1990s. The next influx again began in January 2006 and continued till 2008 July.\textsuperscript{6}

**Special Camps:** There were 2 camps functioning in the state for accommodating certain Sri Lankan Tamils Refugees who had close links with the L.T.T.E. or other militant groups. They stayed in Tamil Nadu to mobilise support for their cause and hence they had been watched by the police vigilantly and these special camps came into existence in 1991 to house just such refugees. These camps were located at Kanchipuram, in chengalpattu district and Tiruvannamalai in Cheyyar district.\textsuperscript{7} These were the camps where suspected criminals, including those on bail and those released after disposal of the cases, among the Tamil refugees lived. Those with other adverse reports such as involvement in smuggling and criminal activities and the members of families of those who fall under these categories were also housed in these camps. This was an attempt to avert untoward incidents in the country.

**Role of Tamil Nadu Government in providing Accommodation Facilities**

**Huts:** The refugees were mostly accommodated in the government owned or rented lands where huts were built for them. There were also other buildings in which the refugees were accommodated, but these were used only for the temporary settlement of the refugees. The huts were mostly constructed on government lands, Regulated Market Committee Authority (RMC) compounds and on lands rented from private parties or temples. Some governmental buildings, community centers, municipal buildings, cyclone shelters, cheap private rented buildings, Small Industries Development Corporation (SIDCO) buildings and lands, and Public Works Department lands were also used for accommodating the refugees.\textsuperscript{8}

The government had maintained complete details about the refugees living in these buildings. Every camp was provided with electricity water, sanitation and other basic facilities. Each hut had a constructed area of 10 feet in
length and 10 feet in breadth and the roof was constructed of asbestos and mica sheets. In the past few years the government has taken up the initiative to offer better conditions to them and new huts were constructed in the government lands in 1997, 1998 and 2001. Apart from that, new huts were also constructed in various districts in Tamil Nadu and were kept vacant to accommodate any future exodus.9

Electricity

Single line electric connections had been provided to each hut. Electricity was supplied only for twelve hours a day, between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and the supply was cut off during daylight hours. This was because of the location of the huts. Most of the areas where the camps were situated were near local villages, which did not have proper electricity facilities. The people in these villages were unhappy that they were not the beneficiaries of proper electrical supply and sometimes entertained bitter feelings towards the refugees, who they thought were receiving better facilities. So, in order to avoid any problems caused by local jealousy, it was arranged to supply only 12 hours worth of electricity to the refugee camps. The other factor was that the electricity supplied to the refugees was absolutely free and they were not charged for this. This caused financial drain to the government.

Sanitation

In all the camps, the government officials had taken much care to provide proper and healthy sanitation facilities to the refugees. Importance was given to hygiene and steps were taken to maintain cleanliness in and around the camps. In every camp both rooms and toilets were constructed. But in most of the camps they were not used because of a question of maintenance. The government left the responsibility of the maintenance of the toilets to the refugees, but they were reluctant to undertake the regular hard work necessary. As a result, in due course, these toilets became useless through lack of
maintenance and lost their very purpose. In some of the camps only women used these toilets and men used the open fields.

**Water**

In general, the state of Tamil Nadu has always had an acute water shortage problem. One tube well was installed in each camp for drinking purpose as well as domestic use. The water was not good in certain places and hence water was sometimes supplied to the camps from wells in the nearby local areas. The government provided this water to the refugees through tanker services, especially to those camps which did not have enough drinking water.

Here, it is worth mentioning that according to the Tamil Nadu Social Development Report of 2008, only 20.6 percent of the Tamil Nadu households enjoyed all the three basic needs of electricity, drinking water and sanitation.\(^\text{10}\)

**Services in the Camps by Government of Tamil Nadu**

**Relief Assistance in Camps**

The following relief assistance had been provided to Sri Lankan refugees accommodated in the normal refugee camps.

**Monthly Cash doles**

This was a part of the relief assistance given to refugee families based on the age criterion of each individual in a family on the date of arrival in India and their first admission in the transit camp. This amount is handed out for their personal expenses in the camp, and the amount varies according to the number of members, including the head of the family, additional members, first child and additional children. Since 1983 according to the GOI letter no. 1(14)/83/RH-(1) dated 17-10-1983, this amount was revised three times in the year 1990, 1996 and 2006. Every fortnight the maintenance allowance of refugees was given to the head of the family. The table furnished below gives the details.
### Cash Dole Distributed to the Family Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Family Members</th>
<th>Cash Doles (Previously)</th>
<th>Cash doles at Present (1.8.2006 onwards)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Head of the Family</td>
<td>Rs. 200.00</td>
<td>Rs. 400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Other adults</td>
<td>Rs. 144.00</td>
<td>Rs. 288.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>First child</td>
<td>Rs. 90.00</td>
<td>Rs. 180.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Other children</td>
<td>Rs. 450.00</td>
<td>Rs. 90.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Subsidised Rice

The camp officials at district level issued separate photo identity cards to each camp refugee family along with Personal Identity Cards of the Individual living in the camps. Apart from this they were provided with ration cards which were generally issued for the whole family as one unit. Rice was supplied to the refugees at the subsidised rate of Rs. 0.57 per kilogram, whereas the local people of Tamil Nadu had to pay Rs. 3.50 per kilogram of rice from the public distribution system. It was generally distributed according to age. The table furnished below gives the details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Family Members</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Quantity of Rice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Above 8 years</td>
<td>400 grams daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Below 8 years</td>
<td>200 grams daily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clothing Materials

The Government of Tamil Nadu had also taken the responsibility of giving clothes to the refugees as primary donor. The central government has taken up the work of monitoring this activity. Once in every year each refugee family is supplied with a set of clothes according to the needs of the family members based on the various scales prescribed by the Government of India. These materials were supplied through the government owned handloom centers called Co-Optex organization. The Government of India supplied the materials absolutely free of cost and the expenditure was entirely borne by the Central Government.

On the whole approximately about Rs. 4 crores was incurred as an expenditure every year for the supply of clothes and mats to camp refugees. Apart from this, the State Government had extended the scheme of free supply of dhotis, and sarees to the adult members of Sri Lanka Refugees also staying in the refugee camps in Tamil Nadu during Pongal festival every year as this festival had been an important occasion for celebration by all the Tamils.

During this occasion, all the adult members of the family living in the refugee camps were presented with free dhotis and sarees under the “supply of free dhotis and saree scheme” of the State Government. The entire expenditure was borne by the Tamil Nadu Government. This distribution commenced during the period of the D.M.K. Government under the Chief Ministership of M. Karunanidhi since 1997. About 50 lakhs every year was spent for the supply of free dhoties and sarees to all the refugees.

Utensils

It must be remembered that the Government had been providing all kinds of assistance to the refugees, right from the day of their arrival in Tamil Nadu. Every family was provided with all essential items to carry on a regular life in
the camps. Utensils were also supplied to each family at the entry point and once in every two years such a set of utensils were distributed to the families even if the previous set was not worn out. Although in 1983, Rs. 50 was fixed as the price for each such utensil set distributed to the families of refugees, the passage of time necessarily increased the cost price, and the government raised the amount in 1995 to Rs. 83 per family\textsuperscript{15} and to Rs. 150 per family in 1998.\textsuperscript{16} Approximate expenditure for two years period on the utensils was Rs. 20,00,000\textsuperscript{17} and the refugees were very much satisfied with the government assistance.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Items} & \textbf{Numbers} \\
\hline
(a) Rice boiling Utensils (5 litres capacity) & 1 \\
(b) Sambar, Curry Utensils (2 litres capacity) & 1 \\
(c) Large spoon & 2 \\
(d) Dining plates & 2 \\
(e) Tumblers & 2 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption*{UTENSILS ITEMS SUPPLIED IN EACH SET PER FAMILY}
\end{table}


\textbf{EDUCATION AND OTHER ASSISTANCE}

\textbf{Medical Assistance:} After the initial registration, the refugees were administered with vaccination by a government appointed medical team. Generally medical assistance had been provided to all needy refugees in the primary health centers; however, serious cases were referred to the nearby government hospitals. The seriously ill patient could avail relief assistance and one attendant was also permitted to stay with the sick person in the hospital for
the entire period of treatment. The office of the Commissioner of Rehabilitation, Government of Tamil Nadu, in short, had offered all kinds of facilities to the refugees after completing all the procedural formalities.\textsuperscript{18}

**Education:** Children of the all the Sri Lankan refugees living in Tamil Nadu were permitted to study in the local government schools free of cost up to the plus 2 level with free uniforms, textbooks and mid day meals.\textsuperscript{19}

Free bus passes were also issued to students up to the eighth standard to travel in all town buses of the state transport from their camp to school and back.\textsuperscript{20} However, the scenario changed after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The Government of Tamil Nadu under the then Chief Minister Ms. Jayalalitha suspended the programme of admission of Sri Lankan Refugee children in schools during the academic year 1991-92.\textsuperscript{21} After receiving a lot of appeals and requests from the parents of the refugee students the government once again permitted them to continue the school education up to the twelfth standard from the academic year 1993-94.\textsuperscript{22} From that academic year onwards government sanction was issued to the Education Department every academic year for permitting the refugee children to continue their studies.

**Higher Education:** The Sri Lankan Tamil students were also admitted in colleges and universities in Tamil Nadu since early 1980s. These students were permitted to stay in India on a students’ visa. But after the intensification of ethnic conflict in 1983 in Sri Lanka, most of the students were unable to pursue their studies and particularly after more and more refugees arrived in Tamil Nadu just to save their lives, they had no opportunities to continue their education.

Some of the students who discontinued their studies went on to become fugitives in this land. When they left Sri Lanka they had lost most of their possessions and some lost the proof of their qualifications as well. On humanitarian grounds, the government permitted them to continue their study in
Tamil Nadu, including at the professional courses. With the efforts of the refugee representatives at the state and central government level they were able to achieve a presence in 2% of the total seats in all the government and professional colleges in Tamil Nadu that were set aside for the Refugee students.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to these facilities, the Government of Tamil Nadu had been providing other necessary facilities like provision of drinking water through tankers during the months of summer scarcity, and consumer items, to the refugees. The Government of India in co-ordination with the Government of Tamil Nadu had been satisfactorily rendering the work of giving shelter, offering food and fulfilling all the basic needs of the refugee for more than twenty six years. The I.A.S. Commissioner of Refugees, Raja Mohan, mentions that the Govt. of Tamil Nadu had been making efforts to keep the refugees in good stead. He also mentioned that the per year expenditure on refugees by the government in 2007-08 alone was over 40 crores.\textsuperscript{24}

**Protection and Security Arrangements for the Sri Lanka Refugees by the Government of Tamil Nadu**

It is to be pointed out here that with the exponentially increasing instances of terrorist activities in most parts of the world, it has become extremely difficult for any country to effectively withstand the terrorist threat for years on end. Hence providing adequate security to VIPs and refugees has become the greatest responsibility of the Indian nation and its states in recent years.

During the inflow of the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees into Tamil Nadu, the Tamil Nadu Government had to make elaborate arrangements for the safety and security of the refugees accommodated at the camps situated in various districts. Based on the strength of the camp’s population, police security arrangements were provided. The security work was carried out on a shift basis in order to
provide effective and continued protection to the refugees. This was also done to monitor the movement of the refugees in and out of the camp since the officials felt that the refugees might sometimes became the tools in the hands of the terrorists and might cause jeopardy to the state and men. Hence, security in the Transit camps had been very tight at most times.

**Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Refugee Assistance**

With each new humanitarian crisis, a plethora of new organizations attempts to respond to the human drama. Some subsequently close down when the crisis subsides, whereas other refine and redefine their roles in response to subsequent challenges. The number of NGO’s, the resources they command and their public profile continues to grow. Moreover, as human security challenges place state security as the guiding principle in public policy, NGOs have increasingly significant roles in providing protection as well as material assistance. There is a trend for policy makers to avail of the help of NGOs to respond to crises in ways that are at once more comprehensive, coordinated and focused. When Jody Williams, who together with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines was awarded the Noble Prize in 1997, was asked how she managed to organize over 1,000 NGOs across six continents, despite the opposition of most governments, she replied: “email”.

Globalization’s preferred tool gives significant new leverage to non-governmental organization, enhancing their capacities for information gathering, coordination and flexibility. The NGOs have played, over time, a similarly crucial role by helping in the preparation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. In fact their contribution to international refugee protection can be traced right from the beginning when a group of NGOs, in 1921, passed the resolutions and presented them to the newly formed League of Nations for the appointment of the first High Commissioner for Refugees.
High Commissioner for Refugees in Chennai: The United Nations High Commission for Refugees began as a small organization in 1950 with a three-year mandate to help resettle European refugees who were still homeless in the aftermath of World War II. Since that time the organization has continually expanded to meet the growing needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced people.27

Since 1950 the core mandate of the UNHCR has not changed. The protection of refugees and the search for solutions to the problems of refugees remain the central objectives of the organization. But the environment in which UNHCR works and the types of activity undertaken by the organization have changed significantly over the past sixty years.

UNHCR and Sri Lankan Refugees

On the Indian shores, the first phase of repatriation took place in June 1991 immediately after the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. As reports of forced repatriation began to come in, the UNHCR and the Indian Government opened discussions on ways to overcome these issues and lay the doubts to rest. The UNHCR was critical of forced repatriation. The UNHCR representative Hasheed fur Khan who visited India had stated that the repatriation did not take place according to an “internationally accepted procedure”.28

The UNHCR was invited by the Government of India in July 1992 to assist the government in ascertaining the voluntary nature of the repatriation and the willingness of the refugees who were being repatriated to Sri Lanka, their country of origin. In response to the request, the UNHCR opened its office in Chennai, in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, on 4 August 1992.
Between 1992 and 1995, out of a total of 54,199 refugees, a total of 31,062 refugees returned to Sri Lanka with the assistance of the Government of India, after the UNHCR had verified the voluntary character of the repatriation. The repatriation operation was suspended in September 1995 due to the escalation of conflict in northern Sri Lanka, which triggered a reverse flow of refugees into India in search of safety and security.29

**Voluntary Repatriation**

Although the situation in Sri Lanka has not been conducive to repatriation after 1996, the UNHCR has been receiving a number of requests from refugees in the government-assisted camps seeking voluntary repatriation assistance, either for personal or family reasons. About 79 have returned with UNHCR support, from 1996 to date.30 After the government-assisted repatriation ended in 1995, the UNHCR received a communiqué from the government of Tamil Nadu. It suggested the following31:

(a) Voluntary repatriation interviews should be conducted in the presence of government officials;
(b) Those found to be eligible for voluntary repatriation assistance from the UNHCR should be assisted to return in groups of ten or more persons;
(c) Split families are not to be assisted for voluntary repatriation, as the government felt that there might be some returnees who would be inclined to come back to India and seek readmission in those camps where their families were residing.

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 1000 refugees returned from India to Sri Lanka between January and December, 2003 assisted by the UNHCR. It is also estimated that some 4000 refugees also returned to Sri Lanka in the same year, unofficially. Ironically the
government takes pains to prevent ‘illegal crossings’ which are often hazardous, and permits are required before a refugee can legally go back.

**Protection for Camp Refugees**

As the UNHCR has no access to the refugee camps, this does not preclude UNHCR Chennai from taking a measured yet proactive role through

(a) contact with NGOs, the media, and the refugees themselves;
(b) encouraging the mass media and human rights advocacy groups to act as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the UNHCR for the protection of the refugees;
(c) intervening, when appropriate, with the authorities regarding requests from refugees about their local problems, for instance, the restoration of camp registration.
(d) facilitating resettlement for camp refugees who have the possibility of being accepted for family reunification by third countries.32

At the same time, civil society efforts have continued to attempt to improve the living conditions and prospects of the refugees.

**ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN TAMIL NADU**

When the refugees started arriving in large numbers in Tamil Nadu, the government and the people of Tamil Nadu with their kind heart sympathized with the plight of these refugees and provided all kinds of relief and assistance. Most of the small organizations in various districts collected funds from the people and supplied essential articles like milk powder, kerosene stoves, utensils, cloths, T.V. sets, etc. to the refugee camps to supplement the relief provided by the government. When the arrival of refugees stopped and when the camp administration became stabilized, most of these organisations stopped their activities. The assistance rendered by them was negligible in terms of money/material when compared to the amount spent by the government. All the voluntary organisations were requested to furnish details of assistance rendered
by them to refugees in cash or otherwise but, none of them responded to this request which goes to show that the real assistance rendered by them was negligible.

The organisations like OFFER distributed articles in and around Chennai and in big camps like Gummidipoondi, Mandapam Transit Camp, and Kottapattu Transit Camp. Some of the organisations like YMCA and YWCA have conducted training programmes in selected centres like Mandapam, Puzhal and Kottapattu camps in various trades like carpentry, tailoring, typewriting, house-wiring, motor-rewinding etc. But only a nominal kind of expense was met by them, and the government provided a sum of Rs. 7,62,495/- to the voluntary organisations for providing training and recreational facilities etc to the refugees. When the response from the refugees for such training programmes became poor, such training programmes were also discontinued in October 1992.

During September 1990, when the refugee population exceeded one lakh, there were 337 refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. In the initial stage, the voluntary organizations were encouraged to help the refugees since the problems of refugees were not only financial but also psychological. When once the arrival of refugees stopped and all the refugees were properly settled in the camps set-up with all the basic necessities provided by the government, most of the voluntary organisations discontinued their activities in refugee camps.

When the reverse flow of refugees started, the representatives of OFFER and Pro-TEG started, giving adverse propaganda in refugee camps asking the refugees not to return to Sri Lanka and they started sending allegations, petitions against the special deputy collector, transit camp, Mandapam. The matter was gone into in detail and it was found that the special Deputy Collector, Transit Camp, Mandapam had been doing extremely good work in rendering relief
assistance to the refugees and managing the reverse flow of refugees from Rameswaram.

In order to discourage the organisations like OFFER and Pro-TEG from dissuading the refugees from going back to Sri Lanka, with adverse propaganda about the state of affairs in Sri Lanka stating that the conditions are not right for a happy return, it became necessary to ban all voluntary organisations from having access to the refugee camps since it may not appear proper to ban only a few organisations. Moreover, the Government of India issued instructions\textsuperscript{34} that all the foreign voluntary agencies (voluntary organisations funded by foreign money/foreign agencies) should not be allowed to work in the refugee camps. Accordingly, instructions were issued to all the district collectors to stop the activities of organisations like CROP (The Community Rehabilitation Organisation for Progress; Perambalur, Tiruchirapalli district), READ (Rural Education and Action for Development), RENAISSANCE (A Trust for Socio-Economic Development, Arantagai), PERD (People Education for Rural Development Society, Kodaikanal), SEED-TRUST (Social Educational and Economic Development Trust), SPEECH (Society for Peoples Education and Economic Change, Madurai), RUC (Rural Uplift Centre, Tirunelveli), OXFAM etc. in refugee camps. The State Government has also issued instructions\textsuperscript{35} that the voluntary organisations should not be allowed to function in the camps, therefore all the voluntary organizations were asked to keep out of the camps. However, somehow, OFERR (Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation), a voluntary organization is functioning with their informal network and steadily gaining access to camps through their informants.

The OFERR was founded in 1984 with the main objective of assisting and rendering relief to Tamil Refugees from Sri Lanka who had taken refuge in India. The OFERR is an organisation of the refugees, by the refugees, and for the refugees. The OFERR had been functioning as an organisation with the
following objectives – non-profit making, non-political and service oriented. The committee of management of the OFERR has consisted of Indian and Sri Lankan professionals, educationalists and social workers. The organisation was duly registered on 21st May 1984 under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act No. 27 of 1975. The registration number is 113 of 1984. The organisation has been accorded charitable status under Sec. 12(A) of the Income Tax Act and had received permission from the Home Ministry of India to receive foreign funds for its humanitarian work. The organisation had been permitted to clear donations received in kind for distribution among the refugees from abroad free of customs duty. Relief articles thus received and distributed to refugees by the OFERR are handed over to the refugees in the presence of representatives of the District Collector who issue a certificate confirming the distribution.\textsuperscript{36}

OFERR functioned from its head office at Third Floor, 31, Sait Colony, 1st Street, Chennai-600008, Tamil Nadu, India. Their services had been extended to all the refugee camps spread all over Tamil Nadu. For better and efficient administration the state was divided into four regions under the control of the head office. The four regions were Chennai, Tirunclveli, Erode and Trichy.\textsuperscript{37}

OFERR had been receiving financial assistance from Non-Governmental Organisations and other charitable institutions and expatriates among the Eelam Tamils. OFERR also received assistance from the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister’s Refugee Fund. All such contributions were duly receipted and deposited in the State Bank of various regions.\textsuperscript{38}

The Organisation had made representations to the state and central governments on various problems and matters concerning the refugees. Many of the suggestions made by OFERR on refugee related matters were accepted by the State and Central Governments during the past several years and were duly attended upon for redressal.\textsuperscript{39}
Main Activities of OFERR

1. **Counselling:** OFERR had been providing training in counselling to both volunteers working among the refugees as well as to the refugees residing in camps regarding:

(a) Family reunion  
(b) Refugee guidance and advice  
(c) Programmes to relieve stress, depression and trauma and motivate refugees

2. **Restoring, Registration, Dole and Rations:** The greatest achievement of the database intervention was realized after a long and protracted effort, OFERR succeeded in persuading the Government of India and Tamil Nadu to accept the reality that there were, in the refugee camps, several thousand refugees whose registrations had been struck out by camp official for varying reasons. The government also acceded to OFERR’s appeal to restore registrations, dole and rations to all refugees whose registration had been struck off. This became possible because OFERR was able to deliver to concerned government officials ‘Hard’ and ‘Soft’ copies of its database, specifically indicating details of the thousands of refugees who were suffering without registration, dole and rations.\(^{40}\)

3. **Women Empowerment:** The aim of this programme is to sustain promote, and enhance the social and economic status of women and children, who constitute the weaker sector of the refugees, and to enable them to be independent and contribute to the building of their homeland upon their return.

   Empowerment was facilitated by the creation of self help groups through which awareness was created via campaigns and training. The main intention of this programme was to prepare women to function as a strong forum, which would enable them in future to lead a normal life in the camps as well as on their
return to their homeland. Approximately, 80% of the women in the camps have participated in the programmes.41

4. Medical Assistance: There were also medical programmes which provided medical services to the refugees in the camps as well as to other Sri Lankan Tamils requiring such assistance but living outside the camps. The refugees were taken care of by the medical team of the OFERR periodically, and this health care by a Non-Governmental Organisation received commendation from government and private agencies.

Since 1988, OFERR staff have been trained to deal with different types of problems, like, suicidal tendencies, suicide attempts, lack of sufficient resources to meet family needs, difficulty in finding employment, etc. As the need for counsellors increased, new groups were trained by the previously trained batch.

During the period of the report, 140 volunteers were provided 12 days of training in counselling under the guidance of Rev. Dr. Kambaa Manickam. These trainings were conducted to produce more counsellors who could also provide counselling in the Mandapam new arrival camp and Tsumani affected areas.42

5. Educational Assistance: This organisation had given high priority to the education of refugee students. They were given different forms of assistance to enable them to pursue their studies in schools and colleges. The organisation had been extending the assistance to students not only to develop their knowledge but also to build up a full-fledged society greatly developed in social, political, economic and moral spheres to work as a community to rebuild the shattered Tamil homeland when they were able to get back to Sri Lanka.

So the OFERR Organisation had been rendering services on the following basis:
• Guidance and advice to refugee students,
• Admission to schools, colleges, polytechnics and other educational institutions,
• English language coaching,
• Adult Education,
• Special classes to enable students to adapt to India curriculum, and
• Financial assistance to meet school or college fees, hostel fees and travelling expenses.\textsuperscript{43}

The refugee students had an opportunity to pursue education in general, technical and professional courses to develop themselves as doctors, engineers, technical officers (teachers, skilled technical works etc.) they were keen to develop themselves in all spheres since they felt that their development would help their land in a significant way.

**International Contribution Received by OFERR**

Office of the Organisation for Eelam Refugees and Rehabilitation with the aid of modern technology had launched a website: www.oferr.org, which made an open campaign for the wellbeing of the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees living in the camps of Tamil Nadu. They appealed to the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Philanthropists living in the western countries to contribute liberally for the cause of these refugees and for the education of the young children and youth living in Tamil Nadu as well as asking for people to buy the products manufactured by the refugees living in Tamil Nadu. These days OFERR has been trying to establish contacts with the wealthy Sri Lankan Tamils in western countries. The object of the organisation has been to contact such expatriates and philanthropists and collect the necessary funds from them by these appeals to help the refugees in Tamil Nadu. OFERR informed them, through the website, that the Eelam Tamil students after having acquired the necessary education and skills in the host country of India would go back to their homeland after a just
and lasting solution was found. Till such a time, offering education to them would be a useful exercise which would train them along the right lines, to face the challenges back home in their motherland. The web information gave interested people all the details of how they could become donors in this humanitarian cause. 44

**Role of (ADRA) Adventist Development and Relief Agency**

    ADRA is a non-governmental organisation present in 125 countries providing sustainable community development and disaster relief without regard to political or religious association, age, gender or ethnicity. ADRA, India was officially registered in 1992. It currently works in the areas of Health, Emergency Management, Economic Development, Education, Water and Sanitation, Environment, Anti-Human Trafficking and Gender Equality.

    Since 2006, ADRA India had supported Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu, in getting better access to clean water and enhanced sanitation, personal hygiene classes, and waste management training. The 12 month long water Environment Sanitation and Shelter (WESS) Project, valued at more than $707,000 and funded by the European Commissions Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) through the ADRA Germany office, is improving access to clean water in 67 camps throughout the southern state of Tamil Nadu. The Project is helping install water pumps and tanks, build and refurbish latrines, and improve the existing surface drainage system. ADRA is also providing household rubbish bins, establishing compost beds and equipping waste management services with the tools necessary to maintain a sanitary environment.

    “ADRA India’s intervention on water and sanitation for our community has made a drastic change in providing us a hygienic environment”, said Annalakhmi, a 32 year old project beneficiary living in the Vazhavanthankottair camp in Tamil Nadu. “I feel proud being a member of our refugee camp and I
hope ADRA India will be with us all the way to achieving our dreams of making our community a model one.”

In the same region, ADRA is also building new shelters and improving existing ones, and providing training on accident risk mitigation. ADRA’s Projects have increased the capacity of refugees by teaching them how to support themselves financially through various livelihood activities and has helped to maintain a better level of health through education, training and facilities improvements.

Paulo Copes, country director for ADRA India, said, “We are committed to continuing to offer humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka’s most deprived and disadvantaged people living in the refugee camps, as long as it’s needed.

ADRA India has been supporting Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu largely as a result of financing partnership with New Zealand’s International Aid and Development Agency (NZAID), ADRA Norway, ADRA Germany, and ADRA New Zealand.

Thus the Government of India and Tamil Nadu Government and Voluntary Organisations had also been serving the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in a great way. The presence of the UNHCR at Delhi and Madras and their involvement in the flow of refugees has been found to be extremely encouraging, as the claim of interested voluntary organisations that the repatriation of refugees is under coercion, no longer hold any water. The UNHCR’s continued coordination and involvement go a long way in the further repatriation of refugees from India to Sri Lanka.

On certain occasions the government had many procedural formalities to fulfill before implementing any beneficial programmes for the betterment of the refugees. For instance, programmes involving financial funding needed official sanction and concurrence from many departments of the government.
However, the government had imposed a few restrictions on them due to the sensitivity of the refugee issues. The Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi had actually aggravated the situation much further and it was suspected that a few associates of the assassins were given shelter in the refugee camps by the refugees themselves. The situation compelled the government to tighten security measures around the refugee camps and to keep a strict vigilance over them. As a result the non-governmental organisations could not have much access to the refugee camps to render their services.

Yet with their positive objectives, steadfast will and local and foreign funds voluntary organisations have been offering essential services to the distressed Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in a substantial way. There can be no denial of the fact that these organisations have helped the refugees considerably.

Conclusion

For the entire time after her independence, India has borne the social, economic and political burden of huge influxes of refugees. Beginning with the cross border exchange of populations with the newly formed state of Pakistan, all the way to the Sri Lankan Tamils in much more recent history, India has done its best to feed, house, clothe, educate and take care of all the basic needs of a huge population of various kinds of refugees. Although India is not a signatory to the major international conventions on refugees, internally it has always done its best to provide for these displaced masses.

The biggest internal issues were created by the influx of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees beginning in the 1980s. There was cause for concern not just about the usual social and economic burdens, but also of undue political influence, and internal and national security, especially considering the militant nature of some of the refugee groups, and their internal animosities. The police had the initial role of receiving the refugees as they arrived in the safe areas, after which they were moved to transit camps for initial shelter and medical aid.
After which they were moved to one of two kinds of camps, the normal ones – for the larger segments of the refugees who were simply seeking shelter and safety, and the special camps — for those who were viewed as a security threat, whether because of known involvement with militant groups or because of a known criminal past or present involvement in criminal activities.

Accommodation was provided in huts, constructed on government land, free electricity was provided for the refugees for all non-daylight hours, sanitation facilities were adequate, although often unused due to issues of cleanliness. Water, always a commodity in short supply in the Tamil Nadu, was brought in by tankers from nearby wells and reservoirs. Relief assistance included cash doles, subsidized food supply, clothing, cooking utensils, medical assistance, and so on. Free education at the school level, uniforms, books, this laid the foundation for a better future for the children. The yearly expenditure on all of these things ran into tens of crores.

NGOs have also played a major role in helping to rehabilitate these refugees. Often government agencies and policymakers too have sought help from and made use of the work being done by these organizations. The UNHCR has also been involved, especially in the repatriation process, since 1992. Their mandate is to make sure that the repatriations are totally voluntary, and to make sure that adequate protection was being provided for the refugees at the camps.
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