The twentieth century will go down in history as the "age of refugees". Today, at the dawn of the century, the refugee is everywhere. Around six million refugees are scattered in the countries surrounding Afghanistan where the Americans and Russians fought a decade-long war 'by proxy'. In 1947, millions were killed, maimed and displaced when the British partitioned the sub-continent, after nearly half a century, the pain is almost forgotten, but not yet the political ill-will contrived to effect the partition.

Refugees and migrants are two separate categories. But conditions that propel them to move out of their homes overlap. Refugees could be the consequence of a political turmoil or even a natural calamity, while migration is a personal or family decision affected by external conditions like poverty or environmental degradation. It is often a
strategy to improve the quality of life. A puzzling and saddening feature of our times is, incidentally, that former victims of tyranny, oppression and torture themselves become, when they come to power, perpetrators of oppression and torture. Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have demonstrated this amply in the sub-continent. During recent years, the London based organisation, Amnesty International, has brought to world notice instances of oppression, torture and brutal violation of human rights in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Almost half century after the end of the colonial period, South Asia is in the midst of a crisis that threatens not only some of the existing state structures but the very fabric of society. There are three inter-related dimensions of the present crisis.

1. The growing polarisation of society along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines. Associated with this, the undermining of social values through which diverse communities had lined together in a pluralistic society,


2. The perceived failure of highly centralized structures of political power to give effective political representation to all strata of society, and the growing militarization associated with the use of coercive state power to suppress resurgent subnationalism.

3. The third dimension is the collapse of the approach to development adopted in the past colonial period in South Asia. The growth process associated with this approach has generated endemic poverty, growing inter-personal and inter-regional disparities, erosion of the ecological environment and finally, growing dependence on foreign aid in the case of a number of countries of South Asia. Today, the whole of South Asia – Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Bhutan is faced with ethnic problems, which has led to the migration of lakhs of people from one place to another and taking refuge. This has created an issue in itself.

A. MIGRATION AFTER PARTITION OF INDIA:

After partition of India in 1947, the orgy of violence that occurred in different parts of the country, made Hindus and Muslims suspicious of each other. Transplantation of the mass of population from one country to the other, had not been envisaged seriously at any stage by either government. The Government of India thought it inconceivable that people would be prepared to leave their lands, property and their ancestral homes. But by the first week of July 1947
the problem had started assuming serious proportions. It was estimated that in Delhi alone 70,000 refugees had crossed over. United Provinces and some neighbouring states also had to cope with large number of refugees. To congress leaders, transfer of population appeared a complete negation of their ideology which they had advocated throughout their life. Mahatma Gandhi, unequivocally rejected the idea in the following words:

"It (exchange of population) is unthinkable and impracticable. The logical consequence of any such step is too dreadful to contemplate."

When the communal situation became worse the leaders who had always been against planned transfer of population gradually realized the gravity of the situation. Even Jinnah did not expect that there would be such a large migration of population. Nehru expressed his definite opinion against mass migration on 19 August 1947, "while we shall give every help to those who wish to come to East Punjab, we would not like to encourage mass migration of people across the new borders, for this will involve tremendous misery for all concerned..."

4. Ibid., p. 102.
Transplantation of the mass of population from one country to the other takes place only after certain amount of psychological, ideological and physical upheaval and disturbance. The conditions in Pakistan and India and the brutalities and humiliations that the peoples had to undergo, brought the required psychological change to induce the people to leave all that they held dear and to flee for protection and shelter to the other side where their community was in majority. In view of the deteriorating situation and failure of the leadership and the government to check the exodus, both the Dominions finally considered it necessary to set up machinery to evacuate the unfortunate people called refugees. It was estimated that nearly 21 lakhs of Muslim refugees had moved into the West Punjab since 1 August 1947 and that during the same period 20 lakhs of non-Muslims had left for the East Punjab. About 673 refugee trains were run between 27 August and 6 November 1947 and they were responsible for the movement of over 23,00,000 of refugees inside India and across the border. Of these 13,62,000 were non-Muslims and 9,39,000 Muslims. The East Punjab Government set up 21 refugees camps in different districts in the state and a number of such camps were set up in West Punjab in Pakistan. A large number

9. Ibid.
10. This estimate was made on the basis of the figures collected by the Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO) which was to arrange the movement of the evacuees across the border and was responsible for their protection en route.
of displaced persons who had migrated to and from India, had been deprived of the means of livelihood. Many of them had exhausted all their savings in the process of migration. The responsibility of resettlement of millions of uprooted people, both urban and rural and unattached women and children, presented a colossal problem of providing immediate relief, finding housing accommodation, lands, shops, business concerns, factories and in large number of cases new vocations. Accordingly, the rehabilitation plans were set. A large number of refugee camps were set up. There were more than 160 refugee camps all over India, providing accommodation to 12,50,000 refugees. In Punjab alone 7,21,396 refugees were accommodated in 85 camps towards the end of December 1947. Out of the remaining 1,50,000 were in camps at Delhi, 53,000 in Rajasthan, 13,000 in Bombay, 30,000 in the United Provinces, 500 in Madras and 1,500 in the Central Provinces. The government spent large amounts on the camps - their establishment and distribution of food and clothing.

Rehabilitation and resettlement proved to be one of the most difficult and complicated problems that India and Pakistan had to face. A number of conferences were held between India and Pakistan to come to some agreement on the issue of evacuee property and various other issues arising out of the partition. Various agreements and

13. Ibid., p. 125.
15. Pant, Goving Ballabh, op.cit., pp. 11-12.
decision were taken during these conferences. But there was a vast
difference between the agreements and their implementation in
practice. The movement of the non-Muslim population into India and
that of the Muslim into Pakistan caused an upheaval in the economic
life of the two countries.

B. BANGLADESHI REFUGEES IN INDIA:

Like other countries of the sub-continent, minority commu-
nities often feel insecure and deprived in Bangladesh. There could
be differences in the degree of discrimination the minority communi-
ties feel in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Minorities
in Bangladesh constitute 14 per cent of the population, according
to official statistics. Hindus account for 12.5 per cent, the
Buddhists one per cent and Christians less than one percent. But
the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist and Christian council, a body of the
minorities, claims that the percentage of minorities in higher, close
to 20 per cent. This is, however, disputed. Hindus are the largest
of the minority groups and are scattered all over Bangladesh while
the Buddhists and Christians are concentrated in certain districts.
Buddhists are mostly located in the Chittagong Hill Tract districts.
The Christians come mainly from Dhaka, Barisal and some other
districts. The minorities have their own religious bodies, but the
"Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Council" act as an apex organisation
for all the three religious groups and often air views on behalf of
the minorities as a whole. The Buddhists have problems particularly

in the context of the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts by the Buddhist tribals while the Christians do not get involved in such conflicts, perhaps because of their negligible percentage. Even after 21 years of independence of Bangladesh, the status and condition of the minority communities remain a matter of concern.

During Bangladesh war, there was a huge influx of refugees in India from East Pakistan. An estimated 3.5 million East Bengali refugees had entered India by the 3rd week of May 1971. India helped them with food and shelter. The uninterrupted influx has led to a serious demographic and electoral imbalance. The last unofficial estimates have put the number of Bangladeshi migrants in the country at an astounding eight to ten million. And now the migration is from the border districts to the capital, where the refugees have put up whole colonies. Though the Bangladeshi refugee problem is not a new one, the problem really assumed frightening proportions after the 1971 Indo-Pak war. Since then, the situation has changed drastically. Whereas earlier, the migration was limited to states contiguous to the Bangladesh border—particularly West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura. Today, the problem has extended to the other states as well. Many refugees have moved into Bihar, U.P.,

Gujrat and even Delhi.

In Delhi, the migrants have settled in massive clusters along the banks of the Yamuna in Jehagirpuri, Seelampur and other resettlement colonies. To look at the statistics, the officials admit that the real figure is closer to five lakh. Slums spring up overnight and officials confess that they are helpless to do anything about it, as there are several problems. They settle down in slums and even manage to get ration cards within a few months and are listed as voters. It is now nearly impossible to identify an illegal immigrant from Bangladesh because they look like Indians, speak the same language and wear the same clothes. An official from the external affairs ministry pointed out, "Quantification is possible only when you come with a visa and the FRRO (Foreigners Registration and Record Office) clears you. There is no other way of identifying of person as an immigrant. And, once he gets a ration card, he simply gets lost in the crowd as just another Indian. The long term security and economic implications of this large-scale influx are admittedly unnerving. But there has to be more humane approach to the problem, international considerations notwithstanding.

On March 1993 the statesman reported that according to a responsible source, the population of Bangladesh registered a

22. Ibid.
shortfall of 7.3 to 9.3 million from the earlier projections and much of this short fall is due to the outmigration of millions to India. The statesman also reported that according to the Union Ministry, 14 million Bangladeshis sneaked into India through West Bengal over the last ten years. Statistics prepared by the Union Home Ministry show that 16 of Assam's 23 districts have been overwhelmed by Bangladeshi settlers, imbalancing the electoral rolls in 50 of the 126 assembly constituencies. The extent of the influx is reflected in the steep rise in population in some districts between 1971 and 1991 - Dharmaji (104.85%); Kokrajhar (75%); Kamrup (64.68%); Darrang (62.31%); Goalpara (56.8%) and Cachar (47.6%).

In April 1991, Hiteshwar Saikia, the Chief Minister of Assam told the assembly that three million Bangladeshis had infiltrated into the state since 1987. Subsequently the Election Commission directed the State Government to carry out an intensive revision of the electoral rolls. The recent riots in 1992 have once again focussed on the need for an urgent solution to the problem of infiltration from Bangladesh. The issue has been compounded by the Bangladesh Government's balligerent stance. The riots have greatly


angered the indigenous Assamese - both Muslims and Hindus. As such, a sharp response developing into a mass movement against the illegal immigrants cannot be ruled out. The major hindrance in detecting and deporting foreigners is the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983, which overrules all other laws concerning illegal immigration in the state. The foreigners - mostly poverty stricken Bangladeshis - merge themselves with the local population thereby making detection almost impossible. The majority of the illegal entrants are of Nepalese origin, coming into Assam either from troubled Southern Bhutan or from Nepal itself. In 1991, the number of Nepalese deported were 5,637 as against 23,303 Bangladeshis. In 1992, 36,280 Nepalese were pushed out of Assam only 1,700 Bangla nationals were forced out. Illegal migrants from Bangladesh are also present in West Bengal, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur. Arunachal has no common border with Bangladesh but has common borders with Burma, China (Tibet) and Bhutan. There are always trans-border movements in this region. A good number of Nepalese and persons originating from Bangladesh have also come over to Arunachal. All the districts of Tripura have common borders with Bangladesh and in all of them the population growth rate is much higher than the national average. Migrants from Bangladesh are not only Bengali Hindus and Muslims but also Buddhist and other tribals. Purnea and Kishanganj districts

of Bihar are also reported to have received a good number of 26 migrants from Bangladesh during the last decade.

The Bangladeshi influx into eastern India does not consist of political or communal refugees but of people in search of land or employment. Anyone found illegally crossing the border can properly be turned back. But those "detected" after considerable periods of time can not be expelled without due process. In September 1992, a conference of Chief Ministers from States affected by illegal immigration from Bangladesh was held. It marked a recognition of a problem that has been becoming worse over the years. If measures like the issue of identity cards in border areas were thought of and implemented earlier, the threat might not have reached a proportion where it is now. It cannot be neglected any longer. The magnitude of the problem is clear from Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan's observation that it has now become extremely difficult to make a correct estimate of those who managed to sneak in and merge with the local population. There is an urgent need, to initiate administrative measures to check the flow as well as to detect and deport those who have

already entered. But in this reference, the process of detection has to be conducted, therefore, with great care and patience. For this all cooperation of Bangladesh is needed to a great extent.  

The steady influx of refugees from East Pakistan, imposed an enormous burden on the Indian treasury, estimated to be as much as $700 million a year. It also brought serious political problems in its wake. First, the ethnic and religious diversity of India's north-eastern states (notably Assam, Tripura, Manipur and West Bengal), a substantial influx of refugees, both Hindu and Muslim was bound to disturb the delicate nature of social relations in these states. Quite apart from the problem of sheltering and caring for them, the Central Government also had to soothe the anxieties the populace of the border state of West Bengal, which remembered only too well the experience of unwelcome refugee influx of 1947-48. The East Pakistani refugee in 1947-48 were unwelcome for a variety of reasons, two of which seem particularly significant. First, they added to the population of an already over-populated state and thereby placed demand on scarce resources. Second, there were cultural prejudices that divided them. Each group spoke a different dialect of Bengali, which was the source

of considerable friction. Despite these potential problems, the Indian leadership could not seal the borders and stop the refugee influx. For humanitarian reasons, regardless of cost, the refugees had to be admitted. Perhaps, more to the point, it was impossible to seal the highly porous borders.

The more enduring, longer term answer lies in assisting Bangladesh to develop and create more jobs through trade, economic cooperation and political accommodation. This would yield India rich dividends too, especially in the North-East for which transit and access to the sea through Bangladesh are most important.

THE CHAKMA REFUGEES:

The Buddhist Chakmas of Bangladesh who have migrated to the neighbouring Indian states of Tripura, Mizoram etc., rose a problem of a different order. There are a good number of Chakmas living in Tripura and Mizoram for generations. The problem can be traced to an unwise Radcliffe award in transferring the Buddhist dominated Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to the Muslim majority East Pakistan. During the British regime non-tribals were not allowed to be settled in the CHT districts permanently. After the partition and inclusion

32. Ibid., p. 119.
33. Verghese, B.G., op.cit.
34. The Hindustan Times, 15 June 1993.
of CHT in Pakistan in 1947 and following constitutional change in Pakistan, the CHT lost most of its protected status and the influx of non-tribal settlers started perceptibly after several thousand Chakmas were ousted because of the Karnaphuli project. Since then the tribal life of the area has been continuously disturbed and the inflow of non-tribal settlers has been increasing. They took shelter with their kith and kin in Tripura and Mizoram. They were not much welcomed. The bulk of them were removed to Arunachal Pradesh. Still they do not have citizenship rights. At the time of the liberation struggle in Bangladesh, a section of the Chakmas sided with Pakistan, perhaps because of bitterness at being evicted from their homes, but this has become a political load which they carry to a certain extent in Bangladesh. They are history's least-known refugees and the tragic dimensions of their situation have largely gone unnoticed.

The homeland of Chakmas, the Chittagong Hill Tracts is mountainous and under thick forests. The special status the CHT enjoyed under British rule continued till Pakistan decided to end it in 1964 by removing the curbs on people of the plains to settle in the

tribal areas. The problem got aggravated when President Ziaur Rahman followed a policy of encouraging people of plains to settle in the tribal lands with the obvious objective of outnumbering the tribals in their own homeland. Because of this, insurgency groups gained ground among the Chakmas who formed the Shanti Bahini, whose means of achieving the target of a fair deal for Chakma was violent. In the conflict that followed involving the Shanti Bahini and the Bangladesh armed forces, thousands of chakmas fled to India for refuge. The exodus increased significantly when Bangladesh initiated the process of becoming an Islamic state after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman in 1975.

**INDIAN STAND:**

Chakmas may have been Dhaka's problem but they have increasingly become India's as well now. From the Indian point of view, the steady influx of a growing number of refugees is a serious problem with alarming ramifications. But on humanitarian grounds, there is no way the concerned State Governments can put a stop to it. The stories of brutalities brought by each family point to a human tragedy of massive proportions. What has

40. *Indian Express*, 16 May 1993.
41. Menon, Ramesh, op.cit., p. 76.
been happening in the CHT area over last two decades is nothing short of ethnocide. They had decided to flee after the Bangladesh Army unleashed an orgy of violence - attacked their village, beat up Chakma men, raped their women and burned and looted their houses.

India provided free daily rations of rice, dal, oil, salt and milk powder besides free shelter and three sets of clothes and three blankets for each family. This involved an expenditure of nearly Rs. 6 crores annually for about 55,000 refugees in all the six camps without any foreign help. The Tripura Government has also taken care of free education for the children of the refugees and supply of potable water through deep tube-wells. The continuous influx of the CHT tribals has not only put a heavy financial burden on India, but it is also creating tension locally since the refugees, who are living at subsistence level, have started to encroach into the forests and vie in the labour market with the local daily wage earners undercutting the latter's daily wage rates. India finds itself in a peculiar situation, whether it is genuine refugees like the Chakmas or the hundreds of thousands of infiltrators from across

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43. Memon, Ramesh, *op.cit.*
the border, the inflow of illegal migrants has led to a demog­
graphic change in the North-east which, if not tackled in right
earnest, could have far-reaching consequences in the region.

The Question of Repatriation:

The question of repatriation of chakma refugees to their
homeland in the CHT districts is a major irritant between India
and Bangladesh. To solve this problems many negotiations were
held, but all of them proved fruitless. Ultimately during a
visit to New Delhi in May, 1992, Bangladesh Prime Minister, Begum
Khalida Zia had given a commitment to Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha
Rao to set up a committee at the political level to settle the
Chakma problem. A 9 member committee headed by Ali Ahmed was
formed. He met with Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS) President J.B.
Larma who submitted a charter of demands on 4th December, 1992.
More meetings were scheduled but were called off for some reason
or the other. India and Bangladesh, during Khalida Zia's visit
to India in May 1992, agreed to arrange the repatriation of about
56,000 tribal refugees, mostly chakmas, to the CHT in full safety
and security. None of the refugees, were, however, prepared to
go back. Most of the refugees are of the view that until complete


47. The Indian Express, 5 June 1992.

normalcy was restored, the question of their return to their homeland in the hill tracts does not arise. A delegation from Bangladesh, led by Communication Minister Col. (Retd.) Ali Ahmed, visited the state of Tripura on 9 April 1993 and addressed the refugees at the Takumbari Camp. They were assured that they could return home safely and their property would be given back to them. Ahmed, however, failed to say anything about the withdrawal of Bangladesh Army from the CHT, and on whether Muslim Settlers would be deported. Six years ago, similar arrangements had been made to repatriate the Chakma refugees but the move had to be abandoned because of their fear of persecution.

During another round of visit to the refugee camps, by the delegation led by Ali Ahmed on 9 May 1993, a group of refugees led by Upendra Lal Chakma had submitted a list of 13 demands in a memorandum. But the delegation did not give any specific assurance to the refugee leaders on their memorandum. The delegation said that the memorandum would be sent to the Prime Minister Khalida Zia for her consideration. Mr. Chakma pointed out that the Bangladesh government on several occasions had not honoured commitments given to the tribals. He told Sunday, 'we can not return on the basis of verbal assurances because the Bangladesh government

49. The Morning Sun, (Dhaka), 2 May 1993.

50. 'Dhaka is at Fault' (Editorial), The Hindustan Times, 10 June 1993.

had violated its commitments several times before." The leader believes that the Chakma can return if the Bangladesh government signs an agreement with Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS), the only political organisation of the CHT's indigenous people. The demands of refugees include withdrawal of Army and paramilitary forces from Chittagong, withdrawal of Muslim resettlers and suspension of the resettling process, granting more autonomy to tribesmen and providing adequate security and resettlement benefits to the refugees on their return to Bangladesh. Though the Bangladesh Government has agreed to ensure return of land and property belonging to the refugees, it did not make any specific commitment on the other demands of the refugees. On the question of withdrawal of Army from CHT area, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Mustafizur Rahman said, "why should the army be withdrawn? Give me one good reason. If the Kashmiris tell you to withdraw the army from Kashmir would you to it? After all, why is the army stationed in Punjab and Kashmir? To provide security."

In May 1993, after years of fruitless negotiations, Dhaka and New Delhi have reached an agreement over Chakma repatriation. According to a joint statement of the Indo-Bangla delegation which visited South Tripura in May 1993, the refugees were responsive


to the proposal for speedy repatriation to Bangladesh and expressed eagerness to return to their homes. It states, 'the two sides agreed to begin the process of implementation within 30 days.' They exchanged views on the broad parameters to be established including the timeframe envisaged, logistics, transit camps and other political modalities. The Indian government had assured its fullest cooperation to assist and encourage the refugees to return. As far as refugee leaders are concerned they say that the problem can be solved only by the international community exerting pressure on the governments of Bangladesh. They also say that the refugees were not ready to return to CHT until a political solution was reached. According to them a conducive atmosphere for repatriation was yet to be created in the hills of Bangladesh where army rule was still enforced. The tribal refugees are insisting on security and measures to enable them to regain their 'social stature', which had been affected by the influx of Muslim inhabitants. The tribals, who formed 90% of the population now accounted for less than 50% of the population in the hill tracts.

In June 1993, Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.S.M. Mustafizur Rahman visited New Delhi to sort out the problem. But it has not

54. The Hindustan Times, 15 May 1993
55. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
been a success. The repatriation of Chakma refugees, which was
to have begun on June 8, on the basis of an understanding reached
between India and Bangladesh has remained a non-starter so far.
Clearly the chakmas need more than a verbal assurance, and it is
basically for Bangladesh to offer them a scheme that the tribals
would find honourable and acceptable.

C. ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH:

The Muslim known as Rohingyas are one of Myanmar's
numerous minorities. As early as the 16th century these minori­
eties have been living in Arakan state in South western Myanmar.
The Myanmar military regime in December 1991 suddenly increased
the number of troops in Arakan from 30,000 to 75,000. The plea
given was that they were worried about moves in Arakan to declare
independence. There was also a build up of Myanmarese troops
along the border with Bangladesh. And due to atrocities of
Myanmar forces, some of the Rohingyas crossed into Bangladesh.
Soon after the influx started Bangladesh asked Myanmar for
repatriation. The Myanmar regime, which has become infamous
world-wide for its brutal repression of the opponents and pro-
democracy movements, has reportedly told Bangladesh that its troop
will not be withdrawn unless the Rohingyas insurgents are
flushed out. The Rohingyas, subjugated to long ill-treatment and

59. The Indian Express, 29 April, 1992.

60. Biswas Sontik, 'Purge of the Muslims: Myanmar Refugees',
India Today, September 15, 1992, pp. 27-34.

deprivation, have already opted for a hardline in the rugged region and built up guerilla groups to fight the Government troops for an 'independent Arakan'. Rohingyas, Solidarity Organization (RSO), and Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) are engaged in limited insurgency.

The Rohingya problem is not new for either Myanmar or Bangladesh. In 1978, the first large-scale influx of Rohingyas into Bangladesh took place when the founder of the present ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Major Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman, was in power. The issue was settled when the present Foreign Minister, A.S.M. Mostafizur Rahman, the then Minister for Home Affairs, signed in Yangon an agreement under which two lakh of the three lakh refugees returned without posing any major problem to either side. The latest exodus of Rohingyas from Myanmar began in mid-1991. This time the refugee influx strained the relations between the two neighbours and drew almost the entire world into the scene. Having escaped the military is a grand design to Burmanization on the ethnic majority of Arakan, initially, the Rohingyas were in no mood to return.

**Dhaka Yangon Accords:**

On April 28, 1992 two agreements between Dhaka and Yangon were signed under which the repatriation of over two lakh ethnic

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Rohingya Muslim refugees from Arakan was to begin by May 15, 1992 and be completed in six months. It had been agreed that 5,000 of them will leave Bangladesh on alternate days and all those who crossed the border from Arakan will be taken back by Myanmar.

A third agreement, signed on May 9, provides for the presence of the UN High Commission for Refugees in the process of repatriation. The first batch of the refugees went back on September 22 in a voluntary repatriation. Meanwhile, Bangladesh’s refugee relief and repatriation Commissioner, Mr. Shahidul Islam, said that most of the refugees were wanting to return, encouraged as they were by the first batch. The task of repatriation and rehabilitation of an estimated 2,65,000 Rohingya refugees is going on in the presence of UNHCR.

D. REFUGEE FROM BHUTAN TO NEPAL:

For quite sometime the influx of Nepali refugees from Bhutan has been a burning issue in Nepal. The problem of 80,000 refugees living in camps in Nepal has engulfed the kingdom in a crisis and soured relations between the two countries. The refugees, who are of Nepali origin had settled in Bhutan for the past several generations. Now they are fleeing their homes in


Bhutan, due to alleged persecution by the Bhutanese government. The influx of refugees started with the imposition of the new code of conduct in 1989. The refugees say that in Bhutan, the Nepali-Bhutani divide has become very sharp since the government adopted a policy of forced cultural assimilation in 1989.

Broadly speaking, the Bhutanese people may be said to be composed of different racial elements. The Mongoloid and the Indo Aryans of kingdoms of Assam and Upper Burma, the predominant Tibetan Mongoloid element inhabits in the northern and central parts of the Kingdom. The Indo Aryans from northern India are settled in the Bhutan Duars and Southern foothills. As it is, Bhutan is a very small country, both in terms of size and population. People of Nepali origin already constitute the majority population in five of its 20 districts. Several million Nepalis live in immediately next door to Bhutan across an open and porous border.

Migration of people from Bhutan to Nepal through India started as early as 1980. A census exercise carried out in 1987-1988 categorized most of them as 'non-national economic migrants' from across Bhutan's southern border with India. A nexus of illegal immigrants and a section of the southern Bhutanese

68. Dhar, M.K. *op.cit.*
population with political ambitions, headed by Tek Nath Rizal bitterly opposed the census and decided to launch "subversive activities". Allegations were made that the government was planning to evict all the southern Bhutanese and take over their property. They formed a party called the Bhutan People's Party (BPP) in Garganda on Indian territory in June 1990 after the creation of the People's Forum for Human Rights (PFHR) on July 1, 1988 by Mr. Rizal M. Hakarbhitta in Nepal. The apprehension in the minds of the Nepal People could be traced to Bhutan government's new code of conduct. The new code is a 30-point code of conduct. The Government of Bhutan issued it to promote 'traditional values and etiquette'. It seeks to impose a dress code and language rule on non-Drukpas. The national dress regulation requires all Bhutanese to wear the national dress - kho for men and Kira for women at all religious institutions and functions, government offices and formal gatherings. The dissident groups described it as cultural discrimination. "In fact they wanted us to leave Hinduism and become Buddhists like them" alleged the refugees. Matters became worse when the Bhutan government ordered all Nepalese who could not furnish any proof of domicile before 1958, to leave the country by 15 January 1991. The cut

69. Ibid.
70. Husrat, Bikramjit, op.cit., p. 5.
off year, the refugees said, had been fixed arbitrarily and the order was followed by a 'brutal campaign' by the army to drive out the non-nationals.

Bengal and Assam have seen more than a score of refugee camps coming up in the past couple of years to house them. Thapa (about 80 kms. from the north Bengal-town of Siliguri, actually located in Nepal) is the largest settlement of these refugees in Nepal. Initially two hundred families came and settled here three years back. Now, 1500 refugees households comprising about 7000 people live in Jhapa in makeshift bamboo structures covered with polythene sheets on the plot provided by the Nepal government. A large number of refugees live in Morang also, in eastern Nepal. The refugees are totally on dole from the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

**BHUTAN'S ATTITUDE:**

The people in the camps in Nepal are all 'non-nationals', according to the line taken by Thimpu. The Foreign Minister of Bhutan Dawa Tsering says, "the refugees are not genuine citizens of Bhutan, there is a belt of Predominantly Nepali population all

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73. Dutta, Nilanjan, *op.cit.*
along the South of Bhutan and they are mostly from there. He further says, "We can not afford to play host to so many non-nationals because we are not a rich country. They have already claimed a sizeable portion of the Bhutanese citizens so we had to draw the line somewhere."

King Jigme Singye Wangchuk insists that all the refugees in the camps in Nepal are not bonafide Bhutanese citizens and hence could not be automatically taken back without proper verification. The king categorized the inmates of the camps as:

- illegal Nepali residents in Bhutan;
- imported Nepali labourers who were claiming to be Bhutanese nationals by virtue of having worked in Bhutan;
- dissidents, many of whom had committed criminal including terrorist offences in Bhutan;
- Bhutanese nationals who had emigrated legally after renouncing their citizenship; and
- people from other parts of the region including Nepal itself, who had never set foot in Bhutan.

The King points out that the Southern Bhutan problem is neither a movement for democracy nor an issue concerning human rights. It

75. Ibid.
is simply an attempt by a minority ethnic community to turn itself into a majority through illegal immigration, in order to take over political power. The real question is whether the ethnic Nepali population in Bhutan, which was given citizenship as recently as 1958, has an obligation to abide by the laws of their adopted country or, whether politically motivated elements among them, who harbour a desire to turn Bhutan into a Nepali-dominated state, should be allowed to dismantle the citizenship laws which provide the only safeguard against Bhutan being swamped by a "flood of economic migrants."

One perception in Bhutan is that it is beneficial for Nepal to give asylum to the refugees. The country, they say, is providing only the land, while all the funds are coming from abroad and in hard currency. Thimpu has also criticised Nepal for harbouring Bhutanese 'anti-nationals'. Many persons wanted by the Bhutanese government are currently in Nepal. These persons belong to newly-formed Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDF).

**NEPAL'S ATTITUDE:** The Nepalese side, however, maintains that the only acceptable solution to the crisis is the 'safe and honourable return of the refugees. There were talks between King Jigme Singye

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Wangehuk and the Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. Giruja Prasad Koirala at Dhaka during the SAARC summit on 9 April 1993. During their talks both sides had taken rigid positions on the question of determining the fate of the refugees. Though later on, Mr. Koirala changed his stand and agreed to give bilateral discussions a chance to succeed. This has raised hopes that renewed talks between the two neighbouring kingdoms will resolve the issue.

**INDIAN ATTITUDE:**

India looks at the issue as a bilateral issue between Bhutan and Nepal and wants it to be solved bilaterally. Shri Nar Bahadur Bhandari, Chief Minister of Sikkim said in an interview with Sunday, "They can come and go. Sikkim is a part of India, there is no restriction on movement. But they can not buy property here or get a job. I have to provide jobs to my local people. A large influx is not in the national interest. Bhutan People's Party (BPP) has come to be associated with the pro-democracy movement in Bhutan. Both the BPP and BNP are looking not so much at Nepal as towards India for genuine political support. So far, India has not given any indication that it is going to oblige. Bhutanese

refugees are not being given asylum in India. Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao has assured that Indian soil would not be used for any anti-Bhutanese activities. Even the Nepalese appeal to India, 'we want India to use its good office and help settle the dispute', has not yielded any results. Rao has made it clear during his visit to Nepal (early 1993) that the issue should be settled bilaterally.

The problem can be solved bilaterally but there seems to be a complete lack of political will. Bhutan is firm in its conviction that the refugees are 'non-nationals' and hence they are not its headache. Nepal, however, seems desperate to talk and is of the view that it can not afford to support such a large refugee population much longer. This problem must be solved as soon as possible through dialogue. As far as records maintained by the UNHCR and the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB) are concerned, about 97% of the refugees were able to produce some document to prove that they were domiciled in Bhutan. UNHCR Programme officer, Veerapong Vong Varetai says, "they either had their citizenship cards or land/property receipts or birth certificates and we were extremely strict while verifying the credentials." The

81. Sen, Avirook, op.cit.
82. Ibid.
83. Sen, Avirook, op.cit.
Bhutan Government is far from convinced. And this has led to the present impasse over the repatriation of the displaced people.

As far as refugees are concerned, they do not quite see Jhapa or Morang as their promised land. They want to go back to Bhutan and live and work there as they had been before the trouble began.

The Nepali Government, according to them, was too weak to prevail over Bhutan to reverse its policies. They only pinned their hope on India to do it.

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**INDIAN MIGRANTS IN SRI LANKA AND TAMIL REFUGEES IN INDIA:**

The two dominant Sri Lankan communities, the Sinhalese and Tamil - both owe their origin to India. Some of the Tamils from South India went to Sri Lanka in 19th and first half of 20th century as workers in coffee and tea plantations. Two communities, wishing to preserve their individual identities have, however, over the centuries been in conflict.

After decitizenisation of Indian Tamil's in 1948, the degradation of man in Sri Lanka began as a rift within the strings of the instrument as between the resident Sinhalese and the 'imported Tamils'. The beautiful, pearl-shaped island republic of Sri Lanka...

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is now torn apart by internal conflicts intersecting at several political, geographical and emotional points. The plantation economy of Ceylon was built upon the basis of an alliance of British capital and Indian Tamil labour. These developments led to an economic migration. In the early years, the numbers ranged between 30,000 and 60,000 including women and children. By 1931, the Indian Tamil immigrants outnumbered the Sri Lankan Tamils, and together, the two Tamil groups comprised some 25% of the country's population.

Earlier Tamils were disfranchised and deprived of citizenship. (They were re-franchised in 1989). And from 1956, the drive for Sinhala-Buddhist supremacy was further aggravated through linguistic, educational, religious, land colonisation and other policies, all designed to marginalise the Tamils. Sri Lanka's political leadership contended that despite their long residence in the island, the immigrants did not belong to it and had a live interest in the country of their origin and were, therefore, aliens. But India thought they were or ought to be Sri Lankan nationals. Gopal Gandhi writes in his novel 'Refuge',


"their disfranchisement is unbelievable. Hundreds of thousands were made stateless and they are asked to go to India. To India! Why not to Timbuctoo? What is India to them? A distant memory of grandparents. Are there many instances of such all round deprivation among peoples?"

Initially the Indian government led by Jawahar Lal Nehru was inclined to consider most of the labourers as Sri Lankan nationals. On the other hand, D.S. Senanyake, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, did not favour granting Sri Lankan citizenship to the entire labour force of Indian origin working on the estates. Finally, in 1964, the Indian and the Ceylon governments estimated that there were 975,000 'stateless' persons in the island. To resolve this problem, the Prime Ministers of two countries, Mrs. Sirimavo Bhandarnaike of Sri Lanka and Lal Bahadur Shastri of India signed an agreement in 1964, which is commonly known as 'Sirimavo - Shastri Agreement. According to this Agreement, it was decided that Ceylon and India would divide the 'Stateless' persons in a 4:7 proposition, i.e. for every four persons accepted by Ceylon, India would take seven back. The Indian government had shown sympathy and utmost consideration in accepting the liability of the stateless persons. But

90. Ibid.
the Lankan government showed tardiness in the implementation of the Terms of the agreement due to political factors. Its enactment to implement the agreement took effect in 1968 and following this some actions were taken from both sides to grant citizenship.

In January 1974, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bhandarnaike and India's Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, signed an agreement to decide the fate of 150,000 persons, (as it was decided at the time of 1964 agreement). This agreement decided that the 150,000 persons would be divided equally between the two countries. But this was not the end of the problem because both the agreements (of 1964 and of 1974) were not implemented properly. By 1988, India had granted citizenship to 422,000 people of Indian origin. Sri Lanka, in turn was obliged to grant citizenship to 468,000 people of Indian origin and also other remaining stateless persons. To end this problem Sri Lanka parliament approved a bill in November 1988, which conferred citizenship on over 268,000 Tamil plantation workers, and also the rights and privileges which the other citizens of Sri Lanka enjoyed.

From the very beginning the problem was complicated. There were navy hinderances in the implementation of citizenship

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agreements. The major political problem, concerning the Indian migrants in Sri Lanka, was the question of their citizenship, which is now settled. But after so many efforts and steps taken by both the countries, the basic ethnic differences still persists.

**Tamil Refugees in India:**

India has been locked in a sharp ethnopolitical conflict with Sri Lanka since August 1983 when the worst ethnopolitical riots in its long history of ethnic conflicts between the dominant Sinhala nationality and the minority Tamil nationality convulsed the island. The real reasons for India's involvement had more to do with its domestic political compulsions on one hand and its geostrategic concerns on the other. The army atrocities against the civilian population in relation to bolder terrorist attacks since the end of 1984 has resulted in an exodus of Tamil refugees to India. J.N. Saxena writes, "The burden on India is not only economic but social and political also, however, it has not asked the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) so far for any economic assistance. As soon as Sri Lankan refugees lands in India, the Indian authorities provide him with a basic need kit.

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In addition, each refugee (adult) received 55 rupees each fortnight, a child gets Rs. 27.50. India has made all possible arrangements in about 70 camps for their lodging and extended medical facilities in almost all the districts of Tamil Nadu." In a report made to the United Religions Organisation (URO), 25 July 1984, it is said, "they have no one to whom to turn in their distress. Hence they turn to India where the roots of the culture of all our people lie." The second influx of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka began after withdrawal of Indian Peace-keeping Forces from Sri Lanka. One refugee said in Tamil Nadu, 'We are caught in a death trap. The LTTE cannot defend us now and others will be happy to kill us'. But compared to the early 1980, this time there was a difference. Many refugees were militants belonging to non LTTE groups-EPRLF, ENDSL, TELO and PLOTE.

The repatriation of the Tamil refugees began soon after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement in July 1987. Nearly 50 batches involving a little over 25,000 refugees returned to their homeland. But as renewed violence fared up more than a lakh of refugees came back to Tamil Nadu between August 1989 and March 1990. Again, the repatriation started in January 1992, and by the end

of the year 1992, over 29000 Sri Lankan Tamils have returned to island. For the rest of the refugees there is a proposal to re-start the repatriation of the refugees from 15 August, 1993. To solve the problem, permanently, what is needed is the peace and stability in Sri Lanka.

F. Afghan Refugees in Pakistan:

South Asia has seen violent upheavals over the last few decades. In 1947, the subcontinent of India was partitioned and millions of people crossed the borders from and to the new country of Pakistan. Killing, rape and looting were common stories during the summer of 1947. In 1980s, the problem of Afghanistan refugees came into existence. As a result of soviet intervention in Afghanistan, almost three million refugees poured into neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. Already in Baluchistan and to a lesser degree in the North West Frontier Province, they have begun to undermine the delicate ethic balance and established pattern of local power and privilege. The continued presence of the refugees has led to tensions between the local populace and the newcomers. The problem really stems from the type of refugees the Afghans are. They are a swaggering, armed, aggressive lot. Their bearing adds


to their historical image of themselves as conquering warriors. They are quite unlike the refugees who came to Pakistan from India in 1947, and the Biharis from Bangladesh in 1971. Those refugees their lives permanently broken, their destinations unknown, were grateful to accept whatever they could get. In any case Afghan do not accept their own role as guests passively.

An attritional ethno-political relationship has existed between Pakistan and Afghanistan since 1947. But today, the refugee problem in Pakistan is assuming serious proportions both for hosts and guests. Exile diminishes anyone. Yet to many Afghan refugees Pakistan is historically a second home. Culturally and ecologically they are in familiar surroundings. Peshawar and Quetta are known cities to many Afghans. On crossing into Pak, Afghans were received as fellow Muslims and equally important, fellow tribesmen. The government set up one of the best refugee organisations of the world. They were given a tent, subsistence allowances and most critical of all for refugees, hope. But there was a price of a sort. They became a part of an international argument in geopolitics. As a result of the refugee situation, the problem of Pakhtunistan has been abruptly killed. 'Pakhtunistan', Afghan propaganda once claimed, would be a homeland for the

100. Ahmad, Akbar S., op. cit., p. 165.
102. Ahmad, Akbar S., op. cit., p. 186.
Pakhtun tribes of Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. Now, the Pakistanis who are in the Peshawar valley are showing signs of impatience with their guests. As a result of the 300,000 refugees in Peshawar, accommodation is difficult to find and competition for cultivated land heightens local tension.

Afghan refugees who are in Pakistan are of two types. Some refugees are nomads who have migrated annually from Afghanistan in winter across the international border to Pakistan, and back in summer, and were in a manner of speaking nationals of both countries. They spent their winters in Pakistan and made the long trek back on camels and on foot to summer pastures in Afghanistan. The main refugee problem arise from changes in Kabul begun in the seventies as a result of successive and increasingly pro-Soviet coups. The refugees have been treated generously by the Government of Pakistan. The difference between the refugees who came to Pakistan in 1947 from India, and the Afghan refugees 30 years later, is that Afghans are determined to return to their lands. They have not come to stay. After withdrawal of Soviet forces and downfall of Najib government, the Mujahideen leader are fighting to get political power.

103. Ibid., p. 169.
It seems to indicate that the 'age of refugees' will go on far beyond the twentieth century. Displacement, political and economic is coterminus with rootlessness. It produces steadily increasing resentment and tension. Indeed, the democratic process of accommodation and adoption of deprived and deviant ethnopolitical groups to the political system seems to be the most and best assured way of resolving ethnopolitical tension and conflicts in the domestic arena. Once each South Asian state can take better care of its domestic ethnopolitical tensions, the region will be in a far stronger position to resolve inter-state problems created by cross-national ethnopolitical groups.