CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

During the Post - Independence period, India has been witnessing the influx of "Refugees" from many of its neighbouring countries. This "Refugee" phenomenon had been one of the growing problems faced by almost all the developed and developing countries in the world. There are around 4,945,000 million refugees all over the world\(^2\). India has been in the receiving end\(^3\) offering shelter to the refugees from East Pakistan (which later became Bangladesh in 1971) and West Pakistan during 1947-48. They were the early refugees followed by the Tibetans, Chakmas of Bangladesh, Afghans and Sri Lankans. Since 1947, India has been giving shelter to more than 2,24,500 refugees\(^4\). At present, the Sri Lankan refugees are the second largest refugee (next to the Tibetans) community living in India. There are over a lakh Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees living in many parts of Tamil Nadu. They are broadly categorized into three divisions; firstly as camp refugees over 65,000, living in the 129 camps\(^5\) in Tamil Nadu by the end of the year 2000; Secondly the non - camp refugees who have personal resources and

1. Refugee definition as laid by UNHCR
3. S.D. Muni and Lok Raj Baral, (Eds.), Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia, New Delhi, 1996, p-14
4. 'Refugee Population in India' UNHCR - Statistics - 1998 - Overview
special provision for accommodation to stay in Tamil Nadu; and Thirdly special camp refugees, who have been part of one of the militant outfits. The number of registered non-camp refugees are around 20,667\(^6\). Apart from them there are non-registered Sri Lankan nationals living in Tamil Nadu who could vary between 35,000 to 45,000 according to conservative estimates living in Tamil Nadu.

Refugees are the people who are uprooted from the land of their own and forced to run away to a different place for the safety of their life leaving all their belongings and dreams behind. In Swahili, the Tanzania’s language, the word for refugee is *mikimbizi*\(^7\), which literally means “a person who runs” under compulsion away from his homeland in fear for his survival. Fundamental justification for this forcible migration may vary from country to country. But because of the multi-religious and pluralistic culture prevailing in almost all the third world countries, this phenomenon is spreading like a fire. In Sri Lanka also the multi-ethnic phenomena had rendered the Sinhalese to follow the chauvinistic approach, which led to the rise of militancy among the Sinhalese and the Tamil migrant groups leading to loss of peace and harmony among groups of people in the nation. In early 1970s, the Tamil youths took up

to arms and it was done against the Sinhalese ethnic state to assert the rights of the Tamil people to self-determination. Later in the month of May 1976 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed under the leadership of Velupillai Prabakaran to accomplish their objectives in the island nation. Since then the trend of militancy did not diminish and in course of time the land was not safe for the peace loving people of the Tamil origin.

At International level, studies on refugees had been seriously attempted by International Organisations such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Health Organisation (WHO) and various other Non-Governmental organisations. Most of the times they were confined to the action-oriented programmes. They were performing their role as mediators and protectors for the victims. Anthropologists have also made their share of contribution in this field discussing on various aspects like displacement of people, causes for such phenomenon, types of problems they were to face in the new asylum etc. But the studies with historical perspective is limited. In India the studies are still at the preliminary stage. As there is no cohesive narration of the entire history of the Refugees in Tamil Nadu in a nutshell an attempt is in this work made to present succinctly an account of the Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu and the administrative measures taken in Tamil Nadu for their welfare.
On the whole, there is much of moral sympathy towards the refugees. But at certain points the host country found it difficult to manage the influx. This study has been chosen to throw light on the Refugee Management in Tamil Nadu with special reference to the Sri Lankan Refugees who have migrated from the neighbouring island nation Sri Lanka into India during 1983 to 2000.

India is an ancient country in the world. It has a hoary past. Over the years, it had been accommodating people of different multi-ethnic background, religions, languages, cultures and customs who by passage of time started living here with a sense of harmony. This practice had been followed even to this day. Also, it is to be pointed out here that it had been always taking steps to help the refugees in all possible ways. This is clear from the Government of India's treatment in recent decades towards the Sri Lankan Refugees for their well being, health, education and rehabilitation. This factor defines the nature of governmental attitude towards the refugees in general.

In the past, many service-oriented organisations have been doing yeoman services to the refugees. Particularly, Jesuit organisations, local Christian denomination and individual philanthropists have contributed greatly to the welfare of the refugees. The efforts of the Central and State Governments for the betterment of the refugees and the work of the Non-Governmental Organisations that were effectively handling critical issues
and advocating for the Sri Lankan Refugees are the highlights of the present study.

At this point it is necessary to understand the fact namely who these “Refugees” are? What relation do they have with India? The answer is not far to seek. The Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees are the Tamils who had migrated to Jaffna in Sri Lanka and settled in its neighbouring areas in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka from ancient times. Another group of Tamils of the Indian Origin had migrated during the Nineteenth Century to work as Plantation Labourers during the rule of the British. Both these groups have common cultural background with Tamil Nadu, which in fact, promoted the high rate of migration of the refugees to this land of their forefathers in subsequent periods, of serious troubles in Sri Lanka.

The domination of the Tamils in many of the institutions of Sri Lanka during the pre-Independence period, their trade monopoly in the coastal areas of the north and eastern parts of Sri Lanka and their flourishing fishing trade, their close relations with the ruling British imperialists and their predominant position in the educational field caused much reactions and resentment among the Sri Lankans. This was a “last straw on the Camel’s back”.

The ethnic conflict that can be traced since the Independence of Sri Lanka in 1948 has been the root cause of the problem of refugees in the
last quarter of the Twentieth Century. The ‘Sinhala Only’ language policy of 1956 is considered to be the first major crack in the ethnic mosaic. Since then the problem has been escalating and a sense of alienation has set in among the Tamil minorities. After July 1983, there has been a gradual militarization of Sri Lankan society and the conflict has grown to abominable proportions. Mass scale genocide, erosion of the value system, loss of freedom of movement, development of terrorism among the disgruntled and aggressive Tamil Youth, who were instrumental in the formation of revolutionary organisations like Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (L.T.T.E.) and the fear of the moderate Tamils about the forceful conscription by the LTTE are the cognitive outcome. The following passage will reveal the condition of the Tamils in Sri Lanka during the early 1980’s.

"A match box cost me 15 Rupees, ... one litre of kerosene costs 400 Rupees,... no electricity, no hospital, my house and my beautiful village were burnt down to the ground by the military force and militants of Sri Lanka... there is no guarantee that I can spend another day with my children............ my wife says to our two year old daughter “eat soon otherwise the military bombing will destroy our shelter and you won’t have food for days”\(^8\).

This situation was there from the early part of 1980’s and continued to batter the Tamils resulting in the serious discord between the

Tamils and Sri Lankans leading to loss of livelihood and business and breakdown of fishing and other social and economic activities of the Tamils in the North and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka. Consequently, geographical proximity with India did work, as a "pull" factor on the Tamils and the ethnic affiliation with Tamil Nadu was another reason for them to choose India as their asylum.

**Nature and Scope of the Study**

Exodus moving towards an unknown destiny with a ray of hope to live in an alien land and their mental agony for their security and survival, make their life a miserable one. Their plight in the new land and sufferings and difficulties in the new environment, the efforts of the host country in ameliorating the suffering of the refugees and in providing basic necessities for them are all interesting aspects for a study. The present study is an attempt to offer a lucid illustration of such circumstances existing in Tamil Nadu, which had accommodated the Sri Lankan refugees in several parts of its land.

India had provided shelter to hundreds and thousands of refugees in earlier times during the exodus influx like the Tibetan refugees in 1958 and the Bangladesh refugees in 1971. At present in India, the number of refugees amount to more than 2,24,500 and the Sri Lankan refugees are the second largest refugee community living in India. There are more than a lakh of Sri Lankan refugees living in Tamil Nadu. As indicated
earlier, they are broadly categorized as camp refugees, non-camp refugees and special camp refugees. Apart from them there is a group of refugees who have entered the country in the garb of tourists, students, patients, etc., and have not left the country after the expiry of their visas. Neither the Government of India nor the Government of Tamil Nadu could effectively monitor their movement and send them back to their country. The first group namely the camp refugees are over 65,000 living in the 129 camps in the Tamil Nadu State. The second group namely the non-camp refugees are persons having better resources in the Tamil country through their incessant connections with the local Tamils. They registered their names and the names of their family members in the local police stations. The third group who are the special camp refugees are a part of one of the militant outfits of Sri Lankan Tamils who are now behind the bars in Tamil Nadu. Here, it must be noted that the exact number of some persons in a unit of the second group of non-camp refugees is not accurate because all of them have not registered themselves in the near by police stations. The registered figures are 20,667 and the unregistered refugees are about 35,000 to 45,000 according to conservative estimates. This study mainly concentrates on

the registered Refugees living in various camps scattered in several parts of Tamil Nadu only.

The most important reason for the Sri Lankan Refugees migrating into Tamil Nadu is that they are still sentimentally attached to Tamil Nadu and the propinquity of Sri Lanka to the Tamil State is another reason. These distressed people want to lead a peaceful life. For this the government at the center and the state have been playing a significant role in rehabilitating them. The management of their affairs in the camps deserves a special study since the authorities take extraordinary steps to improve their condition. Personal interviews were conducted during the fieldwork by visiting different camps to elicit information on their life at the camps. The handling of the refugees by the state government is also unique that demands special attention.

The signing of the Indo – Sri Lanka Peace Accord in July 1987 followed by the assassination of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, and the role of UNHCR in the repatriation of the refugees from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka are the major aspects to be studied. These factors display the attitude and stand of the country at the International level.

A special emphasis has also been made on the work of the Non-Governmental Organisations along with the Government of Tamil Nadu and on their contribution for the welfare of the refugees. This was done
by way of offering counselling and rehabilitation to the refugees in the new place of their habitation taking care of their day to day basic needs. The liaising between the government at the center and state in respect of the refugees is a fascinating study.

On the whole, the entire study would cover in brief the historical connection tracing India's relations with Sri Lanka from ancient times and the circumstances leading to the refugee phenomenon in later times. Articulating on the details of the socio-economic condition of the refugees in the camps an attempt has also been made to study the efforts and measures of the Government of Tamil Nadu in managing the Sri Lankan Refugees in the State from 1983 to 2000.

**Sources**

The sources for the study are both primary and secondary. The Primary sources are the Government Orders (G.O.s') of various Departments of the Government of Tamil Nadu, Policy Notes and other published documents of the Government of Tamil Nadu and Fieldwork collection (interview schedule based on facts) which give information on the primary details of the camps and the socio-economic condition of the people. Also, the extracts from the local newspapers and journals published in Tamil Nadu, and in other parts of India such as "The Hindu", "Indian Express" "India Today" "Asian Watch" and "Asian Age" covering the period from 1983 to 2000 give valuable information
about the refugees and their problems and about the administration of the Government both at the Centre and State in giving relief to the refugees. Personal interviews with the notable personalities related to the study have also been taken into account for this study, which throw much light on the refugee management. The UNHCR Convention Reports and other International Refugee Laws referring to this subject are also useful supplement to the study. The Secondary sources include various published articles and books related to this topic.

**Review of Literature**

There are few books published on some aspects of the Sri Lankan refugees, which are worthy to be discussed.

- "Between Fear and Hope: Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu" authored by V. Suryanarayan & V. Sudarsen, and published by T.R. Publication Private Ltd. 2000, is a lucid narration of the Refugee phenomenon in Tamil Nadu. The authors have taken initiative to deal with the Refugee policy of India. Their main attempt is to explore both the human and security dimensions of the presence of Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu.

- "Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka – 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?" Edited by Siri Gamage & I.B. Watson, and published by Sage Publication, 1999, had collected a set of papers that deal with the victims of political conflicts and violence
in Sri Lanka over the last fifty years. Many papers reflect the idea that “War violence – whether engineered as guerilla war, conventional war, or state violence – are vicious, tragic, and destructive”. The problem can be resolved only through discussion and negotiation is the editors’ argument in this work.

- “Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka” Edited by Mithran Tiruchelvam & Dattathraya C. S., and published by International Center for Ethnic Studies, Colombo 1998 is the outcome of the symposium held in the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo during 13-15, March 1997. The collection of papers has documented the prismatic history of virulent ethnic strife, in the island country since the later part of the Twentieth Century.


- “Refugee” edited by Gopal Gandhi and published by Ravi Dayal Publisher, Delhi, 1987, narrates the melee of the life of the ‘Refugee’ seeking ‘Refuge’ in another country.

- “Ceylon Kicks India – Sri Lanka Today, Yesterday & Tomorrow” by Jagat Singh Bright and published by Streamlines Publishers Pvt., Ltd.,
Cochin, India, 1983 speaks about the early history of Sri Lanka and the relations of India over the years with Sri Lanka.

➢ "Socio-Economic Profile of Sri Lankan Repatriates in Kotagiri" by L. Vedavalli, was published by Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd. in 1994 speaks in detail about the socio-economic condition of the Sri Lankan Repatriates who were settled in kotagiri by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the Sastri-Sirimavo Act.

➢ "Some Basic International Legal Documents on Refugees and Human Rights" , was published by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, New Delhi, India. This International publication focuses on the rights of the individual ‘refugee’ on the basis of humanitarian ground and in it may be found an attempt to legalise their rights of existence.


➢ "The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord – An Appraisal" by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer was published by Indo-Sri Lankan Friendship Society,

> "India-Sri Lanka Relations and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict Documents – 1947 – 2000, Vol. I to V, by Avtar Singh Bhasin, Editor, published by India Research Press, 2001 is a five-volume documentation which reveals the minute details about the relations of India with Sri Lanka. It is good work, which is helpful to the process of corroboration of sources.

All these authors have presented some aspects of the refugee problems but they had not made much of an exclusive study about the life of the Sri Lankan Refugees in the state of Tamil Nadu. Nor they have made an attempt about the problems of the Sri Lankan refugees and the impact of their residence in the new land. The role of UNHCR in the rehabilitation activities and the efforts of the Central and State Governments in handling the entire situation in the state and the most important aspect namely the graphic description of the socio economic condition of the Refugees in the Tamil Nadu state are not adequately studied by one single work so far. Thus, this study is an earnest attempt to cover all these aspects in this direction.

**Methodology**

As this study is unique of its kind, an attempt is made to write the contemporary history of Tamil Nadu with the influx of Sri Lankan Tamils
and the subsequent developments in this land. With this intention the study is based on the historical facts and a scientific method is used to make the qualitative analysis to assess the entire Refugee Management of Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu. It is a scientific study with a historical narration. The data had been collected by carrying out surveys among the refugees from the different camps in Tamil Nadu. Also, written materials have been collected from various agencies working in the camp. Further, interviews with refugees and staff of the influx administration were conducted to get more information about the life of the refugees in the camps. The study is mainly on the life of the refugees, the camp administration and the work of the voluntary agencies.

**CHAPTERISATION**

The following is the chapter distribution of the Proposed Study:-

*Chapter – I* is the Introduction, which gives the brief account of the study highlighting the major aspects of the study. It also deals with sources for the study.

*Chapter – II* deals with the History of India’s Relationship with Sri Lanka from earliest times to 1983. This chapter covers the entire historical background tracing down the relationship of India with Sri Lanka explaining how and when the Tamils migrated to Sri Lanka during the early times. While narrating the history of Sri Lankan Tamils, the historical circumstances are elaborated, which laid foundation for the
ethnic conflict in the country which had also developed into civil war and military intervention leading to terrorism.

Chapter – III elaborates the Influx of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in Tamil Nadu between 1983-2000. This chapter covers the entire history of the mass exodus of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in Tamil Nadu and their distribution to the camps by the Indian government.

Chapter – IV narrates the Socio-economic and cultural life of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in Tamil Nadu dealing with their day to day life highlighting the real life condition in the camps. Government’s measures for their welfare and the benefits achieved by them are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter – V describes the role of the Government in Refugee Management both at the Central and State level. This chapter further deals with the Indian Government’s stand on Refugees at the International Level.

The role of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Refugee Management and the services rendered by them to the refugees in the form of liaisoning between the needy and the provider are vividly narrated in Chapter VI.

Finally the Conclusion briefs the extract of the entire study with the findings.