CHAPTER – III

INFLUX OF SRI LANKAN TAMIL REFUGEES IN TAMIL NADU DURING 1983 – 2000

During 1983 ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka became more and more serious that it became quite an unsuitable island for the Tamil minorities to live peacefully. Particularly, the Sri Lankan situation since 1983 had turned towards worse that it strongly indicated the insecurity for the Tamils and placed Sri Lanka on the map of forced exodus of ‘Refugees’.

As a post 1983 era, Sri Lankan Tamils started leaving their country seeking refuge in other countries. The elite group had a choice to settle in well-developed nations’ like UK, USA, Canada and other European countries. But majority of them who were belonging either to the lower middle class or to the poorer class landed in the shores of Tamil Nadu by launch boats, fishing boats and catamarans. These refugees were kept in the camp in and around the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu by the Government of Tamil Nadu which later rescheduled them to different camps in various parts of the state.

IMMEDIATE CAUSE FOR THE INFLUX OF REFUGEES

People leave their country or areas due to pull and push factors. The pull factor is voluntary; the push factor is more oppressive and traumatic, which force people to move from one place to another, causing refugee exodus for another country or countries depending on the wide
range of variables for hospitality. The case of refugees in Tamil Nadu is
the outcome of the ethnic paranoia about the power equation in Sinhala
country leading to forcible exodus.

Forced exodus of refugees is one of the problems of gross violation
of human dignity and man’s rights as a person and this grave injustice
had been commenced publicly in Sri Lanka from the holocaust day of 24th
July 1983. Considerable number of vociferous Sinhalese set upon the
genocide of the Tamils and caused destruction to their properties in
Colombo. The attacks left no Tamil shops intact in the city. Many
factories and houses owned by Tamils in the Rentamalana area were
destroyed. The Sinhala Government claimed that 267 people had been
killed and 80,000 people rendered homeless. The death toll was nearly
1,000\(^1\). The situation worsened after the incident of 25th and 27th July
1983, when 52 Tamil prisoners who were held in custody at Welikade
Jail under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1979) were killed. In this
attack, a Tamil Militant leader and Dr. Raja Sundaram, the leader of
Gandhian Movement was mercilessly beaten to death. Added to this the
Sri Lankan President Jayawardene’s statement further added fuel to the
fire. He stated:

"The more you put pressure in the north, the happier
the Sinhala people will be here. Really if I starve the
Tamils out, the Sinhala people will be happy."\(^2\).

This actually turned the situation very serious. All these sequenced incidents instilled fear in the minds of many of the Tamil people leading ultimately to exodus.

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

Sri Lankan Tamils came to Tamil Nadu in three waves during the period of 1983-2000. During this period the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987 witnessed the Repatriation of Sri Lankan Refugees back to Sri Lanka. It was carried on in gradual process. In India, Sri Lankan Refugees can be sub-divided into three categories and they are

(a) Camp Refugees.

(b) Non-Camp Refugees which has two divisions – The first being the Sri Lankan Nationals living in Tamil Nadu who registered about their presence with the local police and the second is the Sri Lankan Nationals living in Tamil Nadu illegally after the expiry of their visa. The former group is termed as Non-Camp registered Sri Lankan Tamil refugees and the latter is the non-Camp unregistered Sri Lankan Tamil refugees.

(c) Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee militants detained in Special Camps.

It is essential to keep in mind the differences among the three categories and also their legal status. Unfortunately, the Government, political leaders and the Non Governmental Organisations use the term refugee very commonly and interchangeably. It has created not only semantic
confusion, but also administrative and legal bottlenecks. For example, in an interview with the *City Express*, Chandrahasan founder of the Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation (OERR), clubbed the three categories together and refer to all of them as refugees.

**Camp Refugees** - There were 65,940-registered destitute Sri Lankan Refugees dwelling in 129 Refugee camps situated in different parts of Tamil Nadu as on 30.04.2000.

**Sri Lankan Nationals living in Tamil Nadu** - These Sri Lankan Tamils belong to the well-to-do sections of Sri Lankan society. A few Sri Lankan Tamils came to India on tourist visas, issued by the Indian High Commission in Colombo, but continued to stay in India even after the expiry of the visa period. A few others had made use of Tamil Nadu as a transit point for moving into greener pastures like Canada and other European countries. Following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the Government asked the Sri Lankan Tamils to register themselves with the nearest police stations. The police began to interrogate those who had not registered themselves. This resulted in the detention of 1,800 Sri Lankan Tamils under the Foreigners Act of 1946. In 1999, the Government of India asked all the Sri Lankan Tamil nationals in Chennai, who had arrived between January, 1983 and 31st December, 1992, to register.

themselves with the Immigration Office before 31st August 1999. According to informed sources, only 1,943 Sri Lankans have registered themselves and the number registered was a figure far below the actual number of Sri Lankan Tamils who had been taking shelter in Tamil Nadu. These Sri Lankan Tamil nationals in Tamil Nadu were estimated to be around 80,000.

**NON-CAMP REFUGEES** — It is stated that approximately 20,667 (as per 'Q' branch report) of non-camp refugees have been residing in various parts of Tamil Nadu along with the Tamil population. This information is obtained from the office of the Department of Rehabilitation, Government of Tamil Nadu. These were the people who had entered India via Rameswaram for seeking refuge in Tamil Nadu. After registering in the Mandabam transit camp after clearance, they opted to stay outside the government maintained refugee camps for personal reasons like option to live with their distant relatives in Tamil Nadu, and aversion to live in a restricted area assigned to the refugees by the government. Further, some of the refugees were rich and resourceful having close connections with their rich relatives in Tamil Nadu. They were interested to lead a luxurious life and hence they were not inclined

to live in the restricted refugee camps organised by the Government of Tamil Nadu. These people did not receive any relief assistance from Government of Tamil Nadu except the education facilities offered to the Refugee children by the Government.

_Sri Lankan Militant Tamil Refugees detained in Special Camps_ — These people had been detained in special camps for their militant activities. Though the inmates were not “technically and legally prisoners, their plight had been worse than those prisoners who were convicted and sentenced to specific terms of imprisonment”7 In 1992, 1,629 militants were stationed in five special camps in Vellore, Pudukkottai, Salem, Chengalpattu and Chennai. By the end of the year 2000 there were 150 Sri Lankan nationals in three special camps namely — 1) Thirty Four prisoners in Tipu Mahal, Vellore Fort; 2) Ninety Eight in Chengalpattu; and 3) Eighteen in Melur under section 3(2)(e) of the Foreigners Act of 1946 and they were kept in these places with a view to restricting their movements. According to the members of the Peoples Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) team, which visited the special camp at Tipu Mahal, Vellore in July 1999, the security arrangements in special camps had been “unprecedented and had surpassed the security

arrangements in any of the central prisons in the state.  

The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who were lodged in the Special camps were those who were involved in the criminal cases, including those on bail and those who were released after disposal of the cases, those with other adverse reports such as involvement in smuggling and criminal activities and the members of the families of those fall under these categories. As their movements were restricted, they were supplied with all facilities. They were provided with cooked food at the rate of Rs. 35/- for an adult and Rs. 20/- for a child a day. All the basic amenities were provided in the camp. Militants against whom there were no specific charges were permitted to leave the country at their own cost and they had the right to choose their own destiny. According to informed sources in Colombo, many militants belonging to non-LTTE groups had gone back to Sri Lanka.

The study of this thesis is confined to the details of the ‘Camp Refugees’ only and not about the refugees of other two categories as indicated earlier. The information about the Camp Refugees is illustrated under the sub-headings first, second and third Phase of the Sri Lankan exodus in Tamil Nadu.

Camp Refugees

'Destitute seekers of solace' leaving the land of their ancestors in the dark of the night to exercise the 'fundamental right of mere existence' had to reach the shores of the Indian coast either by launch, fishing boat, or by catamaran. These unfortunate men had to seek the help of the human peddler or the agents who ferried them across the Palk Strait to the Indian soil. At times they used to collect a fee of Rs. 500/- to Rs. 1,000/- during 1983⁹ which had been raised according to the stringency of both the Sri Lankan and Indian patrolling on their coastal line. Once a boat was captured the military authorities of the respective countries seized them. It was stated that Rs. 10,000/- to 15,000/- per head is paid to the peddlers for taking them safely to the Indian soil over the years till 2000.¹⁰ It was done because that these refugees wanted desperately to save themselves from the assaults of the Sri Lankan army, to protect their property from confiscation and to save their women-folk from molestation by the unscrupulous men of the Sri Lankan Army and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. According to a Sri Lankan Tamil journalist, a few mechanised boats from Tamil Nadu smuggled scarce commodities to Sri Lanka and on some occasions would try to bring refugees with them for a good fee. They dropped the anchor at

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Nachiguda, Vallaipadu and other spots between Pooneryn and Mannar for this illegal activity\textsuperscript{11}. It is mostly Sri Lankan fishermen who used to ferry the refugees to India. At times the peddlers left them in the middle of the sea in some small islands in the international waters for the Indian patrollers to take note of them. Some time, they are left in lurch and they would be without food and water for few days and the weak and the young siblings suffered the most. Sometimes they were left 10 to 15 kilometres away from the shores and make them to swim to the shore so that the peddlers could escape without being caught and arrested by the Indian navy officials.\textsuperscript{12} This was how the desperate refugees reached the shores of India after undergoing hazardous and dangerous experiences.

**Reception and Registration of Refugees in Tamil Nadu**

As soon as the refugees reached the Indian territory, they were stopped by Indian security men and interrogated. It was done immediately on arrival of the refugees. The local Police Inspector enquired the refugees to ensure whether they were genuine refugees who were really affected in the ethnic problem and arrived India to save their lives. After enquiry by the local Police Inspector, Police authorities of 'Q' Branch screened the refugees in co-operation with the Intelligence

\textsuperscript{11} Tarsi, "Refugees and Tragedy of Northern Seas", Midweek Mirror, 12th March, 1997.

\textsuperscript{12} Personal Interview with Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee ‘Nivabagiyam’, in Gummudipoondi, 12th January, 2002.
Bureau to segregate the militants if any mingled along with the refugees and to check the bonafides and antecedents of the refugees. After screened by the Police authorities, the Revenue Officials registered the personal details of the refugees’ such as the name of the refugee, occupation, address in Sri Lanka etc., in the admission register. This was done after verifying the documents if any from the individual. Normally, the individuals had the Identification card, Family card, School record etc., but if they did not possess these things, police authorities verified other available evidences to confirm genuine details about the refugees. Then they were photographed to record the identity of each member and the Photo was affixed in the Identity Card.13

As per Government of India’s instructions, a quarantine camp had been opened within the complex of Mandapam Camp where the refugees reached in larger number. This camp had been functioning at Door No. 226, Old Block, from August 2000 onwards. Fresh refugees arriving in India were kept in quarantine for a limited period not exceeding 30 days and only after completion of verification of their antecedents they were shifted to normal camps.14 During the verification process if a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or the members of its splinter groups or Smugglers etc., came to their notice, action was taken to lodge

them in the Special Camp to restrict their movement and safeguard the
security of the State Under Section 3(2)(e) of Foreigner’s Act of 1946.  

**First Phase of Sri Lankan Exodus to Tamil Nadu During 24th July 1983 - 29th July 1987**

The first exodus of refugees began on 24th July 1983 and continued
till 29th July 1987. During this period, 1,34,053 Sri Lankan Tamils
arrived India. This was the period when mass exodus was handled by
the state government of Tamil Nadu. Due to the sentimental ties of the
people of Tamil Nadu with this exodus the government had facilitated
them with all the basic needs.

At the entry level, the exodus were in such a distress and desperate
condition both mentally and physically that the government officials
initially tried to console them. A professional medical psychiatrist present
in the camp medically attended them and to their grievances. They were
handled according to the existing situation. For the initial few days all
the refugees were lodged in the transit Mandabam camp so as to be
transported to transit camp in Trichy. There the immediate basic needs of
the refugees were taken care off.

15. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
## PHASE - I

**DESTITUTE REFUGEES ADMITTED IN CAMPS**

**DURING JULY '83 TO JANUARY '87**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1986</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1987</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Families</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>Families</td>
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<td>Families</td>
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<td>Families</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>Families</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td><strong>615</strong></td>
<td>1,843</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>2,220</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2,545</td>
<td>10,911</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2,699</td>
<td>11,331</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>1,461</td>
<td>6,386</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>6,663</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1,179</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>1,513</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>435</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>1,477</td>
<td>3,510</td>
<td>2,053</td>
<td>5,226</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>1,712</td>
<td>1,096</td>
<td>3,027</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>395</td>
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<td>164</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>567</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>2,034</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>2,354</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>2,822</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>845</td>
<td>3,059</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>840</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>668</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,920</td>
<td>30,693</td>
<td>1,469</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>2,212</td>
<td>5,525</td>
<td>11,601</td>
<td>39,918</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** NON DESTITUTE REFUGEES ARRIVED BY AIR AT CHENNAI AND TRICHIRAPALLY (Students/Businessmen/Tourists) ***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>94,135</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTAL</td>
<td>1,34,053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**This figure is from July '83 to January '85.**

**These Refugees checked in with proper documents (Passport) and were treated under the Foreigners Act of 1946.**

*Source: 'Refugees in Tamil Nadu' Department of Rehabilitation, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1987.*
MEDICAL ASSISTANCE:

Once the refugees were well settled and fed, the government officials registered their names initially and sent them for a thorough medical check up. They were vaccinated and primary level first aid was given to them. Also, the sick were provided with medical assistance. Most of these people suffered from exhaustion, dehydration, fever, malnutrition, heat boils, sun burns, mental and physical stress, etc. The Government appointed medical officers to take care of them till they recovered completely from their health problems. For higher level of medical complications they were transferred and referred to the nearby government hospitals for better treatment.¹⁹

RELOCATING FAMILY MEMBERS:

It is also to be pointed out that few refugees who arrived India got themselves separated from their families. Within a few days of their arrival initial attempts were made by the officials to locate the relatives of the dislocated refugees. The officials, in fact, took steps to search for them and enquiries were made continuously to find out whether the missing family members were staying in different camps in the state. Many were found and they were united with their families. In certain cases, family members were found scattered in several places of Tamil Nadu, who came under the category of unregistered refugees who entered

¹⁹. Ibid.
the territory of Tamil Nadu long time back by some means of Transport. These people in later occasions wanted to join their family members in the camps and they were allowed to join their family members and accommodated after the verification by the officials and approval by the members in the camp. Similarly, new refugees landing the Indian territory had also expressed their desire to join their family members in the camps. Their requests had also been favourably responded by the officials and they were also accommodated in the camps. 20

**FURNISHING BASIC NEEDS:**

The government had provided all basic necessities to the refugees in all the camps of Tamil Nadu. At the initial level every individual refugee was furnished with two sets of clothes to wear and bed roll consisting of mat and bed sheet. Some utensils were also given to them for the preparation of food. An Identity Card was also issued to the families based on which they could draw ration from the Government authorised shops located inside the Transit Mandabam camp. 21

**ACCOMMODATION IN NORMAL CAMPS:**

It is to be noted that over a lakh of refugees during ’83-’84 were accommodated in different camps as and when they arrived. Generally, the batches of exodus were not separated and they were accommodated in

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one single camp for their convenience. The government officials were determined to put them all in places of their choice lest they should feel that they had been separated from their kith and kin. During the initial period the refugees were accommodated in temporary shelters in a vacant land and in the buildings under government possessions. The government also rented a few private buildings for this purpose. List of the camp details is enclosed in Appendix-I.

**DISTRIBUTION OF DOLES TO THE REFUGEES:**

A subsistence allowance had been fixed by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the direction of the Central Government for the refugees to meet their personal and other essential expenses. This dole amount was distributed once in every fortnight to the head of the family. (Detailed description is given in Chapter – V)

This was how the Government of Tamil Nadu had welcomed the steady stream of refugees flowing into India as a result of ethnic conflict and senseless human carnage that have been sweeping the island country before and since 1983. The security for their lives and property, which was at stake in Sri Lanka, was restored to them in the Indian soil to a considerable extent. The people of Tamil Nadu and the media in India had been very much sympathetic towards the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils.
Development Since 1983

When the ethnic problem raged the Sri Lankan soil to a great extent the political leaders of both the countries had started considering the serious issues and wanted to bring out a lasting solution. Further, the influx of refugees into the Indian soil and their stateless condition received the sympathies of the international community. Everyone wanted to help the refugees and offer solution to their problems. Also, these issues were discussed at the meetings of international leaders.

Consequently, the international pressure on President Jayawardene of Sri Lanka led to talks between the leaders of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Tamil leaders. As a first step, cease-fire was declared in 1985 and later in October 1986 proposals to stop conflicts between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamils were made. In 1985 a meeting with the Sri Lankan Government and the militants was held at Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan. In November 1986 the President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India and the leaders of the LTTE met at Bangalore to discuss various issues. However, both the meeting did not solve the matters successfully but only aggravated the situation. Consequently, there was an escalation of Sri Lankan military action in January 1987 and the negotiating process came to a complete halt. The Sri Lankan Government imposed an economic blockade on Jaffna. In turn, the Indian Government in an attempt to save the Tamils carried out relief services on humanitarian
ground, inspite of Sri Lanka’s serious protests. Sri Lanka felt that this was an over interventionism in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka and it had openly opposed the efforts of India in this direction\textsuperscript{22}.

Finally, a solution to the crisis was found. The energetic and enthusiastic Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi took a step ahead to restore peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka. With the co-operation and support of the President Jayawardene of Sri Lanka on 29\textsuperscript{th} July, 1987, Indo-Sri Lanka ‘ACCORD’ was signed. The objects of the Agreement was to hold elections in the Island, lift Emergency, grant Amnesty to all militants, begin the efforts for the formation of a joint province and devolution of powers among the ethnic groups. It was also decided that for implementing these proposals, Government of India would co-operate with the Government of Sri Lanka with military assistance as and when required and requested by them. Thus, Indian Peace Keeping Force was stationed in the Sri Lankan soil as an ambassador of goodwill, security and peace in uniform. The treaty had a provision for the repatriation of Indian citizens (which ceased since October 1983 due to the heavy influx of the Sri Lankan Refugees and suspension of the Sastri-Sirimavo pact) from Sri Lanka concurrently with the repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil

refugees from Tamil Nadu [Article 2-16(d)]. 23 In an annexure to the agreement the Prime Minister of India also agreed to deport from Tamil Nadu all Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who were engaging in terrorist activities or advocating separatism or secessionist tendencies. Further, the Sri Lankan Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR)24 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 31st August 1987 under which UNHCR agreed to provide rehabilitation assistance to the refugees as well as to the displaced Tamils scattered in different parts of the north and east of Sri Lanka.

**Repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees (First Phase)**

By 31st January 1987, a total of 1,28,564 refugees had come into India due to the ethnic violence. Of these 34,429 persons, who were destitutes were admitted into the refugee camps. On the whole 171 temporary camps were set up in Tamil Nadu for the accommodation of these refugees. Of these refugees 9,350 voluntarily left the camp after admission. This was a sequel to the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord which aimed at maintaining peace in the island by bringing Indian Peace Keeping Force to Sri Lanka. It is on this ground some of them left the Tamil soil to

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24. Henceforth UNHCR will be used instead of 'United Nation High Commissioner for Refugee' throughout the thesis.
Sri Lanka soon after admission into the refugee camp. The population of refugees in various refugee camps in Tamil Nadu at the time of repatriation was about 25,000\textsuperscript{25}. They were ready to return soon after the announcement of the July 1987 ‘Accord’ between India and Sri Lanka.

As per the agreement, all Sri Lankan Tamils in India were asked to register for repatriation\textsuperscript{26}. This was the first time an organised repatriation work was attempted. The repatriation work began on 24\textsuperscript{th} December 1987. The first trip by chartered ships\textsuperscript{27} reached Talaimannar with 252 Sri Lankan Tamil repatriates on board. By January 1989, 25,065 persons returned officially\textsuperscript{28}. These included camp and non-camp refugees. Together with organised repatriation, spontaneous repatriation also took place with the help of the government of Tamil Nadu. According to the UNHCR records it is estimated that in this repatriation process a total of 25,610 persons returned through organised channels and 17,290 spontaneously on their own accord\textsuperscript{29}. Some of the remaining Tamil refugees returned to Sri Lanka after a short period without government

\textsuperscript{25} Report on Refugees, Public (Refugees) Rehabilitation Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1987, p-6.
\textsuperscript{26} Frederick C. Cuny and Christopher R. Cuny “The Return of Tamil Refugees to Sri Lanka” in Frederick C. Cuny, Barry N. Stein and Pat Reed, Repatriation During Conflict in Africa and Asia, Dallas Texas, Centre for the Study of Societies in Crisis, pp-23-101.
\textsuperscript{28} Report on Refugees, Public (Refugees) Rehabilitation Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1989, p-6.
assistance. However, few more continued to stay in Tamil Nadu either with their relatives or by their own means\textsuperscript{30}.

The spontaneous repatriation by some refugees indicated that their return to Sri Lanka was not a forced one. In this first attempt at repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees from India, UNHCR was not involved from the Indian side. People had volunteered to go back, even to Jaffna, which was still under the LTTE siege\textsuperscript{31}. Between 24\textsuperscript{th} December 1987 and 31\textsuperscript{st} August 1989, 25,585 refugees and non-camp Sri Lankan Tamil refugees returned to Sri Lanka. As the refugees were sent back to Sri Lanka from 24\textsuperscript{th} December 1987 onwards, the temporary camps in the various districts in Tamil Nadu were closed down\textsuperscript{32}. According to Sri Lankan watchers, it was stated that the period witnessed a large-scale movement of Sri Lankan Tamils to different parts of Europe and Canada.

Some of the Sri Lankan Tamils had entertained a hope that soon matters would change for better due to the efforts of the leaders of the two nations. But this belief that the Peace Accord would enable the refugees to go home, resettle and rebuild their life along with their communities proved an illusion.

\textsuperscript{30} Policy Note: Demand No. 42, Miscellaneous 1996-97, Finance Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1996


\textsuperscript{32} Report on Refugees, Public (Refugees) Rehabilitation Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1989, p-5.
Talking to the press, Capt. Raheem, aide of V. Prabakaran the TTE leader stated:

"Circumstances have forced us to lay down our arms, but remember that we haven’t signed any pact, either with the Indians or with the Sri Lankan Government. The war has ended, but the struggle will continue."

But Sri Lankan President Jayawardene who had a hostile view against the Tamils had always maintained that Sri Lanka should be ruled only by the Sinhalese and Tamils had no role to play in any branch of administration. Also he viewed that ‘the Tamils invited on Sri Lanka’s insistence were not signatories to the document’ of Indo-Sri Lankan Accord of 1987.

This sealed the fate of the settlement of the problem and peace process.

**SECOND PHASE OF SRI LANKAN EXODUS TO TAMIL NADU DURING 25TH AUGUST 1989 - 30TH APRIL 1991**

**PLIGHT OF THE TAMILS IN SRI LANKA**

During the late 1980’s, the Tamils in Sri Lanka were to face with insurmountable difficulties and troubles from the Sri Lankan army as well as from their own militant brethren.

One of the Tamils had expressed his woeful experiences during this me as follows:

"I felt, I will be captured by the army or the Tigers and they will torture me and force me to do what I don’t want to do. I have seen my friends doing so; I want to study and get qualified and work in a respectful job in some foreign land...I am scared to stay in Sri Lanka..."\[5\]

A large number of refugees who crossed over the sea and took asylum in Tamil Nadu were of the age group between 5-15 and 16-30 years, which amounts to around 25 and 50 per cent of the total refugees in the camps. The 16-30 age group was the major target of attack for the security forces of Sri Lanka as they blindly believed that all the Tamils of this particular age group were the Liberation ‘Tigers’.

The refugees of this age group who were lodged in various camps said that if they were staying in Sri Lanka, they would either be tortured or killed, in military camps or would be forced to go underground and join hands with the Tamil Militants. Though most of the refugees of this age group wanted to join hands with Tamil Militants to fight for Eelam, they were compelled by their parents not to join any militant group but to go to India to safeguard their lives. Some had left Sri Lanka along with their parents. Many of them had left their parents in Sri Lanka under their compulsion and escaped to India. They had no contact with their family members in Sri Lanka or in the camps in Tamil Nadu. Some of the
refugees requested the Indian officials to help them by informing their family members in Sri Lanka of their safe arrival to India without facing any assault from the Sri Lankan Navy.

However, the plight of the children had been very much miserable. Particularly, the children of the age group between 5 and 15 had been suffering a lot and it is sad to note that they were school going children now deprived of educational opportunity due to ethnic trouble. They had been abstaining from schools for a long period before they escaped to India. Even these small kids have tales of woes to tell about the Sri Lankan security forces and their atrocities.

**ENTRY OF SRI LANKAN REFUGEES SINCE 1990**

The Second Eelam War commenced in June 1990 and it resulted in the second wave of refugees to India. The war was intensified in course of time and the Government of India was worried about the renewed influx of refugees in Tamil Nadu. After the 25th August 1989, 1,22,000 Sri Lankan Tamils came to Tamil Nadu. Of these, 1,15,680 were destitutes and were accommodated in refugee camps. The peace keeping effort by India in the island country was a thorough failure. The Indian Peace Keeping Force could not effectively function in Sri Lanka due to the existing situations there. Against all norms of peace. The

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36. Ibid.
Indian Peace Keeping force itself became a party to the conflict and this situation further resulted in the heavy influx of the refugees to India in greater numbers. Refugees continued to trickle into India till April-May 1991.

**PHASE – II**

**DESTITUTE REFUGEES ADMITTED IN CAMPS**

**BETWEEN 1989 TO 1991**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Families</td>
<td>Persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>302</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>586</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12,237</td>
<td>46,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>10,181</td>
<td>41,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>9,753</td>
<td>25,719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>2,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>1,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,403</td>
<td>2,891</td>
<td>34,420</td>
<td>118,948</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reactions after the Assassination of Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 21st May 1991

Tamil Nadu which had been protesting against the presence of Sri Lankan Tamil Militants saw the refugees as a potentially destabilizing factor affecting the economy of the state and persuaded New Delhi, that they should be sent back to their original homes at the earliest. The focus of Indian diplomacy then shifted towards persuading Government at Colombo to receive them back. However, no attempt was made to force the refugees to go back. It was under these circumstances that the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by a Sri Lankan Tamil suicide bomber took place. This situation changed the Indian policy to a greater extent. In the aftermath of Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination, unlike in that of Indira Gandhi, no large scale rioting took place in Tamil Nadu. The Congress (I) party in Tamil Nadu took up a restrained position. The attacks by party members were not against the refugees but against the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) for having provided shelter and support to the members of the LTTE. There were some minor disturbances near some camps in various districts by mobs, but the reaction was subdued. However, after these developments the hostility faced by the Sri Lankan Tamils living in Tamil Nadu from the Indians in general and from the local Tamils in particular could not be easily explained.
The psychological impact of these developments on the refugees had been tremendous due to arbitrary arrests of persons of suspicious bonafides. Consequently, the government wanted to consolidate the camps to reduce the tension in the state. The official stand was that it was no longer safe to keep refugees in small isolated camps. The government felt that security could be provided only if the number of camps was reduced. The Tamil Nadu Government consolidated and reduced the existing 237 camps to about 132 in 1993\textsuperscript{37}. The camps along the coastline such as those in Thanjavur and Cuddalore districts were closed down\textsuperscript{38}. These camps according to refugee sources had been havens for militants and provided support to the militants in smuggling weapons to Sri Lanka\textsuperscript{39}. The public in Tamil Nadu had looked at the refugees with suspicion because of the narrow line that seemingly existed between the refugees and the militants. The assassin of Rajiv Gandhi and her associates were no gun holding warriors, they were like any other common men and women. Six of the accused in the assassination case were registered refugees\textsuperscript{40}. The other refugees themselves began to fear about the public reaction against them and they confined themselves to the camps.

\textsuperscript{37} Report on Refugees, Department of Rehabilitation, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1993.

\textsuperscript{38} "The Hindu", (Madras) 13\textsuperscript{th} June 1991.

\textsuperscript{39} "The Hindu", (Madras) 2\textsuperscript{nd} June 1991.

\textsuperscript{40} V. Suryanarayan, "Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu: Humanitarian and Security Dimension," Backgrounder Conference, Sri Lankan Refugees in India, Madras, Centre for South and South East Asian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai, 11th April 1997, p-37.
REORGANISATION OF THE CAMPS OF TAMIL NADU

In the political sphere, two changes took place after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. P.V. Narsimha Rao became the Prime Minister of India on 20th June 1991, and Jayalalitha the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) leader became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on 24th June 1991. The assassination in fact, gave much sympathy votes to both these parties namely Congress and AIADMK which formed governments in the Centre and Tamil Nadu State respectively. The Congress (I) Party of Narasimha Rao, aligned itself with the newly elected AIADMK Government of Tamil Nadu. Jayalalitha who took over as the Chief Minister had already said that the refugees must quit Tamil Nadu particularly after such a catastrophe. As a first step, camps were reorganised and it was decided that on this basis repatriation would take place. Reorganisation was on a regional basis. The traumatized refugees were moved to different camps within the State. Refugees belonging to Jaffna, for instance, were sent to live with refugees from kulakamallai, and the refugees from Mullaituvai were accommodated along with the refugees of kulasekeram. Those from Mannar were divided into two groups and one was merged with Pakode and the other with the Manadpam refugees. Those from Trincomalle and

41. *All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* hence forth will be called as AIADMK
Batticaloa were sheltered with Trincomalee and Pakode, and similarly refugees from Vavuniya were offered shelter along with the refugees from Patavalai\textsuperscript{41}. These arrangements were made by the government officials of Tamil Nadu to avert any untoward and serious incidents in the Tamil soil. Their apprehension was that these Sri Lankan Tamils might indulge in militant activities if they were kept in groups of the same region. They felt that by grouping them with refugees of different regions, they could avoid their unity and concerted efforts. They felt that their efforts would stop the refugees from indulging in violent activities. This grouping also had a beneficial result. It actually made the Tamils of one region to closely move with the Tamils of a different region and this movement strengthened their relationship. In course of time there was also a development of greater unity among the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in the Tamil soil. For instance, refugees from Mullaithivu developed a closer relationship with the refugees from Kiliasram and this development was seen in almost all camps.

\textsuperscript{42} 'The Hindu', (Madras), 24\textsuperscript{th} May 1991.
\textsuperscript{43} 'The Hindu', (Madras), 10\textsuperscript{th} July 1991.
REPATRIATION OF SRI LANKAN REFUGEES (SECOND PHASE)

The repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamil Nadu started again in June 1991. The government notified that all Sri Lankan Tamils living in Tamil Nadu as on 29th June 1991 should register themselves for this task of repatriation in relevant places near their camps which were opened exclusively for this purpose so as to facilitate the process of repatriation. The government of India and Tamil Nadu did not give much importance to the rage of violence continued in Sri Lanka, which was unsafe for the refugee to go back. Nor any attempt was made by them to study the situation in Sri Lanka. The refugees on their part continued to express that they were willing to go back to Sri Lanka only if the Indian government gave them the full assurance of safety to their lives and property. Also, they wanted that the supply of essential commodities and food should be continued at affordable prices for a considerable length of time in Sri Lanka till the restoration of normalcy. But the government could not give any assurance on these issues. Thus, at this point of time the Indian policy which was based on protectionism was undergoing a change since their request cannot practically be implemented as it involved the compliance of Sri Lankan Government 44. However, the

44. 'The Hindu' (Madras), 21st October, 1991, p-2.
official repatriation of refugees started on 20th January 1992. But the second repatriation process was not simple or as easy as the first one. It was complicated by the change in India’s political environment in which the Sri Lankan Tamils had played a major role. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the Tamil militants completely changed the situation in India. The Sri Lankan Tamils to some extent lost the sympathy and support of the majority people of Tamil Nadu in particular and India in general. It was at this juncture that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees made its presence felt from the Indian side. Yet, the situation was still complicated and so solutions were not easy to find. According to UNHCR, 54,188 refugees were voluntarily repatriated to Sri Lanka by chartered ships and flights from 20th January 1992 to March 20th 1995. It was composed of both a spontaneous and organised repatriation processes. The spontaneous repatriation included some who went across to Sri Lanka on their own accord and without any help from any source.

The Government of India carried out the large-scale repatriation between June 1991 and January 1992. From that moment onwards it was the concern of the Government of Sri Lanka to offer protection to the Sri Lankan Tamils. Until July 1992 UNHCR was not present on the Indian side and it was not connected with any process of repatriation. The entry

45. UNHCR Accounts of Repatriation are given: 1. Repatriation of Refugees from India to Sri Lanka, 13th August to 17th September 1992, Colombo, and 2. Repatriation of Refugees from India to Sri Lanka, 28th January to 19th February 1994, Colombo.
of the UNHCR gave momentum to the repatriation work started by the Government of India, and it continued till May 1995 until the take over of Jaffna peninsula by the Sri Lankan forces. This affected the repatriation operations for sometime since the condition was not fit for the refugees to return to Sri Lanka. By May 1995, as per the UNHCR records 51,188 refugees returned to Sri Lanka from India, leaving 54,746 in camps in Tamil Nadu. In fact, 31,062 of these had returned before the UNHCR entry to assist in the repatriation activities. The temporary termination of the repatriation process was also due to the expenses of hiring ships at high rates to transfer the refugees to Sri Lanka and this had always acted as a deterrent. Many refugees carrying large amounts of consumer items refused to go by air and hence ships had to be provided for them. Rehabilitation Ministry officials also mentioned that due to patrolling by both Indian and Sri Lankan naval authorities across the Palk Strait, it was not always feasible to ferry refugees from Rameshwaram to Sri Lanka. The threat posed by ‘Sea Tigers’ the LTTE operating on waters was also an important factor that led to the suspension of transporting refugees by ship. In fact, the refugees preferred to go by ship since they wanted to carry all their heavy baggage through this easy transportation. But the authorities felt that they were exposed to much danger since the members

of LTTE were secretly operating on the waters to make assaults on such movements.

THIRD PHASE OF SRI LANKAN EXODUS TO TAMIL NADU DURING 31ST JULY 1996 - 31ST DECEMBER 2000

The third phase of refugee influx in Tamil Nadu started in 1996 when more than seven thousand Sri Lankan Tamils of Mannar District in Sri Lanka started moving out from their place to Tamil Nadu as conditions worsened in their places. This exodus further added to the refugee population in Tamil Nadu. Of the estimated 2,00,000 Sri Lankan Tamils who had fled to India since 1983, some 63,000 have been repatriated and about 54,000 had been housed in 122 camps in Tamil Nadu apart from those who lived outside these camps.\(^{50}\)

PROBLEMS OF TAMILS IN SRI LANKA

Northern Sri Lanka, comprising of the districts of Mannar, Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya had remained the scene of intense fighting between the LTTE on one side and the Sri Lankan Government security forces and the Tamil militant groups supported by the Government on the other side. It may be pointed out here that not all-militant Tamil groups of Sri Lanka supported the terrorist activities of

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49. Ashu Hans, op.cit. 1997, p-116
50. UNHCR publication, 6th March 1997.
1. LTTE. Some groups wanted only a share in the governmental functions in Sri Lanka. These groups were quite opposed to LTTE’s radical policies.

The increased security measures in the areas outside the North and East had led to great hardships for the civilian population in Sri Lanka, especially to Sri Lankan Tamils. Large-scale cordonning and search operations at several points particularly after the bombing of the Central Bank in Colombo in January 1996, became common features during that period. Further the human rights activists and observers have also complained of non-compliance against Sri Lankan Presidential directives with regard to procedures to be followed when taking persons into custody. After a suicide bomber killed more than 20 people in Jaffna in July 1996, residents complained of further harassment at army checkpoints such as at the Thandikulam check-point which monitored the passage of travellers to and from the LTTE-controlled North. Government forces insisted on definite proof of the purpose of visits to the South, including guarantees from their own family members and business associates. On some days, over 2,000 persons reportedly arrived at the checkpoint in Vavuniya, only to be turned back or were directed to so-called transit camps in Vavuniya to await clarification of

51 'Information Monitor', 7th March 1996.
52 'INFORM', New Delhi, February 1996, p-4.
their claims. After the LTTE overran a military base in the North-eastern Mullaitivu district in July 1995, killing a few and capturing most

**Phase III**

**Destitute Refugees Admitted in Camps Between August 1996 and January 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td></td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td></td>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>181</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>257</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>198</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
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<td>618</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>288</td>
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<td>493</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>200</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>311</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>1,655</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>2,258</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>1,804</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7,108</td>
<td>4,272</td>
<td>3,839</td>
<td>4,977</td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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55. Ibid.
of the garrison's 1,500 soldiers, the morale of the Sri Lankan army and respect for the civilians in Jaffna deteriorated. The repeated occurrences of incidents of extra-judicial killings, sudden "disappearances" of the Tamils and torture perpetrated by Government forces on the Tamils gave evidence to the deplorable condition of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan armed forces and their Tamil military allies were said to be responsible for the harassment and the "disappearance" of the Tamils since they were suspected as members of the LTTE - their arch rivals in Sri Lanka. There were serious clashes in various places in Sri Lanka between the armed forces and Tamil civilians. As an act of revenge, the Sri Lankan armed forces made their vigorous attacks on Tamil civilians assuming that they were the accomplices of the LTTE group and in turn the militant men of the other group retaliated and this resulted in perpetual clashes and great casualties. There were reports about the harassment on Tamil female detainees captured as captives by both the groups. Also, there were reports that women have been kept in detention at police stations for several days without charge sheet and without any female officer present with them for their security.

Human rights abuses by the LTTE against Tamils who were not supporting the LTTE have also been well documented. These included

harassment, intimidation, detention, torture, summary execution as well as "disappearances". LTTE harassment on Tamils who opposed their activities had been known to extend outside Sri Lanka to Tamil expatriate communities in Europe and North America. It is stated that the Tamil children of Sri Lanka had been kidnapped in larger numbers to be trained as LTTE fighters to continue the ethnic war in Sri Lanka. Tamil human rights groups had been concerned about the serious abuses perpetrated by the LTTE and particularly, "its cult of sacrificial death culture and rejection of democratic institutions" were resented by the human rights activist.

The University Teachers of Human Rights Group – Jaffna, 1995, reported the following:

"We do know the anxiety of Tamil parents who await the return of their children from school fearing that they may be accosted and importuned to join the LTTE, and removed far away without a single trace. We also know the helplessness of parents, who if they happen to trace a child removed by the LTTE, are told not to become traitors to the cause and are sent away. Before they have reached an age of mature judgement, children are initiated into a culture of death in which they are taught that the greatest good is to sacrifice their lives for Tamil Eelam..." (1995, p.14).

61 ibid.
62 The University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR-I), Jaffna, 1995, p-12.
Although most of the refugees were able to return to their villages, some were again displaced during the hostilities in July and August 1996, together with the local population in Jaffna and Kilinochchi. Voluntary repatriation movements from India had been suspended since the resumption of armed hostilities in April 1995 and no repatriation process was expected to take place in 1997 until conditions improved.\(^{63}\)

In early August 1996, again the Tamil civilians, particularly the internally displaced persons (IDPs), began fleeing from Mannar Island and other areas in Eastern and Northern Sri Lanka, again to India. Although the numbers were small compared to the 1980s' exodus, officials in Tamil Nadu and Madras were concerned that the constant trickle of refugees arriving from Northern Sri Lanka could escalate problems at any time.\(^{64}\) Again, from September 1996 refugee exodus started taking place and by the end of February 1997, some 7,500 Sri Lankan refugees had left for India from Sri Lanka.\(^{65}\) Most of these refugees were crossing over to India for the second or third time, but the flow is substantially slower than expected. This is because of the heavy patrolling of the Indian and Sri Lankan army and coastguard who were moving over the waters to check illegal movements of any elements and

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\(^{64}\) *The Dinamalar*, (Madras) 12th August 1996.

they acted as a deterrent to the movement of refugees. The Indian authorities took immediate action whenever they found any unauthorised vessel started moving in Indian waters. The LTTE which according to Indian officials had been an active participant in encouraging such movements and clashes between Indian coast guard vessels and the Tamils who were aggressively infiltrating into the Tamil soil. This was done by the LTTE to draw the attention of the international community to the serious situation in Sri Lanka. Also the LTTE seized the boats from the local fishermen adding to the short supply of boats by which the refugee could travel. This they did to increase the traumatic condition and miseries of the Tamil refugees who fled from Sri Lanka in order to escape from the jaws of the LTTE who had always been intent on converting the Tamils as militant groups to fight against the Sri Lankan government for their set goal. At the same time, the UNHCR had also kept open the Open Relief Centres in Sri Lanka so that the displaced persons would not flee to India for lack of food and basic needs. This was the pitiable condition of the Sri Lankan Tamils during the period 1996-2000.

CHAPTER – IV

SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF SRI LANKAN REFUGEES IN TAMIL NADU