CHAPTER VI

ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN REFUGEE MANAGEMENT

Since time immemorial men and women of good will had joined forces to campaign for humanitarian causes. Stand taken against slavery by the Quakers in the 17th Century is an early example of the commitment of a group of people for improving the lot of humankind. Today, thousands of Non-Governmental Organisations exist all over the world - both religious and secular. More than 100 organisations all over the world are involved directly or indirectly with refugees. Of these, some focus primarily on working with refugees in the field while others devote most of their energies in playing an equally vital role by advocating their cause.

Modern Non-Governmental Organisation take efforts to influence the policy decisions of the international community by sensitizing public opinion. The news media and political critics are involved in important issues and they react by recommending actions and by exposing failures and defects of certain policies of the government and organisations. Advocacy groups are especially active in matters concerning human rights, sustainable development and environment - all areas that have a direct impact on population movements.
Non-Governmental Organisations had also made important contributions to the promotion, preparation, ratification and implementation of international level norms. The convention on the Rights of the child and the conventions adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro are recent examples of the creation of path breaking international legal structures that have been heavily influenced by the participation of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The NGOs had played similarly a crucial role by helping in the preparation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. In fact, their contribution to international refugee protection can be traced right from the beginning when a group of NGOs, which in 1921, passed the resolutions and presented them to the newly formed League of Nations for the appointment of the first High Commissioner for Refugees.

It is by monitoring the implementation of laws and conventions at the national and international levels that NGO’s make perhaps their greatest impact. Through their presence every where and by their extensive network they have built up a great structure over the years. They had been the primary and often the only independent witness to human rights violations. They had been the indispensable partners in any strategy that had aimed to benefit the human race. Their vigilance over national and international events can provide early warning about potential movements and activate human rights mechanisms. Their
monitoring work on nations of different ethnic groups had forewarned ethnic violence and forewarned refugee problems before refugees were forced to flee and seek international protection. NGO staff had also been frequently taking direct action to halt flagrant human rights abuses – often at considerable personal risk. Their public denunciations of such violations can put considerable pressure on government to take corrective action.

Current vital refugee issues in which NGOs have adopted a combative stance include the battle against racism and xenophobia in industrialised countries, the accompanying erosion of the right to asylum, and the widening gap between the industrialised countries and the impoverished lands. They have also been the most vociferous campaigners on behalf of minority rights everywhere.

Many NGOs can operate unencumbered by the political constraints, which sometimes hamper the policies and actions of intergovernmental organisations and National governments. Taking their constituency for those who are least able to present their own cases, they are the strongest supporters and most vocal critics of international programmes to protect and assist refugees. Both their support and their criticism strengthen the international protection.

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INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

The office and the structure of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is an International Organisation for the welfare of the refugees all over the world. It was created by Resolution 428 (V) of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and began its operations on 1st January 1951. It is a humanitarian and strictly non-political agency devoted to protecting and assisting the refugees. The UNHCR has two main functions and they are:

"to provide "international protection" to refugees and to seek "permanent solutions" for the problems of refugees."

UNHCR has number of predecessors. The following are a few which had been doing a good work in the direction of refugee welfare. In 1921, the Council of the League of Nations appointed Dr. Fridtj of Nansen "High Commissioner on behalf of the League in connection with the problems of Russian refugees in Europe". The League created the International Nansen Office for Refugees in 1931 and the High Commissioner for Refugees for Germany in 1933. In 1943, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was established, and in 1947 the United Nations created the International Refugee Organisation.

In 1953 for the first time the General Assembly reviewed the need to prolong UNHCR’s mandate. Thus, it has been clear that refugee problems
require the continued attention of the United Nations, and UNHCR’s mandate has been renewed every five years. The person whose concern is of great importance to UNHCR is ...

"any person who, owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear and for reasons other than personal convenience, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...".

The prime concern for this refugees are the immediate assistance in the form of food, water, shelter or medical care and the most fundamental need of a refugee is the grant of asylum in other country. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"Every-one has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution".

Based on these fundamentals this International Organisation is spread world wide and are serving the distressed and destitute refugees and displaced persons who are the victims of wars, conflicts, ethnic strife’s etc.

**Experience of UNHCR with Sri Lankan Refugees**

On the Indian shores, the First phase of repatriation took place in June 1991 immediately after the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. As reports of forced repatriation took place, UNHCR and the Indian Government opened discussions on ways to overcome these issues. The UNHCR was critical of forced repatriation.
The UNHCR representative Hasheed Furkhan who visited India had stated that the repatriation did not take place according to an "internationally accepted procedure". As coercion in some camps continued, the Head of UNHCR, Sadako Ogatra took up the issue directly with the Government. Consequently repatriation was suspended for some time in 1991. UNHCR made no comment on the situation existing in Sri Lanka. In a surprise move on 27th July 1992 India signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR so that the organisation could monitor the repatriation of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to Sri Lanka as an International Observer in India. In Sri Lankan soil the UNHCR office was functioning since May 1987 among the 'Internally Displaced People' in Sri Lanka. The prime task of the staff of the UNHCR's was to offer immediate relief and assistance to the 'Internally Displaced People' in the island. By the end of 1991 they had been working to offer aid to the repatriates who landed in the soil of Sri Lanka after the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was signed by both the countries.


The five conditions of UNHCR's operations in India are:

- Ascertaining the willingness of the refugees to return
- The provision of a list of repatriates and complete repatriation forms
- Giving the list of camps in which sample checking is to be done
- Reviewing cases of repatriates who want to postpone their departure or decide to stay in India
- Permitting UNHCR to give the refugees details of assistance the organisation is rendering to those returning to Sri Lanka.

In India, UNHCR's major work has been to see that repatriation was not forced. All those who had signed the returnee forms were interviewed in Transit camps, by UNHCR to ascertain whether the repatriation was forced or voluntary. UNHCR had no access to camps except by invitation. It also had no financial commitment. All financial assistance to the Tamil Nadu State Government for repatriation of the refugees had come from the Government of India.

Before the entry of the UNHCR, the Government of India had repatriated 23,126 persons between 20th January 1992 and 15th May 1992. Indirect coercion did not stop just because UNHCR moved in. It continued in discreet ways, as rations and stipend money became difficult for some refugees to receive in some camps. In others, health programmes were closed down and schools were not allowed to be reopened. On 27th May 1993, when the UNHCR office was operative, the government banned all the NGOs from working in refugee camps in
Tamil Nadu since the Government itself took care to monitor the entire situation.

The presence of UNHCR in India did put a stop to most of the overt use of force in repatriation. Though push factors continued to be used it was noted that only 90 of the 2,983 refugees screened by UNHCR withdrew their applications for repatriation. When UNHCR came in about 19 families that is to say about 68 persons as per a UNHCR report professed that they were being forced to go. In the next few months only a total of 156 were found to have been repatriated under duress. The Madras UNHCR office confirmed in 1997 that 354 in total had refused to go on grounds of forcible repatriation. The UNHCR, which interviewed 70% of later returnees to verify the voluntary nature of return did not as per its record find any 'overt coercion'. It was obvious that some covert measures were being used. Most families who were repatriated in the first phase before the entry of UNHCR were found divided. Some members were forced to go while some were allowed to stay. At the time of UNHCR entry the next phase of the refugees were repatriated on grounds of family reunification. This was a voluntary repatriation. In many camps basic minimum necessities for sustenance were not available and many others left on their own accord. The presence of UNHCR had not

changed the refugee situation for the better as the agency was on a limited mandate. If financial assistance was stopped or education facilities were not restored, the UNHCR was unable to intervene. This was the state of affairs in the late 1990’s in the camps of Tamil Nadu.

The UNHCR stand in 1991 was that conditions were not conducive to return, but after July 1992 when it opened its office in India, this issue was not raised. Its stand at 2000 was that the...

"unsettled situation in Sri Lanka prevents UNHCR from actually promoting repatriation from India, nonetheless the office facilitates the return of those refugees who desire to go back."^{10}

With the existing problems in Sri Lanka and UNHCR’s inability to solve matters in a conflict zone, refugees who had come to India had to stay on as the situation in Tamil Nadu was much better, and there was no use of force any longer. The Repatriation actually started in 1991 and the war had been still on. The war had not stopped since UNHCR’s entry into the repatriation process in 1992. It was intensified in the next year in 1993 as a few Sri Lankan leaders were assassinated. Lalith Athulat Mudali, leader of the Democratic United National Front of Sri Lanka was killed on 23rd April 1993 and on 1st May 1993 President Ranasinghe Premadasa was assassinated while addressing a rally by a suicide bomber. Another

8. Ibid.
suicide bomber also killed Gaimini Dissanayake, leader of the opposition United National Party’s candidate in the 1994 presidential elections. A barbarous attack on the President Smt. Chandrika Kumartunge was yet another condemnable terrorist act. High intensity attacks and counter attacks had continued except in Jaffna where the army had considerably taken command and bombing of the area had finally stopped.11

The UNHCR, the Indian and the Sri Lankan governments were all responsible for exposing the repatriates to the conditions of insecurity. The Indian Government by use of coercion influenced repatriation, the Sri Lankans announced safety when the conditions were not safe and the UNHCR became a party to a process where it could not fulfil its primary mandate of protection after refugees were repatriated to Sri Lanka. The UNHCR in Sri Lanka ignored its fundamental responsibility of protection by diverting repatriates into areas of rehabilitation and resettlement. The Sri Lankan government when it disseminated information through videos about the camps had not been honest. The development of the war in the last five years and large scale bombing only showed that safety could not be guaranteed. The UNHCR refusing to tread into areas of security concern to the Sri Lankan government did not disseminate information regarding security in the areas to which the people were repatriated.

Refugees were also thus ignorant of the situation, which prevailed in the places to which they were determined to go.\(^{12}\)

By May 1995, as per the UNHCR records 51,188 refugees had returned to Sri Lanka from India, leaving 54,746 in camps. 31,062 of these had returned before UNHCR entry. Fifty two percent of these refugees had gone back for reasons of family unification, seventeen percent for reasons of employment and some for educational pursuits. Some gave their reasons, which indicated the bad conditions in Indian camps. About seventy five percent of the refugees who were repatriated since 1991 had been fishermen and labourers. The second was a forced repatriation by dividing families and repatriating some members. Those who followed thus went for reasons of family reunification in Sri Lanka. As employment and educational facilities were withdrawn, many more preferred to go back to their country. The reason given was that they would have to go back to the island country one-day or other and so it was better to take this opportunity. Many young refugees in India, when interviewed said that they were going back to Mannar as more facilities were available in Sri Lanka, while they had been closed down in India.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Ibid p-116.
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION IN TAMIL NADU

ORGANISATION FOR EELAM REFUGEE REHABILITATION

The Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OfERR) was founded in 1984 with the main objective of assisting and rendering relief to Tamil Refugees from Sri Lanka who had taken refuge in India. There were about 1,40,000 refugees in the state of Tamil Nadu in 1998 and 65,000 of them were sheltered in the 135 Refugee camps maintained by the government in various districts of the state. New arrivals since 1998 numbering more than 8,000 had been accommodated in existing camps as well as in the new camps set for the purpose.

The OfERR had been functioning as an organisation with the following objectives - non-profit making, non-political, and service oriented. The Committee of Management of the OfERR had consisted of Indian and Sri Lankan professionals, educationalists and social workers. The Organisation was duly registered on 21st May 1984 under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act No. 27 of 1975. The registration number is 113 of 1984. The organisation had been accorded charitable status under Sec. 12(A) of the Income Tax Act and had received permission from the Home Ministry of India to receive foreign funds for its humanitarian work. The organisation had been permitted to clear donations received in kind for distribution among the refugees from...
abroad free of customs duty. Relief articles thus received and distributed to refugees by the OfERR are handed over to the refugees in the presence of representative of the District Collector who issued a certificate confirming the distribution.

**ORGANISATION BODIES OF OfERR**

OfERR had been functioning from its head office at Third Floor, 31, Sait Colony, 1st Street, Chennai - 600 008, Tamil Nadu, India. (Phone: 044 - 826 10 63). Their services had been extended to all the refugee camps spread all over Tamil Nadu. For better and efficient administration the state was divided into four regions under the control of the Head Office. The four regions were Chennai, Tirunelveli, Erode, and Trichy.

The **Chennai** office had been functioning from the Door No. 31, 11nd Floor, Sait Colony, 1st Street Egmore, Chennai – 600 008 under the leadership of Mr. Anbu Selvaraj. Chennai region had consisted of the districts of Chengalpet, Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur, Vellore, Tiruvannamalai, Cuddalore and Villupuram.

**Tirunelveli** office had been situated at 164, J-6, Pulithevar Nagar, Thalaiyutha Sanbar Nagar (Post) Tirunelveli under the supervision of Thiru. M. Maheswaran. Tirunelveli region had consisted of Virudhunagar, Toottukkudi, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts.
Erode office had functioned at Door No. 37, Annamalai Nagar, Veerappan Chathiram, Erode – 638 004. Coimbatore, Salem, Erode, Dharmapuri and Namakkal districts fall under this region.

The Trichy office had been functioning at No. 21, 2nd Cross Street, Ponnagar, Trichy and Thiru. R. Eswaran had been in charge of this region. This office started functioning since 1990 and it had consisted of Karur, Perambalur, Trichy, Pudukkottai, Sivaganga, Dindugal, Madurai, and Ramanad districts.

NETWORKING OF OFERR WITH OTHER NGO'S

OFERR office had been networking with the other local non-governmental organisations working in the respective regions in aiding the refugee rehabilitation programme in these areas. As it has been already mentioned, the work of the OFERR was divided into four regions – Chennai, Tirunelveli, Erode, Trichy, for the convenience of the execution of the relief and restoration work. Every region had different NGOs working in the local areas contributing their share of service along with the OFERR in the camps. For instance, in Chennai region local NGO’s like Vellore Social Service Society (VSSS) had been working in the district of Tiruvanamalai and Vellore. Chennai Multipurpose Social Service (CMSS) and Red Cross Society had been working in Tiruvallur.

15. Ibid.
district and Pondicherry. Multipurpose Social Service (PMSS) had been working in Cuddalore and Villupuram districts. Apart from these organisations Inter Church Service Agency (ICSA), Church of South India (CSI) and Tamil Nadu Voluntary Health Association (TNVHA) had been associating with the work in Chennai.

In Erode the other NGO’s working along with the OfERR had been Salem Multipurpose Social Service (SMSS), Dharmapuri Multipurpose Social Service (DMSS), Coimbatore Multi Purpose Social Service (CMSS), Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) and local church Organisations. They had been rendering good services to the Sri Lankan refugees by way of distributing essential consumer items to the refugees and helping the repatriation work.

Trichy region had the contribution of the following local NGO’s such as Kumbakonam Multipurpose Social Service (KMSS), Thanjavur Multipurpose Social Service (TMSS), Trichy Multipurpose Social Service (TMSS), Pudukkottai Multipurpose Social Service (PMSS), Dindugal Multipurpose Social Service (DMSS), Madurai Multipurpose Social Service (MMSS), Sivaganga Multipurpose Social Service (SMSS), Jesuit Refugee Service and Tamil Nadu Voluntary Health Association (TNVHA).
Tirunelveli region refugee camps had received aid from the following local NGO’s who had worked along with OfERR and they were Kothari Social Service (KSS), Tootukudi Multipurpose Social Service (TMSS), St. Joseph Church, Tamil Nadu Voluntary Health Association (TNVHA), Jesuit Refugee Service, Tirunelveli Social Service (TSS), Madurai Multipurpose Social Service (MMSS), and a few other Local NGOs of this region.

FUNCTIONS OF OfERR

The Committee of Management of the OfERR had been meeting once a month. At the monthly meetings the working of the Organisation during the month was reviewed, policy decisions were taken and guidelines were given for the formulation and implementation of programmes and for the handling of problems faced by refugees. Minutes of the meetings were duly recorded and approved by the committee. The OfERR had been receiving financial assistance from Non-Governmental Organisations and other Charitable Institutions and Expatriate from Eelam Tamils. The OfERR also received assistance from the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister’s Refugees’ Fund. All such contributions were duly receipted and deposited in the State Bank of various regions.

16. Personal interview with Mr. Natesalingam, Programme Co-ordinator of OfERR in the State, 8th June 2002.
Accounting records of the society were maintained on a daily basis and the accounts were subject to annual audit by a Chartered Accountant. The financial year of the Society was from 1st April to 31st March. All accounts of the Society had been audited up to the end of the financial year 1999-2000. The Accounts and other records of the OfERR were also subject to inspection by representatives of the Registrar of Societies, Tamil Nadu and the officials of the Union Home Ministry. At the last inspection the Registrar reported that the functioning of the Society was satisfactory.

The Organisation had made representations to the State and Central Governments on various problems and matters concerning the refugees. Many of the suggestions made by OfERR on refugee related matters were accepted by the State and Central Governments during the past several years and were duly attended upon for redressal\(^{18}\).

**Activities of OfERR in Providing Basic Needs**

The ongoing activities and services of the OfERR throughout the state of Tamil Nadu in the ‘Refugee Camps’ included many programmes like counselling, educational assistance and medical assistance.

\(^{18}\) Introductory Pamphlet - Published by NGO OfERR, Chennai - 600 006.
1. **Counselling:**

The refugee situation in general had created mental stress and strain among the refugee population. Most of the refugees had arrived after 1990. However since late 1995, more than 16,000 refugees had arrived due to the escalation of the war in Sri Lanka and the massive displacement of people from Jaffna peninsula to Vanni regions. They suffered from problems such as depression, mental strain etc due to the intensified war in the Tamil homeland. OfERR had been providing training in counselling to both volunteers working among the refugees as well as to the refugees residing in Camps regarding:

- Family Re-Union
- Refugee Guidance and Advice
- Programmes to Relieve Stress, Depression and Trauma and to Motivate Refugees
- Sports, Recreation and Reading Room Facilities
- Prevention of Defiant Behaviour

2. **Educational Assistance:**

This organisation had given high priority for Education of the refugee students. They were given different forms of assistance to enable them to pursue their studies in Schools and Colleges. The organisation had been extending the assistance to students not only to develop their knowledge but also to build up a full-fledged society greatly developed in social, political, economic and moral spheres to work as a community to rebuild the shattered Tamil homeland when they were to get back to Sri
Lanka. So the OfERR organisation had been rendering services on the following basis:

- Guidance and advice to refugee students
- Admission to schools, colleges, polytechnics and other educational institutions
- English language coaching
- Adult education
- Special classes to enable students to adapt to Indian curriculum and
- Financial assistance to meet school or college fees, hostel fees and travelling expenses\(^\text{19}\)

The refugee students had an opportunity to pursue Education in General, Technical and Professional courses to develop themselves as Doctors, Engineers, Technical Officers, Teachers, Skilled Technical workers etc. Over the years many students had developed their skills and they had also made use of all opportunities made available to them for their survival and upliftment. They were keen in developing themselves in all spheres since they felt that their development would help their land in a great way.

**School Education**

Nursery Schools in many parts of this country had been playing a notable role in the field of primary education. They lay a sound foundation for the children at the very young age for their mental development. Tamil Nadu government had taken efforts to establish

\(^{19}\) Personal interview with 'Muniswam S.N.S', incharge of Education Affairs, OfERR Office, Chennai, 10\(^{th}\) June 2002.
nursery schools almost in every camp to offer educational services to the
refugee children. Accordingly Nursery Schools had been established in
all the camps with teachers sufficiently trained to teach children at
Nursery levels. Some times volunteers in the camps also rendered the
services of teaching to the children. Local NGOs and the Jesuit Services
had also trained these volunteers periodically to make them competent
teachers. By this method the children were benefited by the periodical
coaching and training by the volunteers. The volunteers too were
benefited by the training given to them in teaching by the experienced
teachers. These teaching programmes by volunteers were monitored
periodically for better results. The children of the weaker sections of the
refugees, who came from remote areas of the island country where
educational facilities were not adequate had the benefit not only of pre-
school education in the camps but also had the opportunity to pursue later
the college education in India.

Volunteers in the camps had also conducted coaching classes and
language classes apart from the nursery programme. One of the areas
where the refugees had suffered a setback earlier had been in the field of
education. But this Programme had given them enough opportunities to
get over that difficulty. Also the refugees in the category of the weaker
sections had been able to improve their standard of education while living
in the camps as refugees. Further, the girl children were generally not
permitted to pursue education at schools and they were to stay at home and help the parents. However, this programme had helped the girl children to break such barriers. In fact, this programme of education introduced by Government of Tamil Nadu had greatly helped the refugee children in the camps.

Financial and other assistance had also been given to the students who have to travel by bus to school. They were given bus pass concessions which were in fact, made available to all the students of Tamil Nadu. Since the students were required to obtain photo identity cards for obtaining the bus passes, the refugee students were specially assisted for this purpose since they belonged to a different country. Till the receipt of the bus passes by the refugee students the travel expenses were borne by the Organisations for Eclam Refugee Rehabilitation.

Stationary Items relating to their studies were also supplied to the Students. Notebooks, writing materials and instruments were offered to them free of charge. Other like-minded NGO's also participated in the issue of free notebooks to the refugee students.

There were Student Forums set up in the camps with the help of the active and motivated student groups. Student Forums were organised and had been functioning in almost all the Refugees camps. The Members of the students Forum were the students attending 1st to 12th standard in schools. They had generally conducted monthly meetings and they
reported their activities to the OfERR's respective Regional Offices. These reports were shared at the monthly educational review meeting held in the Head Office premises in which volunteers in charge of education in the Regional Offices also participated. Activities included programmes to develop skills of the students in public speaking, writing articles, acting in dramas etc., Their prime task in the camps was to ensure that no child neglected his or her education and to persuade dropouts to return to school. The students were encouraged to take part in social service activities in the camps and they were also provided with sports materials for their recreation.

District Forums for College Students were set up in all the districts where camps were situated. The students held monthly get-together meetings and sent their reports to the regional offices about their activities and progress in education. The regional office responded by giving suggestions and comments for their further development. The students also organised themselves at district level to co-ordinate with OfERR to enable the organisation to conduct coaching and tuition classes in camps for all refugee students. Assistance was also given every now and then to refugee students studying in 9th to 12th standard to pay the school fees, book fees and exam fees.

## Assistance to 9th to 12th Standard Students

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>School Fees</th>
<th>Book Fees</th>
<th>Exam Fees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th Standard</td>
<td>100/-</td>
<td>82/-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Standard</td>
<td>125/-</td>
<td>112/-</td>
<td>57/-</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th Standard</td>
<td>167/-</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th Standard</td>
<td>175/-</td>
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School going students from 1st standard to 8th standard had been enjoying free education in all Government schools. However, they were to pay bus fare for the first two months to travel by bus from the camps to the nearest schools. This was due to some official bottleneck and administrative procedures. After two months the Government of Tamil Nadu had issued to the students the school concession passes. However, OfERR had come forward to help the school children by paying the travel money for the first two months and the refugee students managed to get over this difficulty.

### Higher Education

OfERR had laid emphasis on the importance of education to the refugee students every now and then. It had always asserted that only education and skills training would enable the refugees to go back to their homeland and gainfully employ themselves and partake in the re-building
efforts of their shattered homeland. Particularly higher education was more insisted by this organisation since it wanted to develop the refugee youths to come off well in their career. Most of the refugee students in the camps were from economically weaker sections of the Tamil population. In addition, there were also students living outside the camps whose parents and guardians cannot afford the cost of higher education. They were also assisted financially by the organisation.

A significant factor in the assistance provided to the students had been the awareness and motivation created in them by the organisation’s volunteers who insisted that the refugee students should also share their time in providing services to their fellow brethren. The students who completed the 12th standard examination were given the counselling opportunities to familiarise themselves with the procedures to apply and gain admission in the Arts and Science Colleges and in Professional Courses. A further counselling session was conducted after the results of the 12th standard examination were published. At this counselling, pieces of advice and suggestions were given to students depending on their eligibility and the courses they could select. Assistance up to Rs. 2000/- per student was granted as advance for the payment of college fees on admission. After the admissions were completed, the college students were assisted further with the term fees, special fees, examination fees, book fees, hostel fees, and travelling expenses for one way for 26 days
per month. The reimbursement of the cost of books purchased will be only up to a limit of Rs. 350/- and hostel fees up to Rs. 400/- per month. The students were encouraged to use the library facilities in the colleges and educational institutions. The above fees were paid according to the actual needs of the students supported by receipts issued by the colleges. The college students who received the financial assistance were expected to come forward to do social work\textsuperscript{21}. This was insisted by the organisations since they wanted that all refugees must be benefited by such a kind of social work by the youth for their fellow brethren. The kind of social work that the students were involved were as follows:

a) \textit{Shramadhana work in the camp}: This involves helping the old people living in the camp by taking care of them, giving them bath and cleaning their clothes, feeding them, at specified times and taking them once in a month to some places of interest for their relaxation.

b) \textit{Teaching at the Tuition Centre}: This is part of the social service offered by the college students to teach the school going students in the camp. In fact, this had helped the refugee children to a great extent and the refugees were very much relieved of their worries about their children's future.

\textsuperscript{21} Personal interview with '\textit{S.N.N. Murugasam}', incharge of Education Affairs, OFERR Office, Chennai, 10\textsuperscript{th} June 2002.
c) **Formation of Students Forum:** This was formed for ensuring effective functioning of the programme of the youth and for the improvement of the students in all spheres.

d) **Forming District College Students Forum:** Students forum were set up at district level also for the effective functioning of programmes by the youth. All the students who received financial aid from OfERR formed a network and with their fellow refugees they started working for the welfare of the refugees so that the entire refugee groups could be benefited. It is by these efforts that the distress and demoralised conditions of the refugees were removed to a greater extent.

### 3. **MEDICAL ASSISTANCE:**

There were also Medical Programme which provided the medical services to the refugees in the camps as well as to other Sri Lankan Tamils requiring such assistance but living outside the camps. The refugees were taken care of by the Medical Team of the OfERR periodically and this health care by the Non-Governmental Organisation received commendation from government and other private agencies. The medical services were offered to the refugees under various measures.

**Free Medical Advice and Supply of Medicines:** Medical clinics were functioning from the regional offices in Trichy, Tirunelveli and Erode. The camp health workers were the main providers of health...
services to the refugees in the camps. Their services were made available to the refugees whenever they approached the clinics.

*Clinical Laboratory Service:* The central medical unit in Chennai controlled the complete medical supply stores. Medicines were stored in the central store and were distributed according to the requirements and the needs of the regional outlets. Medicines were provided free of cost for the needy refugees in the camp. Whenever refugee patients required hospitalised treatment they were assisted by the camp health workers. Education on health, nutrition, sanitation and on personal hygiene had been imparted to all the refugees. Special attention was given to pregnant women and lactating mothers. The importance attached to immunization was also stressed in all the camp meetings by the medical experts and health service officials.

*Health Workers Programme:* OfERR had arranged for imparting training to the refugees who were interested to undertake health services among their fellow refugees. This was called Health Workers Programme. These health workers were trained in basic hygiene, health practices, first aid and preventive community medicine. They were given 21 days training in 3 to 4 day slots at the primary level and 40 days at the intermediary level. They cannot stay outside the camp for long periods, as it would attract penalties from the camp authorities. Health Workers were provided with basic medicines including first aid. They also maintained
records of medicines given to the patients. They provided camp residents with information and advised them on a variety of health issues. They had ensured that sanitary conditions in the camps were well maintained, always assisted sick refugee patients to seek medical services without any difficulty and maintained growth charts of the children and monitored their welfare in the camps.

Supplementary assistance for hospitalised patients and to patients undergone de-addiction treatment: Refugees who required hospitalised treatment for a considerable period were given assistance to meet the medical expenses during their hospitalised treatment. The OfERR reimbursed travel and the expenses for the purchase of essential medicines. The community based rehabilitation work continued to function in some of the refugee camps coming under Erode and Tirunelveli regions. Under this programme some of the patients were also referred to the Spastic Society for specialised treatment. In general, the medical attention given and services offered to the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in the camps by the OfERR was a laudable work.

4. Special Programmes For Women And Children:

It is to be pointed out here that OfERR had taken good efforts in improving the wellbeing of the women and children in the refugee camps.

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22. Personal Interview with practicing 'Dr. Poonsukudran', who has completed till fourth year of his Medical course in Sri Lanka, now practices in OfERR since 1991, 10th June 2002.
since they were susceptible to various health hazards. It had not only provided medical attention on them but also supplied them with considerable amount of nutrition. Particularly, it took much care on pregnant women, lactating mothers and children, while at the same time taking efforts for women's empowerment and for providing essential education to children. In order to improve the health of the children it had taken effective steps. The Nutritional Supplement Programme for Children up to 5 years of age was started with this objective in the year 1995-96. The Nutritional Enhancement programme included the supply of supplementary food prepared from local hybrid variety of grains for these children. This food was also provided to the pregnant women and lactating mothers and to those with chronic illness requiring additional food supplementation. Women's Centres where Motivation Programmes for Women were proposed also helped them and monitored on the participation of the women in the camps in these programmes.

5. TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING:

OfERR had offered further services also. Particularly, the technical and the vocational training given by the organisation to the refugees helped them greatly. It had offered many kinds of training.

Practical In-Service Training to Health Workers: This programme was implemented by identifying and selecting suitable persons for implementing health programmes. They were provided with basic
training in health programmes. The training enabled them to carry on preventive health activities and to respond to basic health problems of the refugees by administering medicines for common ailments. At the conclusion of the training they were to sit for a written and viva voce examination which was introduced to test their knowledge and skills.

Training in Carpentry, Masonry and Electrical work: The refugees were also given training in various essential fields of human activity. This was given to them to develop themselves in several arts and crafts and to make them self-reliant in their homeland on their return. The important fields chosen for this purpose were carpentry, masonry and electrical work in which they improved themselves greatly.

Nursery Teachers Training Programme: The Nursery teachers always play an important role in shaping the younger children in any part of the world. In India they had been doing a laudable work. Hence, to shape the refugee children, efforts were taken by the Non-Governmental Organisations during the period under review to take care of the children and to enable them to get the necessary foundation for their basic school career. A few Non-Governmental Organisations and OfERR had provided necessary training for the Nursery teachers to acquire skills and to shape the children in the right way.

Training in Poultry Keeping: This is another training in the field of poultry keeping which was given to refugees in batches. Each batch
consisted of 25 participants. Training was given both in the Nellai regional office premises and in Chennai at OfERR Nallayan Research Centre for sustainable development among the refugees. Poultry keeping was considered feasible and profitable, as no other livestock could be kept in the limited space available in the refugee camps.

**Communication and Leadership Training:** This Programme enabled the volunteers working among the refugees to acquire skills in communication and leadership and enabled them to acquitted themselves creditably. Also, this programme made the camp social workers to be better equipped with essential skills to cope with the situation and solve the problems facing them. The training not only helped the social workers to seek solutions to varied kinds of problems of the refugees but also provided and enabled the social workers to become experts in service activities. In fact, these programmes greatly helped the refugees to face any type of problems in the alien land. In order to offer more help to the refugees the OfERR organisation published a book on communication and leadership and this was fully edited by Rev. Fr. Dr. Elias in Tamil. The English translation of the title is “The Power to overcome the world is within you” and the title of the book is English is “The you in you”.

**Sewing and Tailoring:** Refugees who were keen on developing advanced skills in tailoring were identified, selected and provided training in tailoring to take over the responsibilities as Tailoring Instructors and to
equip themselves to serve in readymade garment units. In fact, these training and skills made the refugees to stand in good stead and infused in them confidence and courage to face any problems in their daily life.

**Computerisation Programme of OfERR:** Computer Facilities were utilised by OfERR as a modernised procedure for various kinds of their work. They were:

- Financial accounting.
- Storing Medicine Stock and refugee camp population Statistics
- Preserving Reports and information about the activities of the organisation
- Maintaining Statistics of programme implementation and the beneficiaries and particulars of garments and stocks manufactured for sale and records of sale proceeds

6. **Income Generating Activities:**

OfERR had introduced various profitable activities for the refugees. Particularly, the income generation programme helped the refugees, who were solely dependent on the dole, which was insufficient to meet even their basic needs. Therefore to meet their needs they had to find an employment or take part in the income generation programmes. Refugees in the camps were helped to seek employment by this organisation by several ways. They were provided with equipment like crow-bars, pick axes and other such tools for taking up employment of their choice. OfERR also helped the refugee groups to set up their own shops of various kinds within the camps. Small-scale loans were also
given to them who showed skills in running small shops. They were also given training to enable themselves to manage their small businesses effectively and profitably.  

7. Supply Of Materials To Camp Refugees:

The Government of India and other foreign agencies had provided various materials to the refugees to carry on their activities in this land. Several individuals also out of sympathy and with the objective of social service sent materials to be distributed among the camp refugees who were really destitutes and distressed. This task was taken up by the OfERR and in the presence of the government officials they were distributed in the camps. For this the Government of Tamil Nadu awarded a Certificate of Merit to this model agency. The OfERR had distributed all essential materials including clothes, mats or bed sheets, cooking utensils, stoves, pots and buckets to the refugees living in camps to make them feel at home in this land.

8. Assistance To Returnees:

Few of the refugees from the camps wanted to proceed to other countries on students’ visa or on employment visa or for getting married to foreign citizens or for visiting a relative. Some of them were interested to return to Sri Lanka to join their family which stayed there itself during

24. Personal interview with ‘Sam Kail Pillai’, Senior Volunteer & Consultant to OfERR working since 1984, 10th March 2002.
the ethnic troubles. On all these accounts the office in Chennai helped the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees for their travel to the place of choice. This office helped them to leave Tamil Nadu by taking each case with meticulous care. All facilities and assistance were provided to these refugees and they were sent to the places of their choice as per the rules and regulations.

9. Refugee Resettlement Service of OfERR:

Advocating support to the refugees, creating awareness among the people all over about the plight of the refugees and offering protection to the refugees were the prime objectives of the OfERR. In fact, such objectives made the government officials, leaders in the Government of Tamil Nadu and in the Union Government to discuss and find suitable solutions to the problems of the refugees. Further, the officials and the political leaders were regularly given information about the condition of the refugees in Tamil Nadu and the political situation in Sri Lanka and particularly the ground situation in the North-eastern part of Sri Lanka, which was the hot-bed of ethnic violence.

Further more, there had been a steady inflow of Tamil refugees to Tamil Nadu since 1990's. The Advocacy and awareness programme helped in ensuring that the government officials and political leaders

25. Personal interview with 'Kuralashingham', senior voluntary & Chief Counsellor for the refugees in OfERR, wants to leave this land, 5th March 2002.
continued their sympathetic disposition towards the refugees who arrived earlier in 1980’s and to the new refugees who were arriving from Sri Lanka during 1990s. The OfERR’s advocacy programme took the lead in co-ordination with the other Non-Governmental Organisations to meet the officials concerned in the Tamil Nadu government and in the Centre to allow NGO’s to work directly in the camps²⁶.

**Communication- Co-ordination:** Co-ordination of multifarious programmes had been an important function of the OfERR organisation. The effective functioning of this organisation depends on the cooperation of all units of OfERR both at the administrative and field level. Communication aspect is also important since information on the refugee services is to be communicated effectively to partner agencies, like NGOs, Human Rights organisations and political leaders and government officials. The objective is to improve the quality of life in the refugee camps in the following methods:

- Construction of temporary sheds for community activities.
- Motivating and assisting refugees in repairing their habitations.
- Repairing of toilets and erection of enclosures around them.
- Repairing existing bore-well pumps.
- Electrical Repairs
- Provision of grinding stones
- Assisting refugees with travel and subsistence allowances when travelling for official purposes
- Distributing relief supplies received from individuals and other NGOs

Awareness building on Environment Protection and the use of renewable energy

**Main objectives:** Certain objectives were set by the organisation to help the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees to develop confidence by themselves, and to make them self-reliant. The members of OfERR also believed that their training would help them to get employment of their choice and that would also help them to rebuild their homeland on their arrival there. Over a period of 3 years in the late 1990s the organisation had created an awareness among them, motivated them and organised them to form the Ceylon Tamil Refugees welfare Association who were in the camps of Tamil Nadu. This NGO with International connection throughout the world became the sympathiser, protector, and espouser of the cause of about 70,000 refugees living in the camps of Tamil Nadu.

The main work for them in this regard was to concentrate on the well being of the refugees based on the aspects given below:

- Availability of funds in the camps through savings schemes
- Income level of women
- Improvement in women's participation in decision making process
- Functioning of day care centres
- Reduction in the work load of women
- Community or Association which had been taking care of persons with disability
- Participation of elders and other marginalised groups in camp activities
- Increase in counselling activities in the camps and at the regional Centres.
- Cases of suicide, dismemberment of families, child marriages etc.,
- Improvement in the public support in India and political climate for refugees in Sri Lanka
**Functioning of camp committees:** Democratic and transparent functioning of camp committees had been the feature in most of the camps in Tamil Nadu. Formation and active functioning of women's committees had been another feature in the camps. Improvement in the leadership qualities of the camp leaders had also been apparent. Improvements in the co-ordination of refugee services of NGOs were made through Personal interviews with the refugees and the coordinators. Case studies by group of experts were considered as the ideal method for improving the condition of the refugees. In addition to the Camp Committee Reports, Camp Animations Reports, Counsellors Reports, Local and International media coverage, Women's Group Records, Savings Registers, Counsellors Registers at the Regional Office, Reports of Camp animators and District supervisors were taken into account for eliciting information and for decision making. Due to the efficiency of the management of the camps, some camps were reorganised and set up in different convenient places by the officials of the Government of Tamil Nadu. During such periods of changes the OIERR requested the authorities not to displace them to another place till the completion of their project period set for the refugees. During the Project period the government authorities did not make any attempt to prevent the NGO member to get into the camps for service activities. Also, the Camp and
Women Committees were allowed to function freely and democratically by the authorities since they wanted the refugees to enjoy their full rights as refugees.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{International Contribution Received by OfERR}

Office of the Organisation for Eelam Refugees and Rehabilitation with the aid of modern technology had launched a website in the internet: www.oferr.org, which made an open campaign for the well being of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in the camps of Tamil Nadu. They appealed to the Sri Lankan Tamils and philanthropists living in the western countries to contribute liberally for the cause of these refugees and for the education of the young children and youth living in the camps in Tamil Nadu and for buying the products manufactured by the refugees living in Tamil Nadu. The caption for these programmes was ‘Undergraduate Scholarship Fund’ and ‘Women Empowerment’.

\textbf{Women Empowerment:} OfERR operates a group called 'OfERR Garments'. This unit had been offering training and then employing refugee women in the production and sale of clothing items for the wider public. The output of this unit had included, Sarcees, blouses, other Ladies garments like Skirts, Churidhar sets, Nighties, and gowns and Children's

\textsuperscript{27} Information Bulletin, OfERR Chennai, 2000.
dresses. These high quality items had been sold at reasonable prices in international currency. For example, a lined saree blouse had been sold for US$3.00 (excluding postal charges) and an un-lined saree blouse for US$2.00 (excluding postal charges). The benefits from this sale of product and the contributions received were really significant for the women refugees. This income was a great addition to the primarily "dole-based" family income of the refugees. It also helped the refugee children to receive adequate nutrition. Further, women employed through OfERR garments manufacturing centres were provided with all facilities and they became almost self-sufficient. Also, this kind of employment made them not to resort to other types of employment for which they were not accustomed to. There were also other avenues for employment. But they were mostly employment based on hard labour like construction labour, Brick kiln labour and agricultural labour. In this way they avoid resorting to overseas employment at the cost of being away from their children. The OfERR organisation had been successfully running this unit in the Chennai office premises since 1995.

_Tertiary Students' Assistance:_ As mentioned above, OfERR with the assistance and permission of the Tamil Nadu state government had been able to secure a restricted number of "places" at universities for promising young refugees to undertake tertiary education in fields like Medicine, Engineering, Commerce, Arts, Agriculture etc. These students like other
refugees had been residing in various camps of Tamil Nadu. They belonged to the families, which had very low income. The refugee students also struggled to complete their education, travelling long distances and had poor facilities for studies at home. Some of the students were orphans and fend for themselves with the assistance received from OiERR. This kind of financial assistance to undertake studies as well as the valuable support from the organisation in the form of motivation enabled the refugee students to pursue educational activity.

Further, they were also able to acquire jobs of their choice either in Tamil Nadu or in overseas countries. Many philanthropists had been contributing to the cause of the refugees through the OiERR for the benefit of the refugees. The contributions had been significant for these promising young refugees. The financial assistance opened doors to enormous opportunities to the young refugees both in Sri Lanka and in Tamil Nadu. In fact, the refugee youths were given training in various programmes. They were educated with various information and ideas. They were also made to learn new skills to attain professional expertise. Further, the young refugee students were also provided with essential facilities for improving their natural skills and for utilising their time and energies for their intellectual growth.
In this way, right from the young age the Sri Lankan Tamil refugee students were given encouragement in all useful ways. The Government of Tamil Nadu had been of the opinion that it was this kind of training that would help the youth in rebuilding their native land which they left about twenty years back.

*Under-Graduate Scholarship Fund:* Another, funding scheme for the refugee students was Under-Graduate Scholarship Fund. This was mainly introduced to educate the youth at least up to graduate level since a Degree had been insisted for a job in many of the organisations. The average cost of supporting one student is US $144 per year and $12 per month. The campaign had been on the principle that "There is nothing without education". The refugee students, who had regularly interacted with other OfERR volunteers echoed the sentiments expressed by a student who stated as follows:

"we have to face a future that will involve rebuilding our home country; so education is most important".

The cost of education varied according to the field of study. But in general it was approximately US$ 12 per month for a student. The students were in need of the financial assistance for a period of 3 years in order to enable themselves to complete their Under-Graduate Degree and so they wanted the Non-Governmental Organisation to take it as a commitment. The OfERR had been providing all kinds of information to
students in respect of their education and encouraging the sharing of experiences with the experts in different fields. For just US $12 per month the contributor had provided education to the youth which had given him confidence in life. Kalistran, the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee had much gratitude for the organisation, the OfERR. It is also to be pointed out here that certain Nationalised Banks had also come forward to help the Sri Lankan students on the request of the Non-Governmental Organisation in lending loans and disbursing money from the accounts of these organisations.

The Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation (OfERR) was founded in 1984 with main objectives of giving assistance and rendering relief to Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka who had taken refuge in India. There were more than 1,00,000 refugees living in the Indian State of Tamil Nadu. 60,000 of them were sheltered in the 116 refugee camps run by the government scattered in many parts of the state during 1996 - 1997. New arrival of refugees since 1998 amounted to more than 8000 who had also been accommodated in the existing camps as well as in new camps set up for this purpose. Many drawbacks and distress conditions in the host country did not deter the Sri Lankan refugees from improving themselves. The Tamil refugees had really made significant improvements in their life during the period of their residence in Tamil Nadu.
Achievements of OfERR: By the end of the year 2000 there were around 500 students from the refugee camps pursuing higher education in universities all over Tamil Nadu. This was a great improvement from just 149 students 4 years earlier. This achievement had been possible because the OfERR had been able to train the youth properly and motivate and assist financially these students. Expenses for the purchase of books and for travel and other related items were mostly borne by this organisation. The students and their parents from the refugee camps did not have much resource to meet the expenses for higher educational pursuits. So OfERR had to help them with financial assistance according to the needs. In return for this assistance, the students were insisted to help other refugee students in the camp studying in lower classes by way of coaching them for passing the final examinations. This program thus encouraged many refugee children to acquire skills and knowledge by this coaching and to perform better and qualify themselves to enter the university and other institutions of higher learning.

However, the number of students wishing to complete their university education had currently exceeded the limit and the funds were inadequate to meet this demand. Consequently, the OfERR had been trying to establish contacts with the wealthy Sri Lankan Tamils in the western countries. The object of the organisation had been to contact them and collect from them the necessary funds by their appeals to help
the refugees in Tamil Nadu. The OfERR informed them through the website that the Eelam Tamil students after having acquired the necessary education and skills in the host country of India would go back to their homeland after a just and lasting solution was found. Till that time, offering education to them would be a useful exercise training them in the right line to face challenges in their homeland. The web information gave all details of how they could be a donor in this humanitarian cause 28.

**FRIENDS OF OFERR (ORGANIZATION FOR EELAM REFUGEE REHABILITATION)**

Another subsidiary organisation, “The Friends of OfERR” had also done a good work in the task of helping the Sri Lankan refugee youths to pursue their work without any disruption. This organization had collected the funds from donors and transmitted them to OfERR in bulk. Friends of OfERR had been a voluntary organization based in the USA and it had been carrying on its service activities to promote the work of OfERR. It had dedicated itself to the work of assisting Sri-Lankan Tamil Refugees in India. It must be pointed out here that it is an organisation of the refugees by the refugees and for the refugees. It had also been a dedicated organisation for the improvement of the lives of the refugees living in the refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. It is in fact, an important member of the Refugee Relief Organization. The contributions to Friends of OfERR had been exempted from Income Tax in the USA. The bank account of

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Friends of OfERR had been maintained at the California Bank and Trust in the Antelope Valley in USA. Friends of OfERR had been functioning from 43847 North Heaton Avenue, Suite B, Lancaster, CA 93534. The Governing Body members of Friends of OfERR till 2000 were C. Pathmarajah M.D., K. Arulanathan M.D., W. Harichandran, Sharmini Kumar, S.E. Moorthy M.D., Raji Satchi, Luxmi Sivalingam, Meera Pathmarajah, T. Sivakumar, S.N. Navabalachandran-MD. These members had been doing a good work in Tamil Nadu to help the Sri Lankan refugees to come out of their distress and to improve themselves in all essential activities.\textsuperscript{29}

Thus, the non-governmental organisations had also been serving the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in a great way. Their services had been undoubtedly significant and no way inferior to that of the government. On certain occasions, the government had many procedural formalities to fulfil before implementing any beneficial programme for the betterment of the refugees. For instance, programmes involving financial funding needed official sanction and concurrence from many Departments of the Government. Further, bureaucratic procedures caused much delay to the welfare schemes and the benefits did not reach the refugees timely and adequately. But the non-governmental organisations had no such rigid formalities to follow nor bureaucratic deadlocks to face.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
with. However, the government had imposed a few restrictions on them due to the sensitivity of the refugee issues. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi had actually aggravated the situation and it was suspected that a few associates of the assassins were given shelter in the refugee camps by the refugees themselves. This situation had compelled the government to tighten the security measures around the refugee camps and to keep a strict vigilance over there. As a result, the non-governmental organisations could not have much access to the refugee camps to render their services.

Yet, with their noble objectives, steadfast will and local and foreign funds they had been offering devoted services to the distressed Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in a substantial way. It is no denial of the fact that the government had been helping the refugees considerably. But the government alone, as it had been already pointed out, could not meet all the requirements of the refugees like financial assistance to professional and higher education and employment to the refugees. It is in such a situation that the non-governmental organisations had stepped in to offer their devoted services to the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees.
CONCLUSION
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In the Post-Independence period, India had been witnessing the influx of refugees from its neighbouring countries. Refugees from Burma, Tibet, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, who were confronted with dangerous situations in their native land had to flee to India since they found India a safe asylum for their survival. India had been a haven for these refugees and once conditions returned to normalcy in their countries they returned to their native countries. During their refuge in India they were very well looked after by the Government of India. Food, clothing and shelter had been given to them and measures were taken to ameliorate their condition and for their general welfare.

The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who had fled from their country due to the ethnic violence, took refuge in India, Tamil Nadu in particular since 1983. They were the people who had taken shelter in Tamil Nadu and were given all support and assistance by the Government of India as well as Tamil Nadu. These Sri Lankan Tamils are the descendents of the early Tamil settlers who had migrated to Sri Lanka during the 11th and 12th centuries of the Christian era. Few of the refugees are the great grand children of the plantation labour who had gone over to the island country to eke out their livelihood during the nineteenth century. The Tamils who had settled there
in Sri Lanka flourished well in their commercial and other enterprising activities. In fact, they began to occupy a preponderant position in Sri Lanka by passage of time. Particularly from the later years of 19th century they began to show their domination in various spheres of human activity in Sri Lanka. This caused concern and resentment among the native Sri Lankans. For some time they were patiently tolerating such a dominance. But in course of time their feeling found expressions through open protests and attacks on the Tamils. In fact, from the middle of the 20th century passions rose high and both these groups, the Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese – the native Sri Lankans began to clash with each other. But many moderate Sinhalese wanted to be docile over these developments.

However, some radical Sinhalese leaders who had held dominant positions in governmental and in political affairs started taking up the cause of the Sinhalese. Also the ‘Sinhala Only Policy’ adopted by the Government of Sri Lanka discriminated the Sri Lankan Tamils in all affairs of the State. This had aggravated the situation in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Tamils were eliminated from many of the powerful positions of the state. This situation resulted in the emergence of militant organisations like LTTE and EROS in Sri Lanka. These organisations wanted to fight tooth and nail to establish their position in Sri Lanka. This ultimately led to ethnic violence, genocide
and large-scale disturbances in many parts of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Tamils and Sinhalese took up arms and fell victims due to this violence and the Sinhalese army also started assaults on the Tamils. The world community had to silently witness the situation though occasionally taking some steps to contain the violence.

It was under these circumstances that the Sri Lankan Tamils fled from their habitations situated in eastern and northeastern parts of Sri Lanka. Whatever mode of conveyance was available that was taken hold of by the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees. Some hired boats to reach Tamil Nadu. Some swam to the shores of Tamil Nadu and some took up the transport catamarans. These distressed Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees reached Tamil Nadu with the hope of getting a safe asylum with the help of the Governments at the Center and Tamil Nadu State.

The three categories of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees namely Camp Refugees, Non-Camp Refugees and the Special Camp Refugees were given asylum and were taken care of by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the orders of the Government of India. While the first two categories were given normal attention, the third category of refugees namely the Special Camp Refugees were given special attention and were watched vigilantly due to their alleged association with Sri Lankan Tamil terrorist groups. The
vigilance over them increased in course of time when Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India, was assassinated by LTTE terrorist group. The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who were involved in criminal cases and the suspects were also included in the group of Special Camp Refugees and were subjected to constant vigilance. The Non-Camp Refugees living outside the camps were not given serious attention by the officials of the Government of Tamil Nadu because these refugees were not interested to claim any financial assistance from the Government. They wanted only the status of refugees for getting educational opportunities in Tamil Nadu for furthering their interests. It is to be pointed out here that the camp refugees alone were people who were getting the support of the Government and they were beneficiaries of the Government welfare measures.

The Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees came in three batches. The first one was from 24th July 1983, second one was from 25th August 1989 and the third was from 31st July 1996. After the signing of the Indo Sri Lankan Accord the first repatriation work started in 1987 with the first set of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees had been safely sent back to Sri Lanka. The second stage of repatriation work started in 1991 and had been continuing since then.
During the period of their residence in Tamil Nadu the camp refugees were well taken care of. Food and consumer items were periodically distributed to them through rationing system. Shelters were provided to them in various districts of Tamil Nadu. Complete protection was given to them by Government and Police officials. Care was taken by the officials of Tamil Nadu Government to make them feel at home in the period of their residence in Tamil Nadu. It was a laudable work of the Government of Tamil Nadu during the period from 1983.

As per the Government estimates the total number of the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees were about 64,950 during the year 2000. It was about 1,83,000 during the 1980s. In the beginning these refugees were accommodated in about 187 camps. But by the end of 2000 after repatriation there were about 129 camps. The refugees led a peaceful life in the camps. Most of them felt that they were living in their homes away from their native places. Their social life was almost similar to their life at Sri Lankan homeland. Yet, some of the refugees have many grievances in respect of their lives in the camps. It is because of the restrictions imposed by the Government on their movement. Due to security reasons the refugees were not allowed to move outside their camps without proper reasons. Those who had been working outside the camp for their livelihood had to seek the
permission. Though they had been moving with the local people in order to have interaction with them they had always been under serious watch.

Many of the refugees after their settlement in different camps in Tamil Nadu had began to adopt some of the habits and practices of the local people. Most of these refugees because of the association with the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka had adopted few of the practices of the Sinhalese. So their lifestyle had been the mixture of the Sinhalese and Tamil Culture. But due to the long stay in the camps in Tamil Nadu they have assimilated some of the practices of the local Tamils particularly, the dressing and food habits and some of the aspects of the performance of certain religious and cultural functions. Many of the refugees had also gone for employment out side the camps. They worked in building construction sites, brick kiln industries, garment factories, agricultural farms and in some allied activities. Some engaged themselves as auto-rickshaw drivers, fruit and vegetable vendors and sellers of fish, flowers and other consumer articles. A few were engaged in stationery shops and fancy articles shops.

Some of the refugees who had a fascination for political activities had joined the local party organisations. At the time of elections with the help of the community heads ‘Talaivars’ they had canvassed for the candidates also. Women refugees in the camp were also very much enterprising. They were
bold enough to carry on their activities independently. There were women
headed families also in which women decided many of the domestic
proposals and activities. Some of the women employed themselves as
coolies for daily wages. A few procured catches near the shores and sold
them in the nearby markets. In this way many of the women refugees
became self-reliant in the camps. It is to be pointed out here that the camp
life had made them more enterprising and self-reliant.

The Government of Tamil Nadu under the guidance of the
Government of India had been taking care of the refugees to a great extent.
Inspite of many difficulties the officials were able to attend to the grievances
of the refugees very well. Right from the day of their arrival to the shores of
Tamil Nadu their interest was taken care of notably. They have been
accommodated in camps situated in different districts of Tamil Nadu. They
were given shelter, food and other essential necessities every now and then.
The officials also took care to give them all kinds of protection as per the
United Nations Refugees Conventions and Protocols. The application of
restrictions on them was only due to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the
former Prime Minister of India. However, this restriction did not much affect
the general condition of the refugees.
In fact, the management of the refugees actually had started from the very arrival of the refugees on the shores of Tamil Nadu, near the places such as Rameswaram, Mandapam, Dhanushkodi and Mannar. The government officials prepared a complete list of the refugees and took them to different camps in Tamil Nadu as and when they arrived according to the allotment made by them. As per instructions from the Government of India, complete information about them had been collected from them and after verification of their antecedents they had been taken to the camps. Accommodation to the refugees was given in various forms such as huts specially constructed for them, government buildings, private rented buildings and Public Works Department buildings. Officials had provided all essential facilities to the refugees so that they would not feel depressed about their conditions in the alien land.

The habitations of the refugees were provided with electricity, water and sanitation facilities. Cash doles were also distributed to poor refugees. In the initial stages of their arrival, most of them were supplied with subsidized rice, cereals and other grocery items, utensils and clothing materials. During festival seasons like Pongal, Tamil New Year Day the government had provided all essential commodities so that they would joyously celebrate
these festivals. In such a way the government officials during the period from 1983 to 2000 provided all assistance for the well being of the refugees.

Also, periodic medical check-up was carried on in the camps for the refugees by specially deputed doctors. During occasions of emergency medical practitioners were made available to them to attend to their medical needs.

Another important assistance provided to the refugees was educational services. Many children and youth in the camp discontinued their studies when they fled to India from their island due to the ethnic violence. The government had provided all facilities to the refugees in respect of education and special accommodation was given to them in many of the professional courses. Much consideration was shown to the refugee children and youth to pursue their studies to build themselves for their future. In fact, 2% of the total seats were allotted for admission of the refugee children and youth in many of the educational institutions. This kind of treatment accorded to the refugees by the government helped them greatly and the refugees were very much benefited by these measures.

While Government was exerting itself to help the refugees in all possible ways, certain non-governmental organisations also came forward to help the refugees. These organisations also made important contributions to
the promotion, preparations modification and implementation of
international level norms. The United Nations High Commissioner for
Refugees Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation and OFERR had
done a great work for the welfare of the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in Tamil
Nadu particularly during 1991-2000. The first repatriation work started in
1987 and continued till 1989. This work was criticized by Human Rights
activists who felt that proper norms were not followed during repatriation
process by the officials of the Government of Tamil Nadu. During the
second phase of repatriation the UNHCR had come forward to look into the
affairs of the refugees on the invitation from the Government of India.
UNHCR was initiated by the Government to monitor the nature of
repatriation as an observer. So the UNHCR had the responsibility of
ascertaining the nature of repatriation whether it was voluntary or
compulsory. So, when the second repatriation process took place in 1991-
1992, the UNHCR personally supervised the work to ascertain whether
refugees were sent back on their own accord or by Compulsion. This was
done to protect their rights as refugees as per the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights of 1948. Though initially they were not allowed to operate in
refugee camps they were later permitted to observe and monitor the welfare
work and repatriation work.
The organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OEERR) founded in 1984 had been a service organisation for the welfare of the Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees. It had been receiving donations from the philanthropists all over the world. It purchased relief articles and distributed them to the refugees. Similarly, the OEERR which had been functioning from different centres of Tamil Nadu had also been networking with the other NGO’s in offering services to the refugees. In fact, Local Social Service Organisations and Jesuit Refugee Services had also been rendering good services to the refugees in collaboration with OEERR.

It is worthy to note that these organisations had been offering counselling and guidance services to the refugees in respect of their education, employment and future activities. They had also helped the youth to form student forums to ventilate their grievances and to express their aspirations. Coaching and training classes were also conducted by these organisations for these youths so that they would be self-reliant in future. On most occasions they paid the fees for the schools and colleges and encouraged them to pursue their education without any break. Also, health care programmes were conducted by them to periodically take care of the health of the refugees. Women and children were also taken care of and the schemes like Nutritional Supplement Programme for Children and Pregnant
women were very much beneficial that they caused much confidence and happiness in the minds of the refugees.

It is also to be pointed out that technical and vocational training were also given to the needy refugees in various crafts like carpentry, masonry, tailoring and electrical work. Poultry-work, communication and leadership training, sewing and tailoring work and in the later years of the 1990's computer course also formed part of their training. All these schemes were income-generating schemes, which were meticulously introduced by the NGOs. Further, the organisations had also taken steps to make the refugees to become aware of their rights and duties. This was in consonance with the Human Rights Programmes of the Government. Separate committees were also set up by these organisations to co-ordinate the activities. The organisations had also been receiving assistance from international countries and agencies. Their patrons are found all over the world. It may be seen from their activities that these organisations have a prime objective and that was offering of services of all kinds to the refugees. It is this motive of the organisations that was responsible for their notable work in repatriating and rejuvenating the distressed Tamil refugees of the island country.

Thus, the refugee management work in Tamil Nadu had been a laudable one since 1983. Though the government of Tamil Nadu had facing
so many difficulties at various fronts it had been offering good services to
the Tamil refugees of Sri Lanka. It is not because that they are the
descendants of the early Tamils. It is because that they are refugees who
have the liberty to enjoy all rights in an alien land. Similar tendencies had
been displayed magnanimously by the non-governmental organisations also
in the management of the refugees. In fact, such a kind of gesture is a model
for all the governments and non-governmental organisations of the world to
emulate and such a gesture alone will remove the distress of the demoralised
refugees of any nation.