PREFACE

Refugee studies posit a unique problem. Studies in the area are rarely attempted from a broad social science perspective in explaining the causes of displacement. Scholars have identified war, ethnic conflict, economic backwardness, environmental degradation, ideological compulsions and so on as general factors leading to refugee generation. This raises two points. One, these factors are not exclusive categories; two, each factor itself is a combination of many other factors to result in displacement of people. Refugee generation has to be understood from this perspective. The focus of the present study is to understand how ethnic conflict leads to refugee generation within a theoretical framework. The task at hand is therefore twofold: (1) to understand ethnic conflict and (2) to explain how this leads to refugee generation. Refugees are a social and political reality. They are to be seen as part of an intricate web, which has to be understood in order to study not only their past but also their future. This brings us to another set of crucial problems, which have a bearing on the refugee experience vis-à-vis the management of refugees. The proposed study would therefore have two very broad objectives: first, to conceptualise how ethnic conflict leads to the process of refugee generation and, second, to analyse how refugee problems are managed.
It should be mentioned at the very outset that each refugee movement is unique in terms of causes and consequences. Yet, there is a thread of generality that is common to all cases of forced massed migration. The fundamental question is how this gap between the general and the specific can be bridged. Our attempt in this context will be three layered. First, to briefly review some of basic social science approaches for explaining ethnic conflict and the generation of refugees. Second, with the help of these variables, a preliminary framework would be constructed. The third task would be to test the hypotheses in a specific situation. The case of Sri Lankan Tamils who were uprooted from their homes in the wake of the ethnic conflict, would be studied as an empirical case study.

Sri Lanka presents a typical example of how a country rocked by intense ethnic conflict has experienced refugee generation. Sri Lanka has been in the grip of ethnic conflict of an unprecedented nature. The conflict has culminated in violent outbursts on several occasions -1958, 1956,1977 and 1981. However, since 1983 the ethnic fratricide has become more deeply entrenched resulting in the militarisation of society. This has led to the uprooting of a substantial number of people from their home. The war between the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has swelled the ranks of the refugees, both within and outside the island. In
the post-1983 period, a large number of Sri Lankan Tamils have left the country and sought refuge in countries like Canada, Britain, Australia, Germany and the Scandinavian nations. However, the bulk of the refugees have remained within the subcontinent itself. They have either taken refuge in Tamil Nadu or have remained displaced within their own country.

Review of literature

Studies on the ethnic conflict and its causes are immense, but its role in refugee generation is far from adequate. Some of the prominent works on ethnic conflict are of Anderson (1991); Barth (1969); Hobsbawm (1990); Erikson (1993); Gellner (1983); Gurr (1977, 1993). Paul Brass (1981); Rupesinghe (1996); Bjorn Hetne (1993); Antony D. Smith (1991); Donald Horowitz (1985), and Gurr and Harff (1994). Newland (1993) has studied how ethnic conflict generates refugee


There is no full-length study on how ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has generated refugees both inside and outside the island and how the refugee
situation has been managed by governments as well as non-governmental agencies. This has provided the impetus for the present work.

**Objectives**

The general objectives of the present study are:

1. To conceptualise the interplay between ethnic conflict and refugee generation
2. To understand refugee generation in the Sri Lankan situation.

The specific objectives of the work are to:

1. Study the genesis of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.
2. Analyse the patterns, processes and effects of violence in the wake of the conflict.
3. Examine the socio-economic, political, psychological and external determinants involved in the process of refugee generation.
4. Identify the directions of displacement and the causes behind this.
5. Examine the conditions of internal refugees in Sri Lanka and their management
6. Examine the conditions of Sri Lankan refugees in India and the response of the state as well as civil society to their plight.

**Hypotheses**

1. Militarisation is central to refugee generation.
2. A complex web of social, economic, psychological and external factors impact upon the process.

3. The role of the state is crucial in the development of the conflict, and its effect on refugee generation.

4. Intense violence is the single most potent factor inducing refugee generation.

Research Methodology

A historical-analytical case study design has been adopted for the study. Both primary as well as secondary data was collected. Primary data was collected through interviews by the researcher. Participant observation as method of data collection was also used. The researcher lived with the respondents from various camps all over Tamil Nadu during a state level meeting of the refugees held in Tiruchirapally. She also lived with a displaced family in Puttalam.

Plan of field study

The field study was planned to visit refugee camps keeping in view of the variance in research. It was conducted in two phases: first in Tamil Nadu in April-May 1999 and then in Sri Lanka in March-April 2000. Three districts each in India and Sri Lanka were selected.

In Tamil Nadu, the following criteria were adopted:
Geographical location of camps

Structure of camp i.e. permanent or temporary, Urban/suburban/rural

Mandapam camp, Ramanathapuram district: entry point for refugees

Nimmeli camp, Kancheepuram district (north)

Kottapatti camp, Trichy district (central)

Naranammalapuram camp, Tirunelveli district (south).

The criteria adopted for selecting the field area in Sri Lanka were slightly more complicated, because the situation was far more complex. Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Puttalam were identified as three districts, which would provide insights into the various facets of displacement. Vavuniya is within the conflict zone. The district is under the Army control, but some parts of it are still with the LTTE and are referred to as “uncleared areas”. Internal refugees from all the surrounding districts in Jaffna and the Vanni are living in Vavuniya. Trincomalee was selected due to three reasons. One, it is located in the Eastern Province and would, therefore, provide a wider perspective in understanding the situation. Two, to understand the issue of repatriation of refugees from India to Sri Lanka, which was adopted between 1987 and 1994, and abandoned since then. The Alles Garden camp in Trincomalee still accommodates some of the returnees from India. Three, Trincomalee has a mixed population with 33.8 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils, 33.6 per cent of
Sinhalese, and 29.3 per cent of Muslims. Puttalam was the third district selected for the field study. Puttalam is not within the conflict zone. It provided an understanding of the refugee situation in non-combat areas in Sri Lanka. It also helped in getting an idea of the third dimension of the Sri Lankan conflict, i.e. the Muslim situation. The following camps were visited in Vavuniya: (a) Sithamparapuram was initially a refugee camp built by the UNHCR to receive returnees from India. In 1997, it was handed over to the Government to be used as welfare centres. (b) Manipuram is a relocated village. (c) Poonthoddum is a Government run camp. (d) Puthukulam is a rehabilitated village. (e) Arafathnagar is a Muslim camp. (f) Aluthgama is a relocated village for Sinhalese refugees. Four camps were covered in Trincomalee: (a) Alles Garden transit camp for returnees from India; (b) Nilaveli camp (c) Love Lane Camp I; and (d) Love Lane Camp II, which accommodate Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese refugees respectively. Puttalam did not offer such a wide variance. The following camps were visited in the districts: Madeenah camp, Maleehapuram camp and Zamzama camp.

The following leaders/ NGO activists and individuals were also interviewed:

- Volunteers and activists from among refugees working in the camps
• S.C. Chandrasah, head of Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation (OfERR), a non-governmental organisation from among the Sri Lankan refugees based in Chennai
• Father Elias of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), St. Joseph’s College Trichy
• Mr. Kumaraswamy, regional head OfERR, Trichy
• Mr. Maheswaran, regional head OfERR, Tirunelveli
• Special Deputy Collector, Refugees, Collectorate Office, Mandapam camp
• The Government Agent, Vavuniya, Trincomalee
• UNHCR, Chennai, Colombo, Vavuniya, Trincomalee.
• OfERR, Chennai, Tirunelveli, Trichy
• ICRC, Vavuniya, Colombo.
• Refugees living in camps/ welfare centres
• Non-camp refugees
• Refugees who have lived in special camps.

Interviews:

One of the most daunting tasks of this research was conducting interviews with respondents. Since the issue was sensitive, extreme care had to be taken first to build confidence with respondents. Though there was an
interpreter with the researcher, most of the interviews were carried out with people who managed to speak English, in order to facilitate direct communication with respondents. Interviews were therefore conducted in mixed English and Tamil. It was observed that once the ice was broken, respondents were forthcoming and language was not a major constraint. Names of respondents have been changed on request.

A set of research questions were used as reference, but not administered in a unilinear mode. Questions were open ended and focussed on the causes of displacement and their experiences. Once the discussion was initiated respondents began to speak about themselves and the situation. Queries were made informally and unobtrusively.

**Constraints in research**

Working was an enriching experience, but there were a number of limitations that I had to contend with. Data on refugees is often shrouded in secrecy. Refugee camps located in the LTTE controlled areas in Sri Lanka were inaccessible. Jaffna was also unreachable by air without Government permission and by land without LTTE permission. In India there was no access to special camps that accommodate refugees who were either members or sympathisers of militant groups. The other problem was the lack of consistent data on violence. Data was conflicting, and varied according to the
source. The data available does not adequately convey the real intensity of the problem because violence is not always covert. In fact psychological violence is more far-reaching and potent in a refugee situation. Despite these lacunae in understanding and quantifying violence, it is a key variable in the study because of its potency and urgency in a refugee situation.

Chapterisation

The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter conceptualises key issues like refugee generation and ethnic conflict, militarisation and related concepts. Based on these, an analytical framework has been formulated to understand the interplay between ethnic conflict and refugee generation.

Chapter two provides a background of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Apart from the development of the conflict, this chapter also takes a historical overview of displacement of people in Sri Lanka since 1956.

The third chapter links the analytical framework with the specific situation in Sri Lanka. It focuses on understanding refugee generation in Sri Lanka. Based on the entire gamut of forces which were at work in the militarised society, and their impact on displacement are also analysed.
Chapter four analyses the condition and management of internal refugees in Sri Lanka. The legal and institutional mechanisms in the management of refugees are also covered in this chapter.

The Sri Lankan refugees in India are the focus of the fifth chapter. Legal mechanisms, response of the state and the civil society and repatriation are some of the issues addressed in this chapter.

While summing up the discussions, the last chapter seeks to test the theoretical propositions in the light of the specific situation that Sri Lanka presents. An attempt is also made to arrive at some broader theoretical insights on the basis of the specific case study.