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**REFUGEE RESOURCES AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION: A STUDY OF SRI
LANKAN TAMIL REFUGEES IN TAMIL NADU, INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

The growing population together with higher literacy and improved standards of living have made the issue of educated unemployment a major one and suddenly, the interest for activities out in the public sector has expanded. Be that as it may, the residential work advertise has encountered work lack and higher wage rate. The entry of refugees in the local work advertises close-by government approved camps is by all accounts an answer for the work deficiency in an incredible degree. There is no legitimate system for work that are available to Sri Lankan Tamil camp living refugees however evacuees are utilized in the chaotic part to enhance their employment. The refugees who relocated from the north and eastern territories of Sri Lanka were agriculturists and fisher folk. In Tamil Nadu, the work accessibility was restricted. They had to work as daily workers and take up salary generation exercises justified thorough physical work. The Indian Government has been providing education to refugee youngsters without having the arrangement for work opportunities in the public segment. Along these lines, refugees depend generally on the chaotic area for their salary. For the study, the researcher has visited a refugee camp in Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu and assembled data by the

co-operation with refugees. The study looks at the different issues of refugees in neighbourhood labour markets and furthermore assesses the conditions of refugee camps in Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, camp population, labour market, workforce, employment, livelihoods

INTRODUCTION

India has seen an expansive number in refugee population movement over the outskirts and settlement of them in different parts of the nation (Khadria, Kumar, Sarkar, and Sharma, 2008). Since 1983, Sri Lankan refugees were forced to escape to India seeking wellbeing and security. The extensive scale of armed struggle between Sri Lankan armed forces and Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) has brought about the death of around 70,000 individuals and displacement of one million individuals (The Refugee Council, 1999). Tamil people in Sri Lanka constitute around 11 per cent of the aggregate populace and are for the most part concentrated in the north and eastern parts of the island (Shastri, 1990). Once the refugees from Sri Lanka reach Danushkodi on Pamban Island in Tamil Nadu, they are questioned by cops to probe their connection with LTTE, and from there on, they are sent to different government run refugee camps all over the state of Tamil Nadu (Arun Janardhanan, 2015; The Refugee Council, London, 1999).

By 1987, there were 29000 refugees in 170 government camps and 106,000 were living outside the camp with the assistance of companions and relatives. As per UNHCR,

before the finish of 1998, there were 70337 refugees housed in 131 camps scattered over the locale of Tamil Nadu. Since the death of Rajiv Gandhi, the non-camp refugees were forcibly moved to camps and camps were shifted to the interior parts. Moreover, the opportunities for development were entirely limited and inhabitants in the special camps were permitted to leave the camp just in the event that they wanted to leave the country (Raizada, 2013).

Refugees from different countries who are in India are dealt with differently because of the absence of a common legal framework for refugees (Kumar, 2017). The legitimate status of refugees is formally determined by the Foreigner's Act, 1946 and Indian Native Act, 1955. As per the provisions of these laws, all non-nationals who enter the country without a valid visa are to be treated as unlawful vagrants, with no special preference for refugees or asylum seekers (Human Right Law Network, 2007). According to the appraisals of United Nations refugee body in 2005, there was a sum of 2,07,861 persons of concern in India, of whom 2,01,281 persons were refugees and 6,480 were asylum seekers. India has not signed the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees 1951 or

its protocol 1967 that helps to avert the legal responsibility of host state from ensuring the rights and services to refugees (Janmyr, 2017). In spite of this, the government of India has been giving essential goods and services to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in camps who have no legitimate contract (Valatheeswaran and Rajan, 2011).

Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees in Tamil Nadu

The State of the World's Refugees Report for the year 2000, states that towards the end of 1999, there are just about 120,000 asylum seekers of Sri Lankan origin. Out of this, 15,900 are in France, 9,200 in Germany, 8,300 in the United Kingdom, 4,300, 2,300 in Norway, 2,100 in the Netherlands and 66,400 refugees are living in camps in India. At present, there are 66156 Sri Lankan refugees living around 113 refugee camps that are arranged in 28 districts out of 32 in Tamil Nadu, India. The government provided them lodging, nourishment grains, health services, power, and education to youngsters. Despite the fact that, the refugees are denied and neglected to access permanent employment. Primarily India has not signed the UN Refugee Convention 1951 and its protocol 1967. However, India has not a sorted out a credible domestic legal system to manage refugees. The existing domestic laws have been framed with the end goal to manage refugees. The Indian

State treats its diverse refugee people in an unexpected way. Sri Lankan Tamil refugees are the most helpless and their involvement in conflict in the island and crossing of Palk Strait have caused mental and physical health issues. With the end goal to escape from the conflict in Sri Lanka, Tamils look to India for refuge with the expectation of a peaceful and safer life. Sadly, they were brought to the camps where they settled and their human rights were severely restricted. Other than these challenges, Tamil refugee people have serene lives and the government has been providing essential services to them.

UN Convention of Status of Refugees (CSR) 1951 requires State parties to safeguard the rights of refugees, including the right to employment. In *Chapter III* of CSR which is titled 'Gainful Employment' "the contracting States have been urged to provide employment and self-employment opportunities and also allow them to carry on professions on the basis of favourable treatment to be given to foreign nationals." Article 17 refers to wage earning employment, Article 18 to self-employment, and Article 19 refers to the recognition of professional diplomas. Although India is not obliged under CSR, it must be noted that by acceding to ICESCR in 1979, India has undertaken the obligation to protect the rights enshrined in this convention without any

discrimination. This convention imposes on India the duty that guarantees the rights of non- citizens with available resources. Right to work has been entrenched in Article 6 of the ICESCR. This right is linked with the “right to minimum wages” and the “right to fair working conditions and decent life”. Sri Lankan Tamil refugees however do not enjoy these rights. Further they are not permitted to work in the State sector due to their lack of legal status and also due to the unemployment problems faced by Indian economy itself. Refugees therefore work in the informal sectors which mostly do not adhere to conditions established under international human rights conventions.

The Indian government has

implemented particular plans for refugees to guarantee their prosperity. Notwithstanding what has just been underlined, the Indian government has a few times implemented plans for such refugees. For example, in 2012, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha requested the expansion of the administration's far-reaching medical coverage plan to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees; a plan primarily focusing on needy individuals in the state was expanded to include the refugees as well. As the years progressed, Tamil Nadu has chosen to contribute effectively to the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees inside the state by giving them certain opportunities to benefit from schemes meant for Indian nationals and adding to their very own prosperity.

Total 1: Refugees Camps in Tamil Nadu

Sl. No	District	No. of Camps	Total Families	Single Families	Total No. of Persons
1	Coimbatore	4	1029	150	3221
2	Cuddalore	4	439	65	1390
3	Dharmapuri	8	698	79	2433
4	Dindigul	7	1016	120	3407
5	Erode	3	1209	151	4713
6	Kanniyakumari	4	425	51	1420
7	Karur	2	637	85	2052
8	Krishnagiri	2	329	23	1151
9	Madurai	3	1570	170	5881
10	Namakkal	3	701	122	2247
11	Perambalur	1	76	12	260
12	Pudukkottai	3	1009	142	3369
13	Ramanathapuram	1	629	0	2125
14	Salem	8	864	98	3457
15	Sivaganga	6	1061	138	3486
16	Theni	2	5	0	24
17	Thiruvallur	2	1364	193	4562
18	Thoothukudi	3	496	0	1659
19	Tiruchirappalli	2	926	136	2951
20	Tirunelveli	9	852	133	2717
21	Tiruvannamalai	13	1109	155	3574
22	Tiruppur	5	321	65	992
23	Vellore	6	1085	116	3690

24	Villupuram	2	518	63	1800
25	Virudhunagar	7	1081	0	3522
	Special camp				
26	Kancheepuram	1	40	0	40
27	Thiruvallur	1	8	0	8
28	Trichy	1	5	0	5
	Total	113	19502	2267	66156

Source: Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation

Table 1 display a concise picture of refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. The subtle elements portrayed in Table 1 were gathered from the website of the Organization for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation (OfERR). The table reveals that 66156 refugees from Sri Lanka are living in 113 government composed camps. The government has imposed stringent

security measures upon the Tamil refugee camps since the death of Rajiv Gandhi. In the early phase of the mass migration of Tamil refugees to India, a warm welcome was accorded to them. Afterwards, particularly after the death of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, refugees were set apart as aggressors and enclosed in the camps.

Table 2: Camp population abstract from January 2009 to January 2016

Year	Family	Adult Male	Adult Female	Child Male	Child Female	Total	CGR
01/2009	19593	27889	26832	9542	9090	73353	0
01/2010	19995	27631	26525	9663	9107	72926	-0.58553
01/2011	19741	26502	25245	9160	8663	69570	-4.82392
01/2012	19964	25698	25091	8699	8391	67879	-2.4912
01/2013	19658	25168	25138	8532	8080	66918	-1.43609
01/2014	19575	24871	24993	7958	7726	65548	-2.09007
01/2015	19647	25008	25345	7346	7102	64801	-1.15276
01/2016	19435	25157	25380	6766	6776	64079	-1.12673

Source: Department of Rehabilitation, Tamil Nadu

Sri Lankan Tamil refugee’s population in India has declined from 2009 to 2016. The refugees are accommodated in government camps without any right to movement. The refugees have no right to go abroad directly from India. They can leave India only if they are returning to Sri Lanka. The India Government made an effort to repatriate Sri Lankan refugees in 1987. In all, 99,469 refugees were sent back between 1987-89 and 1992-95. The repatriation was a debacle and no assessment was made to evaluate the situation in Sri Lanka ahead of

repatriation (Dasgupta, 2003). UNHCR stated that 54,188 refugees were voluntarily repatriated to Sri Lanka by chartered ships and flights between 20 January 1992 and 20 March 1995. However, during the same period of time, there were certainly many forced repatriations as well, and even the voluntary ones were often a result of the increasingly harsh treatment meted out to the refugees in the various camps. The war between Sri Lankan army and LTTE came to an end in 2009 and the progress made in the peace process in Sri Lanka has, however, prompted some of the refugees to return.

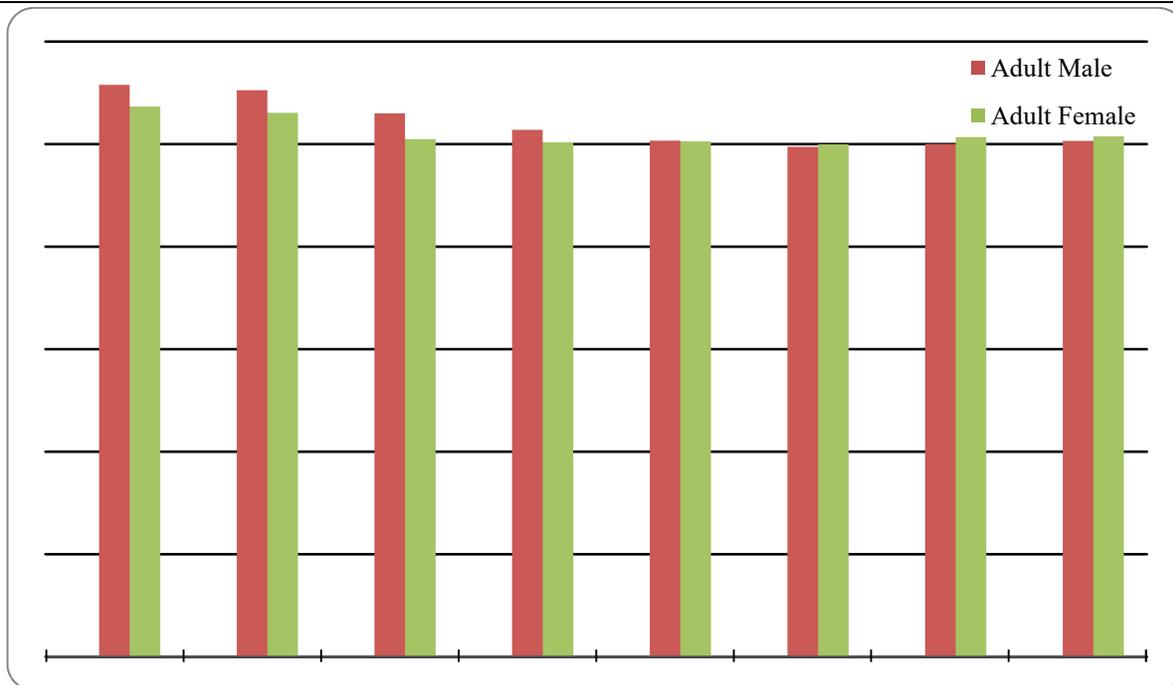


Figure 1: Composition of Male and Female Adults

The adult male population was 27889 which are higher as compared to the female population of 26832 in 2009. The adult male population is declining in India (see figure 1). On the other hand, number of adult females is increasing. The adult males have left India in order to search for a job. Many refugees are working in foreign countries and their family members are in Indian camps. The status of “refugee”, in a sense, is considered as non-human. By looking at the status of Sri Lankan refugees in India, they are highly deprived. They do not have the right to travel, employment, purchasing property, casting vote and even meeting outsiders. The refugees live in small 8 /8 ft or 10/10 ft plots allotted within the camps and are given a packaged minimal

dole. In the initial period of settlement, refugees are permitted to work only in between 6 a. m and 6 p. m. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), basically does not have a policy-based humanitarian presence in India. Uncertain situation in camps and conflicts and threats to lives in home country induced them to think about third country resettlement. According to the study conducted by TISS, ADRA India and Danish Refugee Council (2014-15) revealed that about 68 per cent of refugees would prefer local assimilation, 23 per cent preferring voluntary repatriation and around 4 per cent prefer to have resettlement in a third country. This data is highly interesting, due to the fact that despite the deterioration of the condition of the camps in Tamil Nadu,

refugees prefer to live in India.

An enquiry has been made about the preference of settlement while visiting the camp. A woman aged 46 years stated that *“bombing, killing and attacking of Tamil people were common and I and my husband with two children are hiding night times in the forest to save our lives. Our experience in Sri Lanka was very terrible. We walked continuously for three days without food. My two children were tired and crying for food. We cannot forget this life-threatening journey. We do not need a luxurious life, we need peaceful life. Life in the camp is peaceful and we are adapted with the atmosphere of the camp. Initially we had suffered a lot due to the absence of basic infrastructure facilities but nowadays we have expanded the home, constructed own toilet and had a better life compared to local Tamil people”*, she added.

While talking with a 30-year-old man in the camp, he stated that *“we are highly restricted; we cannot have the permission to attend a public meeting or function. If a VIP visiting nearby areas, security officers will restrict our movement outside of the camp. Anything happens wrong there in the meeting or function, if we are present there, they will definitely doubt us”*.

It is noted that the socio-economic development of the refugees depends upon not

only government policies and employment but also the location of the camp. If the camps are located near to urban areas, it is easy for refugees to get a job and they can run shops and small businesses. But since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi all camps on seashores and towns were shifted to interior areas of Tamil Nadu. During this period, refugees suffered a lot and subjected to strict restriction on their movement. Nowadays the situation is being changed and refugees are free to move out of the camp but they are not allowed to move far away from the camps. However, the question of livelihood has not been addressed properly. How have refugees survived without employment in India? First of all, India does not have a legal framework to ensure the status of refugees. As a humanitarian consideration, the government has been providing a monthly cash dole and free rice of 20 kg to each family. Electricity is free to all families and available water supply depends upon camp location. There are a few common toilets and bathroom in the camps constructed by the government and NGOs. On the other hand, refugees are enjoying higher security for their lives in the camps. Q branch police are the responsible authority in providing security to refugees. The outsiders are allowed to visit the camp only with the permission of concerned authorities.

The study noted that a refugee youth,

who is born in India, is not eligible for citizenship and government job. They have to rely on the private and unorganised sector for employment. Therefore, refugee youth return to Sri Lanka and then apply for a passport to go to foreign countries. Refugee households have a well-expanded connection with foreign networks. The households receive remittances and their status has improved. The only one option available for refugee youth to improve their present situation is migration to another country. This is the central theme of this study; refugees are the additional human resources in India. If the government implement effective policies to utilise refugee resources for the progress of the nation, there is no need for them to prefer migration. In a sense, the government spends a huge amount to meet the expenses of refugees in every month. But the output of these spending is zero. With strict rules and regulations, refugees have not been allowed to impart their productivity for the host country, India. They depend on the domestic labour market and government financial assistance to meet their day to-day needs.

Employment and Labour Market

Before being a 'refugee' in India, Sri Lankan Tamils were engaged in various kinds of activities in Sri Lanka like fishing, agriculture, construction, plantation workers, private as well as public sector employees. In

India, Sri Lankan refugees can work only in private and unorganised sectors. Most of them work as painters, electricians, drivers and refugees living close to town areas are employed in private banks and companies. They are not allowed to purchase property in India. Therefore, agriculture and farm activities are not possible. Refugee women also work in the unorganised sector. Most of them are willing to work at the nearest industries and companies for low wages. It is very difficult for refugee women to get a job nearby camps due to the isolated nature of the camp location. Most of the employment opportunities available are only outside the camps. Invariably, they are forced to work for low wages under poor conditions. Women are unable to find employment in foreign countries due to the restrictions on their right of movement.

The presence of refugees in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu has resulted in a scarcity of various resources, especially shelter and employment. The inflow of refugees in the local labour market has a significant impact on the wage rate. The refugees offer labour force at cheaper wages than the wage rate prevailing in the market. They are willing to undertake dangerous works which are refused by local labour. Mostly they are unskilled labourers and willing to do any work to supplement their livelihood. As per the information collected

during the visit of a refugee camp in Thiruvallur district, refugees who have received employment throughout the month for at least three weeks depend upon contracts. Refugees are undertaking contract works with a minimum wage of Rs.500 per day. Around 55 per cent of the males are painters and remaining of them engaged in other construction-related activities. A number of working days depend upon contract. The contractors directly contact the refugees and hire them. The refugees are satisfied with the working conditions and also they are closely integrated with local people.

Refugees have no legal right to access government jobs. India is not a signatory to UN Convention on Status of Refugees 1951. UN Convention on Status of Refugees 1951 requires State parties to safeguard the rights of refugees, including the right to employment. In Chapter III of CSR which is titled 'Gainful Employment, the contracting States have been urged to provide employment and self-employment opportunities and also allow them to carry on professions on the basis of favourable treatment to be given to foreign nationals. Article 17 refers to wage-earning employment, Article 18 to self-employment and Article 19 refers to the recognition of professional diplomas.

However, Sri Lankan refugees do not enjoy these rights. Moreover, they are not

permitted to work in the public sector due to lack of their legal status and also due to the unemployment problems faced by the Indian population. Refugees, therefore, work in the informal sector which mostly does not adhere to conditions established under international human rights conventions.

The government has been providing free education to refugee children with having the provision for employment in the state sector. Likewise, refugee youth are not reserved seats for studying medicine. Two options for refugee youth to find employment- one is to seek a job in the local labour market in India and settlement in the camp. Second is to migrate a third country. Another problem revealed by refugees is that the educated youth do not have employment equal to their qualification. Even engineering degree holders also go for painting work. Most of the youth prefer the second option and leave the camp permanently to have a better life. The absence of credit from financial institutions, the absence of citizenship, the absence of the right to buy land and strict control on movement have limited the enthusiasm of refugees to stay back.

The contribution of NGOs in empowering refugee women is highly appreciable. The NGOs provide educational assistance, financial assistance and skill development programmes for refugees. The

setting up of SHGs has helped the women refugees to find a livelihood option. Through SHGs, they produce and market various products, running tailoring units and promoting saving among members. Refugees are also running small stationery shops within the camp and nearby town.

The government policies for Sri Lankan refugees are very arduous. For internal security, refugees were confined to camps since 1991. After long years of confinement, the refugees are not granted freedom for better life and their demands for citizenship is under consideration over a long period of time. From the initial period of exodus onwards, government has been providing financial assistance to every member of the family. Nowadays the amount is Rs. 1000 to head of the family and other members of the family, above the age of twelve, receive rupees 750. All children, below the age of twelve, receive rupees 400 every month. This amount is not adequate to meet the expenditure of the family. Therefore, refugees have to find employment in any sector of the economy but they can only secure a job in the unorganised sector. Thus, refugees are the solution to labour market imbalance. Bhavanisagar camp in Erode district is one of the largest camps in Tamil Nadu. The contractors directly come to this camp and hire the labourers for daily wages. Therefore, the

refugees are employed for a fixed period only. A permanent solution to solve the livelihood problem of refugees is to grant citizenship to those who are willing to stay in India and allowing them to have an integrated life with local people.

Employment and Labour Market: A Case Study of Camp Living Refugees in Tamil Nadu

The researcher has visited Pethi Kuppam refugee camp in Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu in order to gather the practical issues of refugees in the host state. Pethi Kuppam refugee's camp is one of the largest camps in the state which accommodates 938 families with 3051 persons. The researcher has used a brief structured schedule to compile data from refugees. It was very difficult to enter the camp without permission of Rehabilitation Department, the Government of Tamil Nadu. The camp is under the surveillance of Q branch police. Tahsildar and revenue inspector is in charge of monitoring the camp. Therefore, it is quite difficult to collect data from refugees within the camp. Outsiders are not allowed to even to enter camp premises, then how to collect data from them? The main problem that the researcher faced is the restriction in meeting the respondents. Refugees are going out of the camp for employment to a nearby town, Gummidipoondi and the camp is about 2 km

away from the town. The researcher met a total of 10 respondents from outside the camp and assessed the details from them. Most of those whom the researcher has met are not interested to respond and they also have the fear that the information provided by them might cause any issues and might get published in the media. But then, some people were willing to respond and have given much co-operation for data collection. The employment aspects of the refugees are highlighted and analysed with statistical tools. The main findings of the study are noted below.

- Of the total respondent, fifty per cent are male and remaining fifty per cent are female. About 70 per cent of the respondents are below forty-five age and 30 per cent are above 45 years.
- Only one person has a professional qualification that he has obtained from Sri Lanka. About 90 per cent of the respondents have higher secondary and below higher secondary qualification.
- About 30 per cent are daily wage earners, 20 per cent are tailors, 1 per cent is auto rickshaw drivers and 1 per cent is self-employed. 30 per cent of the respondents are unemployed. It is clear that only 70 per cent of the respondents are employed and others are depending

on government and relatives for their requirements.

- Auto rickshaw drivers, tailors and self-employed persons get employment for about six days in a week. On the other hand, daily wage earners (coolie) have got employment only for 3-4 days. The average number of days of employment is 5.
- The average wage is Rs.264. Highest wage is Rs. 500 for coolie workers and auto rickshaw drivers. The lowest wage is received by tailors. Females are mostly preferred for tailoring works due to limited employment opportunity nearby camp areas and the government and NGOs have been providing free sewing machine to women.
- Male workers prefer the manual job in the construction sector. The works are available for them on a contract basis. Therefore, they get a job only for limited period. They need to adjust the remaining days with inadequate income.
- About 30 per cent of the respondents are unemployed. Of this, 20 per cent are women. They rely on the government for financial assistance to meet their needs. They opined that the monthly dole provided by the government is insufficient.

The Pethi Kuppam camp is located around 3km away from Gummidipoondi town. Therefore, camp inmates have to find employment in the town and sell their products in the market. The camp is separated from local people with boundaries and there is an LP school within the camp. The camp was firstly started for Burman refugees, later shifted as a military camp, and when the influx of Sri Lankan Tamils began the camp was allotted for accommodating them. In the beginning, the infrastructure facilities were very limited in the camp and entire camp population depended only on government assistance for livelihood. Later with the development of Gummidipoondi town, refugees have found employment outside the camp. Many refugees are working in Chennai which is around 50km away from Gummidipoondi. They can come once in a month to receive monthly doles and renew their camp registration. Even higher educated youth are also doing painting work and construction works. The respondents stated that lack of employment opportunity in the government sector and restriction of freedom of movement are the major constraints in their socio-economic development. Furthermore, the absence of citizenship induces them to move back to Sri Lanka or any other country than India. The protracted solution for refugees in India is to address their livelihood and

employment problems rest with the government. Granting citizenship and providing greater freedoms and opportunities are the utmost solutions. For example, vocational training to unemployed refugee youth to develop their skills along with facilities of credit from banks to start a new business. In addition to providing financial assistance, they should be empowered by giving training and be provided employment opportunities to develop themselves, thereby letting them contribute to the process of development of the country.

CONCLUSION

The exodus of refugees to India began in 1983 and continued until the end of the war in Sri Lanka. The government has made much effort to manage the arrival of refugees and their settlement in various camps across the state. Since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, the condition of refugees became worse and their freedom of movement was curtailed only within the camp. As a result, the employment opportunity for refugees has been limited and made them dependent on the government for food and livelihood. Now the situation is being changed but refugees still do not have the right to employment. The monthly dole given by the government is insufficient, hence refugees found employment outside of the camp. They are admitted as unskilled labours and the

possibility of getting higher wage is limited. No doubt, the presence of refugees in the labour market is a solution to short-term as well as long-term shortages of unskilled labours. If the government can provide vocational training, the refugee labour force will make a significant contribution to the society. Lack of skill development and government restrictions are the main problems which retard the empowerment of refugees. The government should provide employment training and skill development training to all refugees and provide credit to start new ventures, thereby allowing them to develop themselves. This will help the government to reduce the expenditure on refugee welfare and maximise the refugee's contribution to the welfare of the nation.

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