

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > Sri Lanka: Book Review The Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu:By Prof. Suryanarayan:

Sri Lanka: Book Review The Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu:By Prof. Suryanarayan:

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Tue, 04/02/2019 - 09:42

Paper No. 6419 **Dated 2-April-2019**

Review-By S.Chandrasekharan

("Refugee Dilemma -Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu-Published by Prabhat Prakashan and Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad- Price Rs 250.00)

It is almost ten years since the LTTE was virtually wiped out in May 2009 and yet the problems relating to the ethnic question, the refugees and the attempts to get the Sri Lankan Government to transitional justice have failed.

Most recently, the Sri Lankan Government managed to get two more years of extension to implement its own commitments in the Human Rights Council- (Reference may be made to our paper 6414 dated 19-3-2019 where the Sri Lankan Diplomacy has continued to deny, delay, deceive and destroy its own commitments.) Sri Lanka cannot be forgiven for the ruthless killing of over 40,000 innocent civilians towards the end of the war against LTTE. Many more of the former LTTE cadres who were arrested/ captured have not been accounted for even now.

There has been no attempt by the majority community either towards reconciliation or towards devolution worth the name. The book should be aptly termed as the tragedy of the Sri Lankan Tamils and not on the refugee dilemma alone.

The book written by Professor V. Suryanarayan has come out just in time to highlight not only the desperate situation of the Tamil refugees arising out of repeated conflicts but on a global matrix, on the problems of refugees in general and India in particular. The author has pointed out that India being the only country that is contiguous to other South Asian countries had to bear the brunt of refugees from within the South Asian region. It is said that the total number of refugees and displaced persons looked after by India since independence would be approximately 25 million- a staggering figure indeed as it is more than the combined population of Sri Lanka, Singapore, Bhutan and

Maldives (page 26).

The book begins with the “Refugee Phenomenon” in general and the changes taking place in the World that reflect the worsening situation . According to the UNHCR, for the first time the refugees worldwide had passed 50 million mark and in 2015 alone 24 people were displaced every minute of every day- reaching to 34.000 people every day!

Next comes the Indian experience of “Athithi Devo Bhava” and historically India has continued to be the haven of immigrants from times immemorial.

The real issue of the refugees of Tamil Nadu is discussed in the third chapter of the book - the “Island in Distress.” It comprehensively traces the history of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The author has submitted rightly that the Sinhalese- Tamil Conflict is a product of the post independence politics, an offshoot of the nation building experiment where the Sinhalese leaders wanted to build the nation on the basis of the Sinhalese language and Buddhist religion to the exclusion of minority claims and no other to the politics of ethnic mobilization resorted to by Chauvinist Sinhalese and Tamil Leaders. He has also referred to the book by former President, late Jayawardene that conveyed the idea that Sri Lanka and the Sinhala nation are the same and that appears to be the root of the problem. In the major riots of 1983 where no Tamil was spared, Jayawardene had no word of sympathy for the state sponsored killings carried out by his own ministers.

For a reader not so familiar with Sri Lankan politics chapter 3 alone would give a complete account of the ethnic problem and author has succeeded in conveying a complete narrative very objectively and in very few pages. He should be congratulated. Chapter 4 deals with the history of the refugees in and from Sri Lanka culminating in a massive exodus after the communal holocaust of July 1983. It is indeed surprising that a small country like Sri Lanka with a population of 22.4 million (page 60) is one of the world’s principal sources of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Nearly, half of the 2.3 million strong Sri Lanka Tamil population have been rendered homeless and have migrated to different parts of the world or remain internally displaced.

It is in chapter 5 that the author deals with the Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu. He has divided them into six categories- 1. Refugees of Sri Lankan Tamil origin who live in the camps. 2. Refugees of Indian origin who live in the camps. 3. Refugees who live outside the camps. 4 Sri Lankan nationals 5. Militant refugees in Special camps. 6 Miscellaneous category.

Of the first category, 63649 persons have been identified. Surprisingly, 29,500 refugees of Indian Tamil origin are in the camps under the second category. There is a legal distinction between the two groups as a large section of the latter have become stateless due to the insensitive agreement after the Srimavo-Shastri pact of 1964. A small group of 14 Sri Lankan Tamils come under the category of “militant group (5) and it is not clear why they are being kept under ‘prison conditions’ in the State.

It is sad that the the recent changes in the citizenship bill based on residency does not take into account the Indian Tamils of category 2.

One interesting observation made by the author relates to the flow of refugees that was closely linked to the violence unleashed in Sri Lanka against the civilian population. Yet in the closing stages of the war in 2009 near the Mullai Vaikal region, with both the countries India and Sri Lanka sealing the border, the trapped civilians who were caught in the middle perished in thousands. The Tamil Nadu Government did nothing to save the civilians. It was indeed a sad chapter in the history of refugees in India when the author in chapter 2 has highlighted the historical anecdotes as to how India had treated the immigrants as their “guests”.

The author has made a strong plea for a national legislation on the refugees combining the humanitarian needs of the refugees and the security interests of the State. This needs to be examined more carefully and will be necessary only if the existing mechanisms are inadequate. Should we shut out a flexible approach and entangle ourselves in legal niceties?

It was a surprise to note that Tamil Nadu has a refugee camp for Rohingyas in Kelambakkam!

In all, the book makes very interesting reading and is a must for all those who were involved in the Sri Lankan crisis in some way or other or even others interested in ethnic conflicts. It is highly recommended for the Scholars too.

Tags:

[Sri Lanka](#) [1]

[Tamils](#) [2]

[LTTE](#) [3]

[Reugees](#) [4]

Category:

[Papers](#) [5]

Countries:

[Sri Lanka](#) [6]

[India](#) [7]

Topics:

Refugees ^[8]

Political ^[9]

Human Rights ^[10]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2444>

Links

[1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/61>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/2018>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/64>

[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/2019>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>

[6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/sri-lanka>

[7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/india>

[8] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/refugees>

[9] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>

[10] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/human-rights>