

Forced Migration of the Tamils

India versus Sri Lanka

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Abstract

International relations and domestic politics are interlinked. States do not exist in a vacuum. States are unable to make policies without keeping in mind the intricacies of the environment in which they exist. The influence of domestic policy on international relations and vice versa has become even more crucial in the twenty-first century. Relations between neighbouring states have become so complicated with increasing political and economic globalisation that each state regards international influences to be having a lot of significance for its domestic policies. It is in this context that the present article aims to understand the impact of forced migration of a certain population within South Asia on Indian geopolitics. Providing a historical perspective as well as primary observation of residents in a refugee camp, this article will show how a state on the southern border of the country (Tamil Nadu), which shares ethnic commonality with a neighbour (Sri Lanka), has made it clear that neglect of its population in the former will only make relations between the two South Asian countries sour. This forces the Indian federation to rethink about the definition of a semi-federal and semi-unitary system that exists in the country.

Keywords

Forced migration, geopolitics, foreign policy, states, centre, Sri Lankan Tamils

Introduction

Article 1(1) of the Indian Constitution declares India to be a ‘Union of States’ (Basu 2008). There is a lot of confusion over this definition of the Indian political system. Scholars have, time and again, delved into a debate over what the members of the Constituent Assembly meant by such a definition of a ‘union’ and a ‘federation’. It is proclaimed that India is neither a fully unitary state like the United Kingdom nor a federation like the United States of America. It is often described as a federation with a unitary bias.¹ In other words, the centre is stronger than the states. This nature of the Indian federation has created not

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one but a number of kinks in the relation between the centre and the states in India. Part XI of the Indian Constitution deals with the distribution of powers and functions of the centre and the state governments.² According to this, powers are divided into administrative, legislative and executive. Executive powers are to be carried out by the states in such a way that they are in conformity with the laws made by the parliament. Legislative powers are enlisted in the Union List, the state list and the Concurrent List. Foreign policy making is a task of the central government. It is here that problems arise when policies are made with regard to a foreign country close to India's territory.

In making foreign policies pertaining to countries that have geographic and cultural proximity with a state, it is expected that state governments may believe they have an advantage due to this proximity, and will impose pressure on the central government to formulate foreign policies that are in line with their understanding of the situation. However, this can often lead to difficulties in a set-up which is neither fully federal nor fully unitary. Yet it is something that one has to reckon with in a multicultural country like India. Some recent time examples are those of West Bengal chief minister's reaction towards the Teesta agreement between India and Bangladesh and Tamil Nadu's reaction towards India's handling of the Sri Lankan Tamil human rights issue. Mamata Banerjee's initial reaction against the Teesta agreement was to cancel her trip with the former Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh who was supposed to be accompanied by her during his tour to Dhaka, for the finalisation of the agreement.³ According to her she was not consulted by the central government on the sharing of waters of the Teesta and was supposedly misled by the previous National Security Adviser, Shivshankar Menon. She was against the building of dams in Sikkim to generate hydroelectric power which was to be done so that Bangladesh could receive the amount of water it was promised. She was concerned about the interests of West Bengal which led her to take this stand. Similarly, the Government in Tamil Nadu has made a number of protests against the central government's decisions to train Sri Lankan forces or even against Sri Lankan sports teams coming to the state. According to the state government of Tamil Nadu, giving such support to Sri Lanka would mean tacitly supporting the human rights violations of the Tamils by the Sri Lankan government. Tamil Nadu also reacted to the invitation that was sent to President Rajapaksa as a member of a SAARC country for the initiation of the new prime minister of India, Mr Narendra Modi. Such reactions coming from the units of a federation are often deemed as putting state interest above national interest. This however might bring up other debatable issues like what is state interest, national interest and interest of all those people who inhabit these units. The conflict between a state and the centre over an issue which might involve an external power often gets portrayed as a conflict between human rights and state rights. It is as if human rights are represented by the units and state rights by the central government. If the central government vows to balance the needs of the country and the foreign neighbour, it is often viewed in a negative manner. It is as if the centre is insensitive and does not bother about its citizens.

Such pressures are created especially by those states along India's international borders, which have common ethnic groups living on both sides of the political demarcation. Given that the political borders in the Indian sub-continent are largely an outcome of and imposed after the departure of the British colonial powers from South Asia, this is a relatively common situation in the Indian federation, where the demands of the units to the centre must be taken care of if not fulfilled. Such recurring demands have arisen from the government in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has placed frequent demands to the central government to deal with this issue in a certain manner when it comes to the southern neighbour of India, Sri Lanka. In order to understand the reasons behind such demands one has to go through a historical overview of the relation between Tamils in India and Sri Lanka.

Film Director Shoojit Sarkar's *Madras Café* gives a basic idea of what Sri Lankan Tamils have been through during its civil war in the 1990s. The film has been critically appraised. Most critics have called it a movie with a mixture of facts and fiction with a well-knit storyline. Few have pointed out that the

depiction of some of the incidents has not been able to capture the reality of the situation. In spite of that it does give one a rudimentary idea of the condition of the Tamils within the country.

The History of Tamils in South Asia

Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon was also a British Colony like India. It received its independence in 1948. Even though geographically a very small country, it has a highly heterogeneous population consisting of two main ethnic groups. These two groups are the Sinhalese (Buddhists and Christians) and the Tamils (Hindus and Christians). Among the ethnic minorities are the Muslims, popularly known as the Moors, the Burghers, mainly Christian and the descendants of the colonial powers. Apart from them, there are the Eurasians, Malay, Veddas and the Europeans. According to the 1981 census of Sri Lanka, the major ethnic group, the Sinhalese, comprised of 74 per cent of the then population.⁴ The former constituted 70 per cent of the total population (Choudhary).

Sinhala is the main language of Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese live in the western region of the Island country. They are said to have been migrants partly from North India around 500 BC (basically Aryans from Bengal; Jayawardhana 1988). With time they began to get assimilated with the original Proto-Austroloid inhabitants of the land. Sinhalese language and Buddhist religion became associated with these people in the country. The Sinhalese could again be divided into the Low Country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese. The former constituted around 60 per cent of the Sinhalese population.

The largest ethnic minority in the country are the Tamils. The Tamils in Sri Lanka can be grouped into Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils. Sri Lankan Tamils who constitute about 11 per cent of the total population have lived mostly in the northern and eastern regions. For these people, Jaffna has been the main area of their activity. They are looked upon by the Sinhalese as invaders from South India. However, there is historical evidence that the Tamils had a kingdom as early as the seventh century AD (*ibid.*) This may suggest that all Tamils in this group are not recent migrants from India but have been living there since ages. Those Tamils who worked under the British rule as plantation workers are known as Plantation Tamils. There are others who had been in Sri Lanka even before British rule and are partly descendants of immigrants from India years back. Richard De Silva goes on to say that the 'Tamil element in Sri Lanka increased substantially with the arrival of the Indian Tamils largely in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (*ibid.*, 3) (De Silva 1992). These Indian Tamils are referred to as Up-Country Tamils because of their occupation in coffee and then tea plantations. Although denied by the Tamils of India, the Indian Tamils have been physically distant from the Sri Lankan Tamils because of which they have not been a united ethnic group. Another reason behind their lack of unity is that very few Indian Tamils have remained in Sri Lanka. Many of them have been repatriated while others have got absorbed among the Sri Lankan Tamils (Richard de Silva 1987). However, there are many of them who believe that there is no difference between the Tamils of India and Sri Lanka.

There are varied notions about Sri Lankan Tamils. Some scholars believe that all Tamils of Sri Lanka are descendants of Indian Tamils, some having settled there around AD 400. Some believe that the arrival of this group of Tamils cannot be dated. Some are not even sure whether they had any connection with India. On the other hand, the Indian Tamils are recent migrants in the country. They reached the island during the British rule as plantation workers. The exact date of their entry into Sri Lanka has been calculated to be around AD 1815, after the fall of the kingdom of Kandy. They were the first seasonal migrants into the land. However with the increasing number of them coming into the country for coffee and tea plantations, they began to get domiciled and become part of the region. The question of their citizenship was a bone of contention between India and Sri Lanka (Jayawardhana 1988). The Indian

Tamils have been mostly plantation workers while the Sri Lankan Tamils have been engaged in agriculture.

From the very beginning, the conflict has been between the two main groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. When the British reached Sri Lankan soil they suggested that due to differences between the Sinhalese and the Tamils they should form two different nations. This is typical of British tendency, whereby they tend to implement a divide and rule policy in a heterogeneous but united peaceful country. However, there is also said to be some official proof that there were two countries within Sri Lanka. Sir Hugh Cleghorn wrote in June 1799 to the UK government:⁵

Two different nations from a very ancient period have divided between them the possession of the Island. First the Sinhalese, inhabiting the interior of the country in its Southern and Western parts, from the river Wallouve to that of Chilaw and secondly the Malabars (Tamils) who possess the Northern and Eastern Districts. These two nations differ entirely in their religion, language and manners. (De Silva 1995, 85)

Just as many regions of India were earlier independent kingdoms in the colonial age and had joined the former in the post-Independence period, there were similar ones even in Sri Lanka. Kandy, Jaffna and Kotte were some of the sovereign states in Sri Lanka during British rule (Choudhary).

The problem in Sri Lanka is relatively complex. Seemingly, the Indian Tamils who have been deprived of their citizenship once the British colonial powers left are the most affected by the ethnic conflict. However, a deeper assessment of the conflict would indicate that the Sri Lankan Tamils, who have been living in the country since ages have also been deprived of an identity. The citizenship of the Indian Tamils (living in Sri Lanka for more than 100 years) was taken away when the United National Party came to power after the departure of the British (*ibid.*). One of the first tasks undertaken by UNP in power was to disenfranchise the Tamils who had been having voting rights since 1931, under the colonial power. Denying a pre-election promise of having Tamil and Sinhala as official languages, the UNP also decided on a 'Sinhala Only' policy for official languages soon after coming to power. The intention was to reduce the number of Tamils in state services, where Sinhala was made mandatory. The Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 denied citizenship to about 11 per cent of the population, the main purpose of which was to discriminate against the Tamils. According to this bill, to be considered a citizen, a Tamil had to prove that his father was a Sri Lankan citizen and that they were at least the third generation Tamil living in that country. Only a few of them could prove that they were the third generation of Tamils in Sri Lanka as most of them did not have the requisite documents (as earlier births were not registered) and there were others who shifted to India to give birth to their children.

The demand of the Sri Lankan government was repatriation of these Tamils back to India. The claim was that these Tamils were the main cause behind unemployment in the country. There was another method of depriving the Tamils. Their land was being occupied by the Sinhalese, who had initially settled in the South-Western and Central areas. These areas were already densely populated, so new Sinhalese settlements extended into the Eastern region, which were known to be inhabited by the Tamils. This led to the demand for a separate state by the Tamils who believed that only a separate state could ensure the safety of the people (Jayawardhana 1988). Thus their demand mentioned the creation of a new state carved out of the Northern and Eastern provinces of the country and to be called Tamil Eelam (*The Times of India* 29 April 1983). Although the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was mainly behind this demand they believed in using parliamentary democratic means to achieve their goal. There were some youth who began to form groups which in future used violent means to achieve these demands. Many of them came to India to live as camp residents. A breakthrough in the condition of stateless Indian Tamils was reached with the India–Sri Lanka Pact of 1964.⁶ This was followed by another pact in 1974.⁷

According to Irin News, around 70,000 Sri Lankan Tamils live in Tamil Nadu camps.⁸

Sri Lankan Tamils in India can be divided into four categories (Suryanarayan 2003). These are: Refugees who live in the camps in Tamil Nadu; those recognised refugees who do not live in camps; Sri Lankan nationals who come into the country legally with valid travel documents; and lastly the Tamil militants who are kept in separate special camps.

There were three waves of movements of Tamils from Sri Lanka to India (ibid.). The first wave came to India in July 1983. This was a phase of communal disharmony in Sri Lanka which led to this exodus. This phase continued till 1987 when the India–Sri Lanka Accord was signed between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardene.⁹ The phase after the signing of the Accord saw the return of many of the Tamil refugees back to their homeland. Many of them also travelled to places beyond South Asia.

The second wave of refugees came during the Second Eelam War in 1990. Many of these refugees were accommodated in the camps set up in Chennai. In 1992 however, a number of them were also repatriated voluntarily.

It was in 1995 that the third wave of refugees arrived in India. The movement of people during this phase occurred mainly as a result of Sri Lankan army's operations in the LTTE controlled areas of the country.

Tamil Nadu currently has over 100 refugee camps housing registered Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. There are some, however, who have not agreed to register in any camp and are living on their own means within the territories of India. Many of the unregistered refugees are living with their friends or relatives outside these camps.

If the number of refugees moving from Sri Lanka to India during these three phases is analysed the result will show that with time there was a drop in the number of migrants coming to India. According to Professor Suryanarayan, there are a number of reasons for this drip in numbers (Suryanarayan 2003). All those Sri Lankan Tamils who had the means to leave their country did so during the final phase of the war. Most of them travelled to European countries, the United States and Canada. The Tamils from Sri Lanka also found it difficult to leave the Tamil areas as these regions were specifically under the scrutiny of the Sri Lankan Navy. Boat operators found it more and more challenging to carry the Tamils from Sri Lanka to India. Vigilance in the Palk Strait was also increased by the Indian forces (Indian Navy and the Coast Guard) because of which movement could not go unnoticed. There are groups with mechanised boats which carry out illegal trade, carrying scarce goods to Sri Lanka and then bringing back refugees from that country to India. It has been a tough time for the authorities to deter such groups from carrying out such tasks. During 1997–1998 the transport fees for carrying refugees became very high and this acted as another detriment for the refugees to come to India. Boat operators also exploit the refugees by dropping them midway into the sea and asking them to swim through the rest of the way. It is perhaps because of these reasons that the number of people coming into India came down. Another factor that might have hampered entry of refugees into India was that the refugees found it easier to reach countries beyond South Asia. A strong Tamil diaspora was building up in regions outside South Asia. These people made it easier for later entrants from Sri Lanka to come and stay in foreign lands.

Life in the Camps in Chennai: A Case Study in a Refugee Camp near Chennai

India and the Indians are known for 'Atithi Devo Bhava' (Guest is God).¹⁰ India is famous for its tolerant attitude and generosity towards all those who have desired to make India their home (Suryanarayan 2003). A home to all religions, India is believed to act as a safe haven to refugees and asylum seekers.

This is true not only for formal/legal guests that we have in the country but also for people who are forced to migrate from their home towns and enter India illegally. But there are complaints from such migrants regarding the condition of their livelihood in India.

Do you know what it feels like to be denied of a basic driving licence, even after 23 years of stay in the country? Do you know what it is to lead a life of headcounts everyday and signing into the camp by 6 p.m forcing us to take up unskilled menial labour in the vicinity so that we will return? We are not even entitled to a bank account. (*The Hindu*)

This is what one of the residents of a camp in Gumidipoondi had to say when they were interviewed by *The Hindu* in April 2013. This resident had an advanced degree in Business Management (MBA) with a B.A in Literature, neither of which had fetched him any job. Another camp in Puzhal, 20 km from Chennai, consists of refugees who are also equally frustrated about the condition of their lives (*The Statesman*). They have lost all hopes of going back to their original home town in Sri Lanka. These sentiments are not unique to any particular camp resident in Gumidipoondi or Puzhal, but one can hear similar hues and cries from amongst camp residents across Tamil Nadu. All the camp residents have a similar story of agony and pain to share.

In April 2013, I made an exploratory field trip to a refugee camp near Chennai. Marakkanam in Villupuran district of Tamil Nadu is 116 km away from Chennai and 31 km from Pondicherry. It is a coastal Panchayat town, well connected with many other towns in the state, as well as with neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh. Around 10 km away from Marakkanam, there is a refugee camp known as Peria Selavai. This is one of the 115 (number given by the residents) refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. Entry to these camps to speak with residents is largely restricted without the permission of state authorities or local NGO contacts. However, the state permission process is cumbersome and interested people often opt for NGO contacts. As an academic and researcher in international relations, I was granted entry into the camp to observe first-hand and meet with camp elders to get their perspective on their situation.

At the entrance to the camp is a temple which is typically South Indian in style and design. Although the camp looks empty and uninhabited at the entrance, it houses 465 Sri Lankan refugee families of Tamil origin. They have been living here in this region for the last 20/25 years. Therefore, they came to India during the early 1990s. The people in these camps are not allowed to meet strangers and their movement outside the camp is also restricted, limiting their options for jobs. One of the younger men explained 'with such restrictions, there is no way to make a living here. The few people that work with us and for us are some NGO workers and activists.' Tamil Nadu has a number of responsibilities for these camp residents, who are registered refugees in India. Some of these include providing temporary housing facilities, free medical treatment, clothing, utensils and free education up to secondary level (*The Hindu* 20 June 2013). The temporary houses are built of mud and bricks and measure 10 by 10 feet in size. Most of them were built more than a decade back and are in dire need of renovation. Without any support from the government, small renovations are usually taken care of by the families themselves with whatever resources are at their disposal. Using their own resource, many residents have even extended their camp houses with the increase in their family size. During the rainy season, camp residents make their own arrangements for safety and security from natural disasters. Some of the more dilapidated houses need special attention. Living conditions are made worse because of poor sanitation and scarcity of clean drinking water. In spite of the lack of clean water sources within the camp, residents are not allowed go too far to fetch water as they are not allowed to do that everyday. Scarcity of drinking water often causes illnesses among the residents, particularly the elderly and children. The camp also has limited electric supply; residents only have electric power for 12 hours between 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. This lack of electricity also means that camp residents need to go hours without fans in the scorching

Tamil Nadu summers. The refugees can work as cheap labourers and menial workers. Most of them work in construction works, as drivers and also fishermen. Each family head (whether the father or the mother, whoever is alive) is given 1,000 rupees per month. People above 15 are given 750 each while children below 15 are given 400 per month. The refugees are to pay for their own ration and food items are supposedly subsidised. However, residents complained that the rice which is given to them at a reduced price is thick in texture and not a quality brand. Refugee children from these camps are allowed to go to nearby schools for primary education while for secondary schooling they have to go to Marakkanam, which is 10 km away. Although residents are allowed to use the local hospitals, their inability to pay the hospital charges always makes it almost impossible to avail services at these places.

Apart from the dilapidated condition of their homes and the economic insecurities in their lives, the camp residents are always under surveillance by the government authorities, including the police. They are not allowed to move around outside the camps, unless for some work, for which they are required to take prior permission.

During my visit, camp elders expressed their frustration with the precarious conditions they live in. One of the older women expressed through an interpreter 'Our situation is particularly unfortunate ... we were compelled to come to India for our safety and the safety of our family. We have always wanted to go back home to Sri Lanka, but now that seems unlikely.' These refugees arrived at Rameswaram in India, had to get registered at Mandapam first as refugees and then were taken to the various camps across Tamil Nadu. There were others who arrived in India but did not want to get registered and live in the camps. This was because some of the people had never imagined they would have to live their lives as refugees in another country, away from their motherland. In fact, all the men and women who crossed the Indian Ocean to take refuge in India had the hope of returning back to their country, to Jaffna, which they consider 'home'. None of them had actually thought they would have to stay back in the refugee camps for two decades.

What I observed at and heard from the residents of Marakkanam was consistent with the findings from another survey conducted with Tamil refugees living in various camps in Tamil Nadu. Federation of People's Rights¹¹ carried out a survey of the condition of these Tamil refugees in the state. The fact finding report is important and helps in understanding how the situation has been for these refugees. The group has also come up with suggestions as to what can be done for these refugees. With permission from the government of Tamil Nadu, they visited a number of camps across the state. These were Keezputhupattu at Villupuram district, Peria Selavai in the same district, Thiruvadhavur at Madurai, Kullanchavady at Cuddalore, Viridhachalam also at Cuddalore, Pavalathanur, Athikaattanur, Paramathi Vellore and Kurukapatti at Salem district, at Karur, at Bhavani Sagar and Anacut in Erode district. Before being able to get hold of boats to come over to India, many refugees often hide in forested areas in Sri Lanka, in fear that they would be caught by the armed forces in the country. Once these refugees are able to reach the Indian shore, they are first interrogated by the Indian Navy, then by a Special branch of Interrogation at Mugandharayar Chatiram. After that the Dhanuskodi Police also investigate and then register the names of the refugees. It is after this that they are taken to the Mandapam camps where their local needs are taken care of by the NGOs of Tamil Nadu, which are working for these refugees.

As mentioned by the camp residents of Marakkanam, these refugees too were first taken to Mandapam, which basically serves as a transit camp. Many families, who have not been able to pay money for their transportation to another camp, live in Mandapam for decades. According to the findings of the Group, that initially these refugees are made to stay in isolation from one another. This experience is worse than those of prisoners in prison cells. Food is brought at 35 Sri Lankan rupees per head for each refugee and is brought from outside. Any refugee who is suspected to have been part of the secessionist movement may be kept in quarantine for more than a month and are referred to special camps. Those who get to stay

in the camp houses consider themselves to be lucky as not every registered refugee gets to live under a roof. This is mainly because of shortage of the provision of houses.

There are some camps in Keezputhupattu where a number of refugees are not registered by the government. These people do not receive any facility from the government or any authority.

The Fact Finding Group made a number of recommendations for these people in the camps. Some of them are:

1. All the people who cross over must be registered as refugees and given identity cards so that they receive some relief and rehabilitation facility from the Government of Tamil Nadu.
2. Those registered refugees who have married Indian citizens and have lived in the camps for more than a decade must be granted Indian citizenship (if they want it). Children born in the camps must be given Indian citizenship.
3. Monthly allowances should be increased for the inmates of the camps.
4. Good quality ration should be subsidised and provided for them.
5. Clothes and utensils should be provided more often and at regular gaps.
6. The promises made during elections by politicians that they would provide free gas, televisions and other services if elected, should be extended to these refugees as well.
7. The houses or the camps should be renovated from time to time.
8. Better water facilities, toilet facilities should be made for the inmates.
9. Moreover, these camps should be looked after by the Panchayats or the municipalities of the regions.
10. Electricity should be made available for 24 hours and street lights installed.
11. Medical facilities need a lot of improvement.
12. Self-help groups must be given recognition by the government so that the women in the camps are able to fetch some money for their families. Bank accounts should also be allowed for these refugees.
13. Small-scale industries should be allowed to be opened by these people.

Apart from these recommendations, the report also mentions the need for India to sign the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. The two Special Camps that exist for those who have been linked with the terrorist movement are said to be worse than prisons. These camps need special attention so that they can be made habitable.

In spite of all that has been said against Indian authorities it would be unjust to mention only the negative aspects of camp life in the Indian state of Chennai. Overall Chennai has acted as a safe haven for these refugees. Other positive factors that make Chennai a chosen destination by the refugees are the following factors. Then allowance (although meagre) that is paid to the inmates do help the families in their day to day matters. The very fact that India has allowed the camp residents to find jobs for themselves, however minor they may be, shows that India does care about the financial prerogatives of these people. Apart from these, they get the opportunity to use public hospitals and schools for their use. The provision of free education up to the secondary level is something that must be applauded. This is an indirect way of making these refugee children self-sufficient for their future. Apart from these, the fact that Tamil Nadu is a place of their ethnic brothers from India makes these refugees feel safer.

Impact of Migration on Geopolitics

South Asia can be characterised as a region having a number of ethnic problems, a region having a number of groups with the desire for autonomy, flaws in constitution formation and impediments to

the processes of democratisation. People's movement across countries is rampant because of the artificially created borders in the region. Historical baggage has led to many misunderstandings and unfinished tasks between the neighbouring countries in South Asia. The reaction of host states towards refugees and migrants is interesting.

In India, there are a number of groups which have been looking for asylum in the country, most of them demanding citizenship. A glance at the different types of migrants in the country will give readers a clear idea as to where each group falls into. What makes their stay in India interesting? It is true that those who come to India as geopolitical migrants do not always come here voluntarily. They are mostly forced migrants who have had to flee their home countries for fear of their lives. Forced migrants can be differentiated into refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and economic migrants. Some of these concepts may have overlapping meanings, for example, a refugee¹² (a broad term referring to all those who leave their place of residence and leave their country of origin due to threat to their lives or property) can be an economic migrant or a political migrant. Internally displaced people (IDP) are those who have to move away from their hearth and home in fear of persecution.¹³ They, however, do not cross the international borders of their countries. Hence, they are known as internally displaced. Asylum seekers are those individuals who are awaiting the status of being granted a refugee card.¹⁴

In South Asia, most migrants have some link (ethnic and geographic) with people within India because of which the reaction of the Indians towards them is somewhat sympathetic. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, people have openly empathised with the refugees and have been highly vocal about the discriminating policies that the SL Tamils have been facing in SL. It is because of this that the issue of SL Tamils is always found in the election manifestos of the political parties of the state. The parties in the state know that if they do not support the plea of the SL Tamils, they would not win the votes in the states. Many of the Tamils in India, who have been fighting for the rights of the SL Tamils, complain about the discriminative policies of the Government of India towards refugees coming into the country. The conditions of the Tamil refugees in India are often compared to those of the Tibetan refugees who have been living in India since 1959 (*The Statesman* 27 August 1993). In their opinion, the Indian government is more concerned and accommodating towards Tibetan refugees than SL refugees. In as early as 1993, when the SL Tamils were under the process of being repatriated from Tamil Nadu back home to Sri Lanka, many of the relief agency workers claimed that the Tamils were being forcefully repatriated. It was during that time when the Minister of State for Home in India said that as many as 113,217 SL refugees were living in India at that time. Technically all of them were of Tamil origin but none of them could be granted Indian citizenship because they were officially still holding SL citizenship. Hence it was imperative that the Government of India send these refugees back home and not get them settled in India permanently.

As mentioned earlier, there are varied reactions towards the different migrant groups within India.¹⁵ There are many Tamils living in West Bengal, who when asked about the SL Tamil issue will give varying responses. Groups and associations like Tamil Sangam and South India clubs outside Tamil Nadu, often find it a little uncanny when questioned about their opinion on the condition of the SL Tamils.¹⁶ Fearing public suspicion due to association, many of these organisations refuse to talk about the issue publicly, although individual Tamil families have talked about their opinion on the issue and how they feel things can be made easier for the deprived SL Tamils. A very significant role is played by the diaspora Tamil groups living in the UK or the USA. Many of them are not only vocal about their support for the SL Tamils, but also collect funds for them. For instance, the Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America (FETNA) has issued public statements calling for an end to Sri Lankan government's violence against Tamils. They have participated in agitations, including protests at the United Nations,

calling for the inclusion of Tamils in negotiations with the government resulting in a peaceful political resolution to the conflict.

Ever since the start of the problem of Sri Lankan Tamils being discriminated by the majority Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, India has played a valuable role not only because it is the largest and closest neighbour of the country but also because the affected people are ethnically linked to India. It is because of this that India has always felt a moral need to get involved in this so called internal matter of a neighbouring country. This in fact is not something that India has done for the first time with regard to the internal problem of neighbour. India has often had to take such steps because of ethnic, religious and linguistic similarities between the people in the South Asian region. Surrounded by countries that have shared origins, a 'fellow feeling' is imbibed in Indians who share these commonalities with people across the borders.

When the Tamils of India fight for the rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils in that country, they do so even by going against their own governments. India has seen agitations by the people of Tamil Nadu and the state government against the central government's decision to even have talks with the Sri Lankan government. According to the people of Tamil Nadu, keeping in mind the human rights abuses against the Tamils in Sri Lanka, India should not engage in any bilateral activity with Sri Lanka. There have been protests in Tamil Nadu against defence deals with Sri Lanka, visits by Sri Lankan sports teams and joint military trainings.¹⁷ These protests are a reflection of how the condition of a group of migrants who belong to common ethnic groups can have an impact on the geopolitical decision making of a government in a country.

Varied reactions have also been seen among the people of West Bengal towards migrants coming from Bangladesh. A certain section in the government has always felt the need to be silent on issues, such as illegal migration from Bangladesh, as that would make them unpopular amongst the Bengalis (from erstwhile East Bengal) as well as amongst the religious minorities, who are often used as pawns for electoral purposes.

The Indian government, which has seen coalition politics since the 1990s, has also realised the importance of regional parties. Regional parties can make or break a government. This is even more vital because of India's quasi-federal nature where the states have an impacting role on the policies of the central government. In such a situation it is always necessary to keep the states happy with the policies that the centre makes.

This situation is often problematic in case of foreign policy making; in this case, for example. It is the task of the central government to decide what policies need to be formulated with regard to a neighbouring country, here Sri Lanka. However, in order to appease its coalition partners, the centre has often found it obligatory to make policies that would satisfy the state concerned rather than make policies that would put India on a higher diplomatic platform with the neighbour. The question is to what extent can states influence foreign policy making? And to what extent can the role of a state be defined under the Indian federation? It is now time to see how the new government under the prime ministership of Mr Narendra Modi (since May 2014) will deal with such cases of centre-state conflict. With the new BJP government in power, an end has also been brought to coalition politics (which ruled India since the early 1990s). Some believe that this would be beneficial for India to take its geopolitical stands with regard to its neighbours.

Thus, the relevance between migration and geopolitics in international relations can also be established through this article. We talk about the impact of geopolitics on migration of certain groups of people. But migration also plays a role in shaping the geopolitics of a state. India as the largest and most resourceful country of South Asia is expected to keep the migrants safe and provide them with basic amenities.

India's geopolitical relation with Sri Lanka has changed over time. With the end of the Eelam War, reconstruction has been one of the most important tasks of helping nations around Sri Lanka. A 2011 report of the UN Secretary General said, 'both government forces and the LTTE conducted military operations with flagrant disregard for the protection, rights, welfare and lives of civilians and failed to respect the norms of international law'.¹⁸ In January 2012, India and Sri Lanka signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding a million dollar reconstruction project of building around 49,000 houses for the IDPs in the war zones. By 31st January around 16,400 houses were completed. The project is said to be 'owner driven' where the displaced themselves are required to build their own homes with technical assistance. The United States of America urged Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations of a domestic inquiry commission as well as accept assistance from United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) by the government has been totally incapable of handling the post-war situation, of investigating into alleged war crimes by the security forces.

India did not take any unilateral decision. Instead it jointly began to work towards the renovation of a war devastated region. India's support for the United Nations' resolution against Sri Lankan war crimes only portrays India's concern for human kind in general and the Tamil community in particular. There are of course other geopolitical concerns as well apart from the pressure given by the state of Tamil Nadu. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the country made during the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Accord, which basically spoke of devolution of power in the country. What offends India is that there is at least some limited devolution in all regions excepting the north and the east where the Tamils live. Therefore, India decided to sign the UN resolution of censuring Sri Lanka for violation of human rights. The central government was also pressurised by Tamil Nadu to consider taking this step so as to express their disappointment over the violations. However, Shiv Shankar Menon refused to comment on whether India was satisfied with the peace and reconciliation process of Sri Lanka.

Recent developments in the situation took an even more crucial turn. Before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) a lot of debate occurred regarding whether the Indian Prime Minister should attend the meeting or send some representative to Sri Lanka where the meeting was duly scheduled. There was difference of opinion not only between the Congress government and the opposition but also within the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Former Minister of State (MoS; within the Prime Minister's Office) Mr V Narayanaswamy and former Union MoS for Environment Ms Jayanthi Natarajan opposed prime minister's visit to Colombo. The opposition BJP (this was before May 2014) on the other hand, took a different stance. According to them there was no reason for the Indian prime minister to boycott the meeting as the Tamils in North East provinces of Sri Lanka have already had a chance of exercising their franchise and have elected a Tamil chief minister for their province. The BJP leader also said, 'We understand the sentiments of the people of Tamil Nadu, but Indian foreign policy has to be guided by larger interests of the country and our geo-political interests' (*The Hindu* 5 November 2013b, 1). There were some within the Tamil Nadu Congress who said that the Indian prime minister should visit Sri Lanka only to project the grievances of the Tamils there (*ibid.*). The Tamil Nadu assembly also held a special session to debate on the decision of the central government to participate in the CHOGM. The chief minister of Tamil Nadu had called for a complete boycott of the CHOGM. Rail blockades and hartals were called for to support a boycott of the Commonwealth meeting (*The Hindu* 12 November 2013, 6).

The problem with any situation like this is two-fold. The government and the ruling party is often unable to decide what is more important, the security of the nation as a whole or the security of a particular community. In either case, there will be opposition from some part of the society.

In the opinion of Krishnan Srinivasan that CHOGM was held at Sri Lanka was a ‘wicked problem’ according to modern management talk (*The Telegraph* 5 November 2013, 10). The Commonwealth Charter holds human rights as one of the most important values that all Commonwealth nations are expected to uphold. It is in this very light that questions arose whether it was correct to choose Sri Lanka as the destination for CHOGM. It is in the interest of Sri Lanka to recognise the Tamil minorities as equal citizens. This can be achieved by allowing the Tamils to administer their own lands and use Tamil as their official language. A lot has already been done after the election where the Tamils have been able to select a Tamil chief minister for the North Eastern province of Sri Lanka.¹⁹ Elections in this region were held almost after three decades and the Tamil party won a milestone victory in it. C.V. Wigneswaran was sworn in as the chief minister of the Northern Provinces, which was once the stronghold of the LTTE. The Tamil National Alliance also asked the Indian prime minister to urge Sri Lankan government to implement the 13th Amendment (*The Hindu* 7 October 2013, 2).

Conclusion

It has to be kept in mind that in politics and international relations, dialogue between two adversarial neighbours must not stop. If India can be in dialogue with Pakistan even after so many events of deceptive activities on the part of the latter, it can also continue having a cordial but firm relation with Sri Lanka. Lack of communication might in fact lead to a sour relationship between the any two neighbours. This is something which is not healthy for an already volatile South Asia.

Relations between states and the centre do get affected due to groups of people affected by migration. Geopolitics which was once a reason for their forced migration now gets affected due to the latter. It is also time we delve into questions like why India does not have any policy towards displaced communities, both internal as well as external.

In view of India’s foreign policy, the former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh spoke about resetting India’s Foreign Policy in a Conclave of top Indian Diplomats (*The Hindu* 5 November 2013a, 1). India’s Foreign policy has seen resistance from within especially by some of the federating units like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Since India is described as a ‘Union of States’ the concerns of each part of the Union is considered valuable. India’s regional foreign policy needs a major overhaul which has been expressed by Dr Singh. He mentioned five areas which need special attention (*ibid.*):

1. Country’s development is to be the centre-stage among its international concerns
2. Greater integration with the world economy
3. Stable relationships with great powers
4. Greater regional cooperation
5. Propagation of values India stood for

Experts like Rajiv Sikri, former Diplomat in the Government of India, however, expressed dissatisfaction about the prime minister not having mentioned anything about security issues like the situation in the borders of the Indian territory.

Politics minus morality is what international relations is all about according to the Classical Realists. However, complexities in the present globalised world demand something extra from leaders and

politicians. It is necessary to take special consideration of the rights of human beings. This is necessary for survival especially because the world is already filled with terrorist activities, ethnic conflicts and state-led assassinations. Under these circumstances, it is a priority for every country, in this case India, to keep in mind that the welfare of its citizens comes first. It then becomes its moral duty to provide shelter to all those who seek refuge in India, provided these people are legally seeking such shelter from the Government of India.

Geopolitical exigencies leading to unwanted movements of people across the region have made the people assertive in projecting their needs so that there are lesser incidents of forced migration in future. It reflects the power of a state to force the centre in the Indian system to pursue policies according to the benefit of its people. This is possible irrespective of whether the state government is in power or in opposition. In both positions it can disturb the smooth functioning of the central government.

Notes

1. <http://news.outlookindia.com/>, accessed on 2 January 2014.
2. <http://www.constitution.org/cons/india>, accessed on 2 January 2014.
3. 'Govt Buckles under Mamata Pressure, Scraps Teesta Treaty with Bangladesh', <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/>, accessed on 8 January 2014.
4. 'Govt Buckles under Mamata Pressure, Scraps Teesta Treaty with Bangladesh', <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/>, accessed on 8 January 2014.
5. Rajasingham, K.T, Sri Lanka: The Untold Story, 17th November 2001, <http://www.atimes.com/>, accessed on 27 May 2013.
6. On 29 October 1964, a bilateral agreement was signed between the governments of Sri Lanka and India. The agreement was popularly known as the Sirimavo–Shastri Pact. It was named after the prime ministers of Sri Lankan and Indian. According to this pact, India was to confer citizenship to around 5 lakh Tamils. This was to have a natural increase in the number of the people to be given citizenship by India over a time span of 15 years.
7. In 1974 there was another agreement between the two countries according to which India would accept around 75,000 people of Indian origin from Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, was to take in 300,000 persons first and then provide Sri Lankan citizenship to 75,000.
8. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/>, accessed on 20 January 2014.
9. Swamy, Narayan, M.R. 'India-Sri Lanka Accord: Does It Still Flicker?', <http://www.ipcs.org/>, accessed on 6 June 2013.
10. Taittiriya Upanisad I.xi.2, Swami Gambhirananda (Translated) Eight Upanisads.
11. Some of the most prominent and leading activists of Human Rights Groups across Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry decided to form a fact finding committee in order to look into the condition of the Sri Lankan refugees who have been coming in as an influx especially during the phase post 2006. They had to get permission from the Tamil Nadu government to visit the camp at Mandapam in Rameswaram in order to gather the findings.
12. <http://www.unhcr.org.in/pages/index/30>
13. <http://www.unhcr.org.in/pages/index/26>
14. <http://www.unhcr.org.in/pages/index/24>
15. The author conducted a survey of Tamils living in USA and India. It was designed to collect respondent opinion on the condition of the Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka and the refugees who are in India.
16. When I entered these clubs and introduced myself as a research scholar working on forced migrants, I was immediately told that they would not be able to help me in any way, apprehending what was coming next to them. They were adamant not to talk about their Tamil brothers from Sri Lanka or give their opinion on their plight.

17. Jayalalitha, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, attacked the central government (UPA II) for providing training to the Sri Lankan forces in Tamil Nadu. According to her this was sheer insensitivity on the part of the Indian government as it was helping a country which had ill-treated many of its own fellow beings.
18. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012>, accessed on 2 January 2014.
19. <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>, accessed on 1 January 2014.

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