

Pattern of Post 1947 Refugee Resettlement in India , Course-203,category-I

1. Introduction

The partition was a highly controversial arrangements and remains a cause of much tention on the sub continent today. Since attaining independence in 1947 India has received voluminous streams of political refugees totalling about 8 million till 1970-'71 from four neighbouring countries, West Pakistan (now Pakistan), East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Tibet and Sri Lanka named as Punjabis (4.7 million), Bengalis(2.5 million), Tibetan(80 thousand) and Ceylonese Tamils(0.5 million) respectively. It was one of the largest and most rapid migrations in human history – an estimated 14.5 million people migrated within 4 years (Bharadwaj,Khwaja & Mian, 2008). It is estimated that 16.7 million people were forced to leave during the four year period after the partition. With 14.5 million inflows during the same interval, this suggests that 2.2 million people were "missing" or unaccounted for during the partition. These groups differed in the time and conditions of entry, size of migration waves, the strategy adopted for adjustment. Three regions of India: Punjab , Himalaya and West Bengal can be considered as reservoirs holding the refugees and subsequently releasing their flow. But resettling was made more complicated by the fact that the ecological setting of the area of origin and destination were extremely different. The strategies and locations of resettlement, the consequences , the extent or success or failure and the associated regional development aspects varied for different groups and for different areas.

India is neither party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees nor the 1967 Protocol. The lack of specific refugee legislation in India has led the Govt. to adopt an ad hoc approach to different refugee influxes. The status of refugees in India is governed mainly by political and administrative decisions rather than any codified model of conduct. The ad hoc nature of the government's approach has led to varying treatment of different refugee groups. Some groups are granted a full range of benefits including legal residence and the ability to be legally employed, whilst others are criminalised and denied access to basic social resources.

This paper will be mainly concerned with the Tibetan and Bangladeshi who in terms of cultural-ecological adjustments and degree of success achieved in resettlement are the most sharply contrasted. Here culture means 'genre de vie' which is an interacting aggregate of value system, manipulative technology and material and non material traits. The culture ecological interaction refers to the process of adaptation of culture to ecology and ecology to culture. The Punjabis, Bengalis, Sri Lankan Tamils and Tibetan – four distinct culture groups who entered India as political refugees settled in two distributional patterns , a) Widespread, cutting across a large number of diverse ecologies b) Concentrated,

coinciding with an ecological context. Distribution ecology and culture (economy and technology) functioning in a mutual cause and effect relationship, from the trinity of the phenomena of refugee resettlement and development. For the analysis, most of the data have been compiled from mainly immediate post partition Census reports of the year 1951, 1961 and 1971.

2. THE TIBETANS

As recently as 1914, a Peace Convention was signed by Britain, China and Tibet that formally recognised Tibet as an independent country. Representatives from the major monasteries governed the country with the Dalai Lama heading the government. The Tibetan people have a deep-seated faith in religion and Buddhism ruled every aspect of their lives. In 1949 China invaded Tibet. Two years later Chinese troops forcibly occupied Tibet; killing, detaining and arresting thousands of Tibetan citizens. At the time of the 1951 census, the number of Tibetan political refugee in India were around 3000. By the 1961 census the number had swelled to about 43000 (an increase by 1500%) and it reached 50000 in 1971 –80000 immediately after 1971. Today there are approximately 150000 Tibetan refugees in India.

The primary reason for selecting India as their destination was the willingness of the country to accept them as political refugee. However the realisation of the compatibility of Tibetan and Indian culture was also a major factor. According to 1951 census 70% of Tibetan refugee were concentrated in West Bengal, 20% in Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh. The arrival and temporary resettling were restricted to the Himalayan states which are climatically and topographically analogous to Southern Tibet. But in the late 50's , during the relocation in other states, it was felt that the severest constraint on resettling was the ecological incompatibility of the resettlement areas with indigenous Tibetan culture.

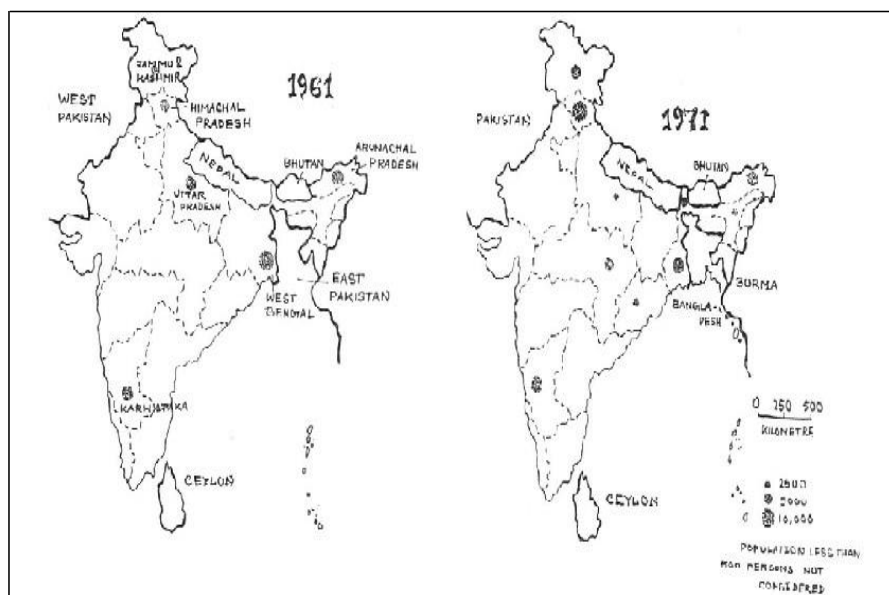


Fig : 1 Distribution of Tibetans in India

Tibetans who arrived in India in the late 1950s and early 1960s were accorded refugee status by the Indian government despite India not being party to either the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol.

These Tibetans were issued registration certificates, which must be renewed once or twice a year. Tibetans who were born in India are also eligible to obtain a registration certificate once they are

18 years old. Although the Indian government continues to allow Tibetans to enter the country, it has not afforded them the same legal status as the first wave of Tibetans. However, some Tibetans who arrived in the second-wave were able to obtain their registration certificates by claiming that they were born in India.

Tibetans in India live in 37 different settlements and 70 scattered communities in Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, South Sikkim, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Orissa. Of the settlements, just under half are based on agriculture, while one-third are agro-industrial and a fifth are handicraft-based. The scattered communities consist of smaller groups of Tibetans outside of the official settlements who were not willing, or not able, due to limited resources, to be accommodated in the settlements. Initially Himalayan settlements played a significant role in the process of resettlement. The Himalayan was considered a 'bridge' culture (Saklani 1978:42). Upon arrival in the Himalaya, the Tibetan refugees were destitute and experienced a range of adjustment problems. Tibetans in India live in 37 different settlements and 70 scattered communities in Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, South Sikkim, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Orissa. Of the settlements, just under half are based on agriculture, while one-third are agro-industrial and a fifth are handicraft-based. The scattered communities consist of smaller groups of Tibetans outside of the official settlements who were not willing, or not able, due to limited resources, to be accommodated in the settlements. Depending upon the amount of land available for the distribution, the refugees received from 1 to 2 acres of land per person. Since cultivable land is scarce in the Himalaya, the population of the settlements has been kept at a minimum, not more than 1500 persons. Each settlements has at least two camps – one at the lower elevation and the other at the higher elevation. This enables them to grow a wide range of crops and also utilise cultivable land wherever it is available. But the combination of heavy rainfall and rapid clearance of forests accelerated the loose top soil to be eroded, after two years of good harvest. Livestock was an important element in the agricultural economy in Tibet. But in India, for the Tibetan refugee, land for grazing is limited and adjoining forests are protected and reserved. So the domestic needs of Tibetans are not fully satisfied by the local procedure. Near- town settlements developed dairy and vegetable farming and handicraft industries whose products are readily sold to the urban markets. Everywhere in the Himalayan settlements part of the population evolved into permanent settlers, other moved to the peninsular settlements. The roadsettlements are essentially labour camps, comprising 40 to 50 tents and are temporary in nature.

Table:1

Population of Selected Peninsular Settlement of Tibetans in India

Settlement	State	Colonies	Population
Mundgod	Mysore	8	2000
Phuntsckling	Orissa	5	1800
Bylakuppe	Mysore	6	3000

Phendeling	Madhya Pradesh	3	2000
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Source: Dalai Lama 1969:4, 49, 64 and 82

Right from the beginning the Tibetan resettlement schemes were incorporated into the larger govt sponsored and organised agricultural colonisation programmes (Farmer 1974:50). This gave a certain direction, immediacy, and permanence to the efforts.

The Tibetan refugees have been successful, to a large extent, in the culture ecological sense, in reconstructing their economy and in partially integrating with the larger, regional, non- Tibetan groups, but they have not been able, as yet, to become an integral element of the mainstreams of Indian national life. They and the locals have considerable interaction, mainly economic, but little mutual assimilation of culture traits. For that to be achieved they have to accept Indian nationality, which the Indian govt is willing to grant, they have to be dispersed throughout the country in a larger number of settlements and they have to fully adopt the Indian way of life. The Tibetans refuse to accept these measures which, in their assessment, would thwart their attempt to preserve their cultural identity and reduce their chances of returning to Tibet some day.

It has to be mentioned that as far as the point of view of Indian authority is concerned – Tibetan refugees have constituted an irritating burden, both in economic and political perspective. Their settlement has created an enormous pressure on the scarce land resource and a serious impediment to regional development.

3. THE BENGALI REFUGEE

The Bengali refugees are comprised of Bengali Hindus, Bengali Muslims and tribal groups from East Pakistan and Bangladesh around 1947 and 1971. India was partitioned in 1947, leading to the creation of two sovereign states: India and Pakistan. The Hindu population of Pakistan, numbering roughly three million, is largely concentrated in the southern province of Sindh. These streams of migrants were followed by the Bengali Muslims and the tribal groups who entered India mainly after 1971. The tense inter-communal relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Pakistan have become more apparent since the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. Growing insecurity amongst Hindus, particularly with the rise of right-wing Islamist groups in the country caused more Hindus to leave for India. The Islamisation of the country under the dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq made life for religious minorities in Pakistan difficult in the late 1970s and 1980s. After the destruction of the Babri

Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, the backlash against the Hindu population caused many more to flee to India.

The resettlement of Bengali Hindus is apparently an intractable issue and the govt. has had problems with its identification and assessment. Before the migrants can be identified, they mingle with the vast humanity living in the rural Bengal or move straight to the dying metropolis of Calcutta. On the other hand the Muslim migrants have not been given the

status of legal refugees and hence have received neither help nor direction in the process of spontaneous resettlement. They move mostly through the southern gateway and tend to concentrate mainly in the Brahmaputra Valley districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Nowgong and Cachar and in the border districts of Malda, West Dinajpur and Murshidabad in West Bengal and Tripura (Das 1980:6; and Gosal and Mukerji 1979:94).

Pakistan in India,

1951

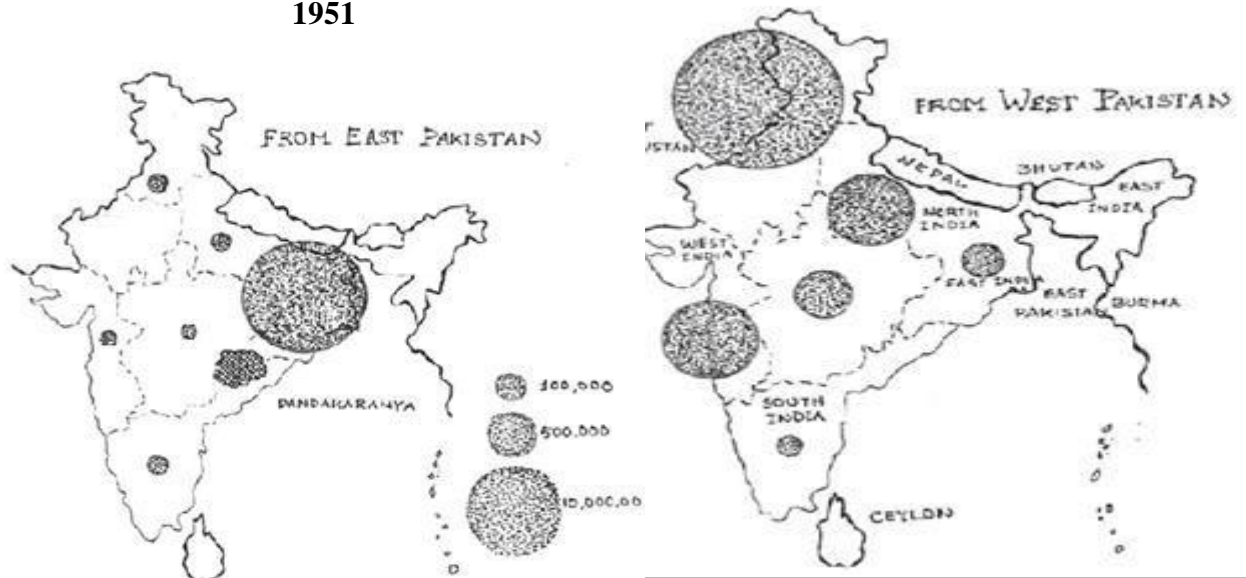


Fig: 2.1 Distribution of refugees from

Fig: 2.2 Distribution of refugees from Pakistan in India, 1951

The Indian Constitution and the Indian Citizenship Act 1955, however, make specific provision for those who were born or whose parents were born in undivided India to apply for Indian citizenship. The Citizenship Amendment Rules 2004 specifically provide for Pakistanis to apply for citizenship in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The conditions for citizenship are that the individual must have been continuously resident in India for five years, rather than for 12 years as is the case with other foreigners applying for citizenship, and intend to settle permanently in India. As a

result of this legislation, which dramatically sped up the application process, the Indian government awarded 13,000

Hindu Pakistanis Indian citizenship between 2005 and 2006. Once Pakistani refugees have attained citizenship they are afforded the same rights as Indian citizens. The amendment of the Citizenship Act in 2005, however, has drastically increased the fee structure for citizenship application. For the poorest Pakistanis these fees are prohibitive, leaving them permanently disenfranchised.

Initially Bengali refugees were held back in the human reservoir of West Bengal where, in a not too unfamiliar setting, they tried to adjust to the ecological conditions. However the economic compulsions were overwhelming and without moving out they would not solve their problem. Little support was forthcoming from the govt which was mainly interested in flushing them out of West Bengal and resettling them at some distance like Dandakaranya (inaccessible and remote from West Bengal) – a forested plateau, ranging in height from 200 to 900m. with many intermittent and perennial streams. The ecological handicaps include the danger of inadequate rainfall at the beginning and end of the southwest monsoon, heavy clayey soil in the valley bottoms and

sandy soil on the swells, and hyperendemic malaria and blackwater fever. So from the very beginning the resettlement programme was implemented by a govt organisation, the Dandakaranya Development Authority, established in 1958. But no Bengali refugee has willingly moved into Dandakaranya. Their perception of distance from West Bengal and their deeply entrenched reluctance to settle in non-Bengali speaking areas were the major, built-in obstacles to their movement to the region.

Table: 2
Growth of Muslim population in Assam and West Bengal

States and Districts	Percentage growth of Muslim population		Percentage share of Muslim immigrants in the total Muslim growth.
	1951- 1961	1961 -1971	
ASSAM	39	31	
Goalpara	41	41	30
Kamrup	39	36	28
Nowgong	39	32	29
Cachar	21	27	7
WEST BENGAL	36	30	
Malda	63	23	55
West Dinajpur	51	28	45
Murshidabad	35	30	21
Nadia	63	25	14
Tripura	68	-55	58

Source: Data based on Census of India 1961 and 1971. Figures rounded off to the next higher digit.

Consequently the resettling of the Bengali refugees has been a cultural-ecological failure. Further their cultural inability to manipulate the unfamiliar ecological context bred in them a sense of failure, frustration and rebellion. They refused to adopt the regional agricultural technology or learn the improved farming techniques being introduced by the Authority.

There were other negative factors, including the strong, persistent and widespread propaganda launched by the communist party of India to lure the Dandakaranya Bengalis into Sundarbans, the failure of the Dandakaranya Authority to equip the refugees with techniques, tools, and acceptable infrastructural facilities to overcome the ecological handicap and the unmitigated hostility of the tribal group.

Right from the beginning there was continuous desertion from the Dandakaranya settlements, in waves of increasing magnitude: 1039 families in 1965, 862 in 1965 – 66, 1600 from 1966 – 72 and 10,923 between 1972 and 1978.

Table:3
Number of Bengali Refugees In Dandakaranya

Districts	1951	1961	1971
Baster	408	6072	52873
Koraput	3995	5951	72598

Kalahandi	466	399	525
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Source: Census of India 1951, 1961 and 1971. Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, volumes on Language and Migration

In total some 15,000 families out of 20,000 deserted settlements, including about 500 families who had already spent 15 to 20 years in them. Several thousand of them moved, on their own, into Sundarbans Delta, cleared forests and created settlements, without any planning but modelled after the image of Bangladesh rural landscape. Considering that Sundarbans settlements are rapidly stabilizes, the immediate question that arises is this : Why has the Dandakaranya scheme failed?

Dandakaranya is inaccessible and remote from West Bengal. Its climate, terrain, and soil are not suitable for growing paddy and jute. The Bengali farmer's culture and farming techniques, born out of the fluvial and alluvial ecological setting, could not successfully adjust to the regional landscape. The Bengalis have persistently refused to learn the local, tribal languages, mostly non-Aryan, and hence cannot interact with the indigenous tribal groups. Integration with the local, population is further hampered by conflicting claims to forests, rivers, tanks, trade, transport, social facilities and economic opportunities. Simmering grudges occasionally break out in open clashes.

The resettling of the Bengali refugees has been a culture- ecological failure: the native Bengali culture, historically and functionally rooted in Bengali ecology and lacking in resilience and the capacity both for accepting innovations and for being innovative has proven incompatible with an alien ecological setting. The failure was exacerbated by the fact that the refugees' technological competence for adequately transforming in the ecology to suit their culture was severely weakened by political indecision and victimization.

There has also been sudden continuous but unrelated influx of Bangladesh tribal population into Tripura, Mizoram and Assam states of India from the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. During the latter half of 1980 more than 30,000 of them, comprised mainly of Chakma, Tripuris and Maug tribals, entered India. Their undefined political status prevents their resettlement. In India they are not allowed to practise shifting slash-and-burn cultivation, hunting and fishing which form their traditional mode of living. Ecologically their resettlement would encounter major difficulties because of limited forest and wildlife resources and a very fragile environmental complex. Also, the tribal population, adjusted only to humid, forested hill tracts, cannot be settled in any other environmental setting elsewhere in India. Thus, they have to be resettled in areas adjacent to their Bangladesh homeland, even though this would result in vast ecological destruction and low economic subsistence.

4. THE PUNJABI REFUGEES:

In reconstructing their lives and attaining level of prosperity unequally by other groups, the Punjabi refugees have been the most successful. They are the most widespread and well distributed in all the economic activities and have become fully integrated with regional population groups and ecological lineaments. The Punjabi refugees are comprised of two religious groups, Sikhs and Hindus. The Sikhs are represented by four castes, Jats,

Artisan, Service and scheduled groups while the Brahmins, Khattris and Banias constitute the main Hindu castes.

The massive influx occurred within relatively short time: by 1951 there were about 4.7 million Punjab refugees, three quarters of whom were concentrated in North-western India (including Punjab with 60%). There was a large spill-over from Punjab into Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and into distant areas such as the Chambal Valley and Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh.

About 60% of the refugees went to rural areas, and the rest to urban places. Their proportion in farming, tertiary services, and commerce were 40, 25, and 16% respectively. Fortunately for the refugees, evacuee properties left behind by Muslims were extensive and could be allotted to the Punjabi refugees both in urban and rural areas. Many of the refugee farmers received land in the ancestral villages from which their ancestors had migrated to the canal colonies of West Punjab. Their resettlement in Punjab and Delhi, a gigantic task, was undertaken by the government. However, in other areas rehabilitation was due to their own initiative, pragmatism and opportunism.

Urban and rural resettlement have had different characteristics, although in both the degree of success far exceeded the levels of expectation. The urban Punjabis often moved repeatedly in search of employment opportunities and evacuee properties. Some of them went as far as Assam, Kerala, Madras and Bombay.

The Punjabi refugee farmers, like their urban counterparts, resettled in most diverse ecological and spatial setting : the birs (savannah lands which were former hunting grounds of feudal rulers), The sandy plains of Hissar, the annually flooded dhak forest land of Karnal, the bet (recent flood-plains), tarai (piedmont swampy tracts), mining areas of Bihar, plantation regions of Assam, and ravine lands of Gwalior. Many of them gave up farming and became commercial entrepreneurs and engineering and transportation workers and settled in Bombay, Madras, Durgapur, Bihar and Rourkela. They engaged in a surprisingly wide spectrum.

In the beginning Punjabis were confident pioneer settlers. Almost immediately they developed strong and articulate interest group, establishing liaison with government agencies and insisting on their grievances being heard and demanded fulfilled. The Punjabi refugees have not merely survived but prospered in the alien setting. Everywhere they have transcended regional and local barriers – ecological, economical, political, social, and cultural to attain prosperity.

5. THE SRI LANKAN TAMILS :

The Sri Lankan Tamils who came to India as refugees around 1960 as a result of a pact between Shastri and Bandaranaike, are the descendants of those Tamils who around 1840 went to Ceylon as cheap agricultural labour and those who migrated subsequently. In Sri Lanka the Tamils are mainly settled in Jaffna peninsula and the interior hill country (Ginsburg 1958:666; Silva 1977:117). In the former, where they settled early, the Tamils, are efficient paddy growers adept in the use of dry-farming techniques, albeit on small farms; in the latter they are recent migrants, employed mainly as plantation and estate labourers. This spatial segregation has contributed at least as much as ethnic differentiation

to the creation of a areal-cultural, pluralistic, but fragmented and internally conflicting society. Their problem arose from the non-acceptance of their demand for dual citizenship and retention of Tamil as one of the principle languages of the country. The ensuing agreement stipulated over a period of 15 years some 525,000 Sri Lankan Tamil would return to Tamil Nadu in India. In fact the migration volume was much smaller as only about 55,000 of them returned on the permanent basis. In addition, many returnees stayed in India for a few years, and returned to Sri Lanka permanently. This periodic migration and return migration have since 1950 been continually fuelled by ethnically based communal antagonism and political rivalry between the Sinhalese and the Tamils (Silva 1977:177).

At the census of 1961 Sri Lankan Tamils settled in India numbered 28,600, of whom 23000 were concentrated in their ancestral Tamil Nadu with the rest in Mysore, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra states (Number 1965:26-64). Their number almost doubled to 55,000 in 1971 (Sekhar 1979:16).

N factor has played a more important role in the process of Tamil resettlement than continued residence in rural areas possessing ecological settings, parameters and resources similar to those in the areas of immediate origin in Sri Lanka and in the areas of resettlement back in Tamil Nadu. This trend was further buttressed by their uninterrupted agricultural or primary mode of living. Many of them, on their own initiative, became absorbed in emerging capitalist agriculture. Many of them have remained peasant farmers. On the whole government help has been only marginal. The colonies that the government selected for them which they then cleared and settled, were covered before colonization with degraded but fairly dense scrub-jungle (Farmer 1974:153). Also, the government established tea and cocoa plantation in Nilgiris and Kanyakumari hills and a Plantation Development Corporation intended to settle some refugees as estate labourer (Farmer 1974:51 and 74). Except for minor conflicts arising out of competition for the use of irrigated lands (Farmer 1974:69) the Sri Lankan Tamils were successful in resettling in Tamil Nadu, the land of their choice, the land which they could identify with. They were also successful in integrating themselves with the indigenous Tamil population.

One may conclude the discussion on the Sri Lankan Tamils on a paradoxical note: considered in the light of the government plans, policies and programmers, their resettlement was failure, but, on the other hand, their own efforts and initiative and the voluntary response of the host group resulted in the success of their resettlement. Equally important, in terms of development, is the fact that the exodus of the skilled Tamil labourer has hit Sri Lanka's tea plantation very hard. Neither can the plucking routines be maintained nor can the products be brought to the factories.

6. CONCLUSION:

Refugee resettlement can be conceptualised using a model that involves six elements : country of origin, reservoir, dispersion pattern, distribution location, ecological nexus and development level. The largest concentration of refugees tend to occur in the past of the host country adjacent to the country of origin; here the ecological nexus and culture configurations closely resemble those of the country of origin. This zone is the reservoir and its extent and capacity are partly determined by the length of the international boundary and partly by the similarities in ecology and culture. From the reservoir the streams flow out in several directions, some of them determined by the government policies. These flows gradually decline in strength as intervening opportunities hold part of the

discharge back. Distribution location is linked with ecological nexus. The development level is the function of the extent and manner of utilisation of the ecological nexus encountered in the distribution location. As the distance from the reservoir and the first distribution location increases the development level falls. It is in the reservoir that the maximum efforts are invested and the development is most intensive. The pattern is severely truncated by the allocatory and directive roles of the government which result in high areal specialisation.

Applying this model to the Indian experiences we find that in the case of the Punjabis the resettlement and the subsequent location have been in more developed regions where the refugees could derive the benefits from and contribute to the development. Their maximum concentrations are in the states of Punjab and Haryana where their impact on development has been the highest. It is widely believed that the miraculous development of Punjab in the post Independence period is very largely attributable to the Punjab refugees. Undoubtedly the model is best validated in the Punjabi refugee movement and resettlement. The model thus describes and explains the movement, volume, resettlement and relationship to development of the different refugee groups in India. It helps us in attempting a comparative assessment of the efforts made by the four groups and other agencies toward their resettlement.

In the final analysis it may be concluded that the Punjabi refugees have emerged as the most well-adjusted group, followed by the Tibetans. Although the Sri Lankan Tamils have not been able to settle down fully and some are still floating around among the urban areas or between the rural and urban area most have resettled successfully. Undoubtedly, the least adjusted are the Bengali refugees who have experienced a cultural ecological failure and have suffered governmental discrimination.

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