

A CRY FOR CEYLON REFUGEES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO QUESTION HOUR

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Abstract: India and Sri Lanka are the countries characterized by great socio-economic, political and cultural similarities. Both the countries also share identical views on most of the international problems and issues. They had trade relations during the chola period. Rajaraja Chola defeated the king of Ceylon and subdued the country for sometimes. During the British rule many people from India, especially from Tamil Nadu went and settled there in Ceylon and worked in tea plantations. The people of Indian origin in Ceylon irritated the Sinhalese who waited for an opportunity to throw them away. This problem existed since 1949 when Sri Lanka got independence. The ethnic discrimination was followed by a lot of refugees swarming into the Indian sub-continent. The two governments have held protracted negotiations to find a solution of this problem but without much success. The presence of large number of Tamilian refugees in India was felt by the native people who began to raise their voice against the central government to intervene. The political parties in Tamil Nadu played a vital role in screwing the congress party in Tamil Nadu to settle the issue. The legislators belonging the Communist Party, Dravida Munnerra Kazhagam, Anna Dravida Munerra Kazhagam raised the issue of the refugees during the question hour to get the attention of the government. This paper is based on the primary sources like the Debates of the Madras Legislative Assembly and Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly. This paper deals with the questions raised by the legislators and the replies given by the ruling party. Later the issue of the refugees were utilized by the politicians for vote bank.

Keywords: Refugees, Question Hour, Communists, DMK, ADMK, Evasive Reply, Under Consideration, Tamilians, Geo-Politics, Election Manifesto.

INTRODUCTION

Ceylon has historical relations with the main land of India. India and Srilanka are the countries characterized by great socio-economic, political and cultural similarities [1]. The early Chola Kings, the Pallavas and the imperial cholas had trade relations with the small island of Ceylon. Ceylon was also colonized by the English and it got independence on 4th February 1948[2]. When the first government was formed under T.S. Senanayake, Tamil leaders like Ponnambalam and Mahadeva joined his Cabinet. But when S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike became the prime minister, he introduced the controversial "Sinhala only Act"[3]. There was already a friction between the Sinhalese and the Tamilians and many Tamils were sent to India as refugees from Ceylon. The Ceylon government passed certain acts which curbed the rights of the Indians at Ceylon. This kind of discriminatory activities of the Ceylon government created lot of dissensions among the people of Tamil Nadu. The politicians also raised a series of questions regarding the plight of the Tamils from Ceylon. Though many questions were raised in the assembly, the central government remained a deaf ear to their cries and pleas. On the pretext of maintaining friendship with the neighboring country, the central government seldom cared for the issues raised by the state government. This paper focuses on the questions raised in the assembly regarding the Ceylon refugees and the vague answers given by the central government.

During the first assembly the communists were the main opposition party on the Madras Legislative Assembly. The communists passed a number of questions regarding the repatriation of the Ceylon refugees. S. Ramalingam, enquired whether any reply was received to the representation made by the state government to the Indian government regarding the rights of Tamilians and other Indians in Ceylon.[4] That question was actually asked to know about the status of the resolution passed in the assembly regarding the 'Exclusion of certain citizens of Ceylon from rights of citizenship. The resolution was forwarded to the Union government and the question was taken only in 1954. Minister C. Subramaniam informed that the Union government was fully aware of all the situations in Ceylon and were making continuous diplomatic efforts to solve it as best as possible.

India had already agreed to the terms and conditions of the Ceylon on the refugees issue and S. Ramalingam again and again stressed in the assembly that to the Indians and he enquired whether the State government sent any opinion to the Union government in that regard. The minister replied that they had neither sent their opinion nor their opinion sought for. The Madras government which was essentially a congress government just load the line of the central government which always looked at the Ceylon issues purely on geo-politics point of view. Again the communist leader K.P. Gopalan posed a question regarding the rehabilitation of the Ceylon Indians. A large number of Ceylon Indians had already begun to repatriate to India especially to Madras. While replying, the minister asserted that the state government had made arrangements to rehabilitate the refugees but the number of Indians who returned to India till then could not be said to be large. The government was watching the situation and there was no need for rehabilitation and it would be considered when need arose. The answer revealed the fact that the congress government failed to put a check the Ceylon government and thereby complicated the problems which ultimately led to the death of Rajiv Gandhi. When P. Ramamurthi enquired about the number of Indians repatriated, the speaker, cut him short and ordered him to put a separate question.[5] Day by day large number of refugees entered in to India and so many questions were raised about the rehabilitation of the refugees and all the questions were answered more or less in a vague manner. S. Vadivelu wanted to know the exact number of Indians repatriated between August and December 1954. It was stated that nearly 2037 Indians returned home.[6] Flight of Indians in Ceylon continued and at that time a new High commissioner for Ceylon. Mr. Chakaravarthy, was appointed in 1955. Before going to Ceylon, Mr. Chakaravarthy came to Madras and met the ministers of the state in April 1955. The legislative members hoped that the meeting of the High commissioner with the State ministers would ease the tension between Ceylon and India. N.K. Palanisamy enquired about the meeting of the High commissioner with the ministers of the Madras state. He wanted to know whether any possible solution was found regarding the plight of Indians.[7]

The communists and the other opposition members believed that the refugee matters would be discussed in the assembly. But C. Subramaniam replied that it was usual for the High commissioner in Ceylon to Maintain personal contact with the ministers of Madras. He also explained that the high commissioner designate for India in Ceylon met the Chief Minister and minister of finance and education on 1st April 1955 when he passed through Madras on his way to Ceylon to take up his appointment. C. Subramaniam also asserted that their discussions were general and did not relate to any particular development in Ceylon. Their answer was that they met the Ceylon High Commissioner but never talked about the refugees or repatriation. Irritated at this reply Narayan Kurup also raised a question regarding the same issue but he was also given same reply stating that their talks were of general nature. Later C. Subramaniam met the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. When he returned back. The members enquired him about his discussions with the prime minister and also enquired whether they discussed about the Ceylon evacuees to Madras. State C. Submaniam accepted that he had talks with the Prime Minister but asserted it was also of general nature.[8] He also coolly stated that nobody was sent out from Ceylon and discussions were going on. Narayankurup stated that a considerable number of Ceylon evacuees had already been to our State he also remarked that on previous occasion the honorable minister himself stated that the relief measures adopted must not be an invitation for the people to return.[9] C. Subramaniam thanked Narayankurup for his grateful opinion and stated that the government still did not consider that the problem had not become so serious enough to consider rehabilitation on a large scale. When further questions were raised the speaker asked them to put a separate question. When Kalyanasundaram questioned about the representation made by the state government to the union government regarding the Suitable steps taken for protecting the rights of the citizens of the Indian origin in Ceylon, it was denied. The ruling congress party asserted that the government could not give the details in public interest.

The congress government in the state solely depended on the central government. The problems of the refugees were not taken into account. A. Ratnam enquired about the number of people repatriated between 2nd January 1955 and 2nd October

1955[10]. It was stated that nearly 10,661 Tamilians had been repatriated. The government also informed the house that they were exempted from sales tax for any business undertaken by the repatriated Tamilians for the period of one year from 1st April 1955. He also further stated that no other assistance would be granted to the persons returning from Ceylon. Later, it was also stated that 17,684 persons had returned at the end of 10th October 1955. Still then the government never had an idea of creating a separate department for the refugees. They believed that it was not necessary to create a department for the evacuees. S.T. Adityan enquired whether the State government had pushed the central government to rehabilitate those unfortunate people and could they be treated like the Pakistani refugees?"[11] C. Subramaniam convinced the legislators stating that the problem had not become so serious and when serious problems arose, the central government as well as the state government would certainly take sufficient measures. According to a statement given in the assembly in reply to the question of A.M. Rathasamy more than 21,955 people had been repatriated between 19th October 1954 and 19th February 1956.[12] S. Kandasamy enquired whether any representation was made to the central government regarding the repatriation and rehabilitation of Indian residence in Ceylon on the first week of May 1955. In this regard, C. Subramaniam replied negatively.[13] On hearing this negative reply, S. Ramalingam got infuriated and enquired the minister how he could give a negative answer when two resolutions were already passed in the house regarding the issue. The minister asked him to put a separate question.

The problems of the repatriates and the policy of the central government towards the Ceylon Tamils were discussed when DMK became the official opposition party. The DMK strongly supported the Liberation movements of the Ceylon Tamils. N.K. Palanisamy enquired the government about the proposal sent to the central government about the repatriation of the refugees. The congress government expressed its hatred towards the opposition party and it was revealed by the way they replied. M. Baktavatsalam just accepted that the proposal was sent to the central government and was not willing to give further information regarding the proposal. SattanathaKarayalar elicited information about the number of persons repatriated from Ceylon in 1958. It was stated that 8,842 persons were repatriated from 1st January to 17th December 1958. When a supplementary question was probed to elicit the information about their rehabilitation the government stated that they had no information about any rehabilitation of the 8,842 refugees. More and more refugees were repatriated and there was not proper rehabilitation programme for their settlements. The government announced that the refugees could register their names in the employment exchange. Then M.K. Somasundaram enquired about number of persons registered in the employment office and the number persons who were given employment opportunities. It was stated that 130 persons registered in the employment exchange and five persons were given jobs. The DMK members S.M. Annamalai and M.P. Sarathi enquired the government about the representations received by the government regarding the Ceylon refugees.[14]the Chief Minister asked them to put a separate question because they did not want to disclose such matters in the assembly. M. Baktavatsalam announced that it was the responsibility of the central government to deal with the ethnic problems and requested the legislators not to interfere in the external affairs of the country. M. Kayanasundaram, M.V. Karivengadam, Rama. Aranganal and some legislators of the government enquired about the plight of the Indians from Ceylon and dieted information about the policy at the central government in dealing with the refugees. All the questions related to the repatriates received the same reply and sometimes in a sharp tone. Later when the D.M.K formed the ministry, they could not stop the secession of 'KachaTivu' to the Ceylon government.[15] Congress members like N.S.V Chitan enquired about the settlement of the refugees in KodaiKanal.[16]The D.M.K ministry tried to rehabilitate the refugees to some extent.

Later Anna DravidaMunierakazhagam and M.G. Ramachandran tried to settle the refugee issues.[17] But, during the later period, the refugee problem was used in the political platform to get more votes. When Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister to send the Indian peace keeping Force to Sri Lanka in July 1987 under the India- Lanka peace Accord Signed between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayanardene. The IPKF created more problems and it ultimately led to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991.[19]

The plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka has become a big electoral theme. Both D.M.K and AIADMK are vying with each other to impress the electorate with their commitment to protect the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils.[20]Jayalalitha, the former Chief Minister fasted one day Sri Lankan issue. M. Karunanidhi also suddenly went on a fast to demand an immediate cease fire in Sri Lanka.[21] The condition of the Sri lankan Tamil refugees living in camps in Tamil Nadu, the question of their nationality and their repatriation to their homeland on the country of their Choice are problems that need to be addressed Urgently in order to instill a sense of belonging in them.[22]the election manifesto issued by Jayalalitha Called for 'appropriate action against these responsible for the genocide of Sri Lankan Tamils to line with full freedom

and dignifies. Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees do not trust India's congress party. India's Congress party shows no inclination to put pressure on Sri Lanka to recognize an independent Tamil State on its territory[23]. But, all the parties used the term 'refugee' and 'repatriation' for political propagation only.

REFERENCES

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- [2] K.M.De Silva, "A History of Srilanka, New Delhi, 2007,p 7
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- [4] Madras legislative Assembly Debates. Vol.XIII, No. 13 Question no. 109, Dt. 13th March 1954.
- [5] M.L.A.D. Vol. XXIV, No.3, Question No. 1588, Dt: 24th March 1955, pp. 300-302.
- [6] M.L.A.D. Vol. XXII, No. 9, Q.No. 2171 and 2172.
- [7] M.L.A.D. Vol. XXV, No. 6, Q.No. 2169 dt: 22nd August 1955, p. 335.
- [8] The congress government seldom had affinity towards the Ceylon refugees.
- [9] M.L.A.D. Vol. XXV, No. 6, Q.No. 2171, P. 336.
- [10] M.L.A.D. Vol. XXX, No. 7, Q.No. 3235, dt: 2nd March 1956, P. 359.
- [11] M.L.A.D. Vol.XXIX, No.2, Q.No. 3001, dt: 27th January 1956, pp. 142-143.
- [12] M.L.A.D. Vol. XXIX, No.1. Q.No. 34, Dt. 16th March 1956, pp. 14-17.
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