

PERSONS OF INDIAN ORIGIN IN SRI LANKA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Recent trends in relations between India and Sri Lanka, particularly those arising from the July agreement of 1987 between the two countries, raise important issues pertaining to the status and future of the Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka, who are not directly affected by the agreement, but who have been subject of earlier agreements between the two countries. Article 2.16 (d) of the July 1987 Agreement states as follows:

"The Government of India will expedite repatriation from Sri Lanka of Indian citizens to India who are resident here, concurrently with the repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamilnadu".

No publicity has so far been given, and scant information is available, about the twin processes of repatriation contemplated in the above-quoted article. The Indian citizens referred to in this context are those among the Sri Lanka Indian community who acquired Indian nationality under the citizenship agreements between the two countries, and whose repatriation to India have been provided for in those agreements as well as in the normal immigration laws of Sri Lanka. The refugees mentioned are Tamils of Sri Lankan as well as Indian origin, very largely Tamils of Sri Lankan origin, who found sanctuary in Tamil Nadu in the wake of communal conflicts and disturbances in Sri Lanka, in and after July 1983. India became involved in the return of this class of refugees to Sri Lanka, because their return was tied up with normal conditions prevailing in Sri Lanka, and India itself was committed under the 1987 agreement to help restore normalcy in the Island. In the eighteen months which have now elapsed since the agreement was signed, some of the refugees of Sri Lankan origin in India have expressed a desire to stay on in India, while some among those awaiting repatriation to India have either disappeared or have expressed a desire to stay on in Sri Lanka, and the most recent citizenship legislation in Sri Lanka has taken account of this fact. The whole issue of giving Sri Lankan citizenship to persons of Indian origins

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