

## BOOK REVIEW

### REFUGEES AND REGIONAL SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA

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**E** dited by S.D. Muni and Lok Raj Baral, (under the auspices of Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka), Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi 1986. 245 pp., (Indian) Rs. 275.00

The flight and plight of the refugee is an age-old phenomenon, perhaps predating the formation of the modern state. Ancient histories, chronicles and legends abound with tales of historically formed aggregates of people migrating from their habitual places of native settlements under real or perceived threats of insecurity. Often these take the form of transmigration to contiguous or adjacent areas of relative security, but sometimes across the seas. It may be recalled here that the legendary beginnings of the majority community in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese, is traced to a band of refugees from North-East India fleeing from the wrath of the state ruler.

From the days of the medieval Fiddler on the Roof, the refugee problem has now assumed gruesome proportions affecting a wider section of humanity. It is this scenario, in particular its South Asian manifestation, which forms the central theme of this book. The bulk of the material embodied in this volume (except the chapters contributed by Rizvi and Suriyanarayan) represent the written papers submitted for the first seminar project of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS). Much of the groundwork of this seminar was accomplished by the doyen of the RCSS, Late Professor Shelton Kodikara, whose timely call for collaboration in this endeavor found a ready response from a team of dedicated South Asian scholars. Two of the leading experts on regional affairs, S.D. Muni and Lok Raj Baral undertook to edit this volume despite their other professional commitments.

In the introductory chapter they have neatly summed up the causes, course and magnitude of the refugee crisis against the background of their regional epicenters. No doubt in consideration of the ever-widening spiral of refugee generating situations in the modern world, the definition of refugees adopted here is much broader than what was envisaged in the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees held in 1951. The economic and developmental migrants are subsumed under the same category as those who are being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political dissent. It is precisely for this reasons that Shikha Bose acknowledges the use of

the description 'refugee' or 'migrant' interchangeably as 'deliberate' in her paper on the Chakmas of Bangladesh.

Admittedly, such loose classifications avoid semantic controversies but infuse an element of confusion to comparative analysis. Suffice it to point out the asymmetrical privations of the "Bihari Muslims" and Afgan refugees in Pakistan or those of the Tibetan refugees and Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India.

The main focus of the book is to relate refugee flows with security concerns within the context of the South Asian polities. Each chapter provides a vivid picture of the security threats posed by the respective refugee community to the host country. Understandably, by far the most serious of these, levelled at the regional super power, India, by the Sri Lankan Tamil exiles on her soil has received a wide coverage in the chapters authored by Bertram Bastiampillai and V. Suriyanarayan.

In spite of Kodikara's able attempt to locate the root causes of the major refugee exoduses in the upsurge of ethno-nationalism in South Asia, the contents of the book do not provide adequate discussion on the theoretical postulates of either the refugee syndrome or the concept of Security. However, it needs to be mentioned here that Imitiaz Ahmed and Dawa Norbu in their contributions have made a brief theoretical exposition of these two terms but do not elaborate beyond making certain passing remarks. Shikha Bose, on her part, speculates that 'deprivation' is the omnibus term encompassing all refugee generating issues, which, in turn, begets the question: will then the refugee exoduses remain an intractable problem for ever? Her own answer to this question provides a fitting ending to this review.

Fences and border patrols will not succeed in preventing the march of people away from a place of insecurity to a place of security. As demonstrated by the Chakmas, unless their security is guaranteed, people will come and go, back and forth, across the border line, violating every rule of international behaviour and internal law.

An epistemological purist would look for a finer definition of the term refugee as it is used here, and, probably a Buzanian encapsulation of the extended meaning of the term national security, but for those who wish to read succinct analysis of the refugee and the security interaction in South Asia, this book is of immense value.