Sri Lankans Settle In Canada
Category : January 1986
Published by Anonymous on Jan. 01, 1986

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As a result of longstanding violence between the Singalese Army and Tamil guerrillas in Sri Lanka, thousands of Hindu Tamil refugees have fled their home's war zone and found shelter in the open-door nation of Canada. Unlike many other countries, Canada has not refused entry to the Tamils nor refused them refugee status, recognizing the genuine threat to their lives if they were to return home. There are by one estimate as many as 5,000 Tamils in Canada, mostly concentrated in Montreal and Toronto.

Back in Sri Lanka, violence is escalating. In late December, unconfirmed reports state that 15-20 government helicopter gunships, allegedly manned by Pakistani mercenaries, attacked Jaffna and other areas. Though attacking Tamil militants, the ships also killed innocent Tamil citizens.

Montrealpuram: A visitor to some neighborhoods of Montreal might feel he's walking the shop-crowded lanes of Jaffna, the largest town of northern Sri Lanka's Tamil district Quebec province has provided welfare aid to all the refugees, something no other province has done. This has been vitally important, as jobs are difficult to find for the youth. Many speak only halting English and no French.

In the midst of social/economic and not to mention weather acclimatization, religion is slowly being rekindled. Many refugees have lost faith, wondering outloud how Siva could have allowed them to suffer. Mr. Ranganathan has recently organized the Saiva Mission of Quebec, and conducts puja and bhajan for hundreds of Hindus every Friday evening. He and an 11-member committee plan to raise a Muruga temple in Montreal to preserve their close relationship with this powerful son of Lord Siva who wields the lance of kundalini.

There will be more Hindus moving from Montreal to Toronto if present patterns

continue. For, although Quebec has been most generous with financial aid to the refugees, many find it difficult to master the French language, almost a requisite in Montreal. Plus, there seem to be more job opportunities in Toronto.

In addition to the culture shock of a foreign country, many of the refugees are still stunned by events which precipitated their exodus. It is difficult to find one who has not had a relative murdered or seen hideous atrocities committed by the Buddhist Singhalese (majority population of Sri Lanka). They have seen their temples vandalized, the murthis desecrated. Their past is destroyed; their future in Lanka almost nonexistent.

Yet, adversity has forged a determination in the youth. A number of the young men who have found jobs work double shifts in order to send money back to families still in Lanka or taking refuge in Madras, South India. They dream of one day returning to their homeland to live in peace.

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