

Attaining Trishanku's Heaven?: Bhutanese Refugee Re-Settlement in the United States

By

Sreeja Balarajan*

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), many Bhutanese refugees say they want to return to their homes in Bhutan. Despite this desire—and despite numerous high-level meetings between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal to resolve the refugee crisis over the past 16 years—Bhutan has not permitted a single refugee to return home. Local integration has not been possible for political reasons. Moreover, Nepali government policy denies the refugees two basic rights that are pre-requisites for local integration: freedom of movement and the right to work and earn a living.

Only a small number of refugees have been able to acquire legal citizenship in Nepal. This occurs through marriage or descent. With neither repatriation nor local integration a realistic possibility for the great majority of refugees, resettlement to a third country, such as the United States, has emerged as the only durable solution to the 16-year-old problem. The plan to resettle the refugees has been a divisive issue in the camps. While many welcome the chance to begin new lives in other countries, a group of politically active refugees opposes the resettlement plan, saying that repatriation to Bhutan is the only acceptable solution¹.

Introduction to the Bhutanese refugees is just a click away compared to a decade plus years ago when information about them was nowhere near the amount of 'results' they generate on search engines today. A search will throw up an interesting amount of facts, studies-short-term and in-depth academic papers, blogs, discussion forums, official documents, news and information sites, refugee narratives, among other things.

The re-settlement process has, in many senses, thrown open the refugees for scrutiny and not just by a small group of academics, policy makers and interested parties. This process has created a wide-open, unfettered 'market' for many of us to reflect on our own impressions and,

* Scholar and Humanitarian Activist

Refugee Watch, 39 & 40, June and December 2012

views and to disseminate our own knowledge regarding the Bhutanese refugees. The Bhutanese refugees themselves are an integral part of this process.² The re-settlement process has toppled the few refugee elites as spokespersons for their cause and suffering and generated a slew of eager participants from across the Bhutanese refugee population. Mirroring this, the re-settlement of the Bhutanese refugees in western countries like the US, Australia and other European nations, has generated another set of narratives offered by another group on the refugees. It is unlike any focus and attention that the Bhutanese refugees have faced since their flight from Southern Bhutan. Both processes have an uneven path, fraught with pitfalls. In this case, academics and researchers have also taken a similar journey along this path.³

Receiving a Solution of Convenience: Resettlement in the West

After the establishment of the seven UNHCR camps in eastern Nepal in 1992, the issue of Bhutanese refugees was taken up in a joint verification process between Nepal and Bhutan. This long drawn-out process ended in a stalemate but repatriation to Bhutan was never achieved. Over the years, the refugees have taken several attempts to cross over to Bhutan through the Indian Territory.⁴ Till date not a single refugee has been repatriated to Bhutan.

While technically contained within the camps, the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees had the dubious distinction of being refugees in a region ethnically similar to their own community and in many senses, moved freely in the larger sub-continent. The refugees traveled to India and throughout Nepal to meet their relatives, for education, employment, business, and some visited southern Bhutan clandestinely. The youth sought education and employment in South Asia. The political movement and activism among this group, took birth on the coat-tails of the initial movement created by the Nepali-Bhutanese elites.

Within its uneasy birth and legacy, the Bhutanese refugee activism went through several phases, ranging from demand for human rights, peaceful advocacy for repatriation, militancy and political front groups and parties of all shades. The refugees were not immune to the larger socio-political movement in Nepal and the surrounding region of India, particularly the group who left Bhutan as children, and grew up in the camps. Not allowed access to legal employment and education, frustrated at their situation and with the other political entities and international agencies deciding their fates, they were easy targets as recruits for political movements in the region, including the People's War in Nepal.⁵

South Asian states, with their cross-cutting ethnic communities have had a contentious relationship with each other. The increasing militancy among the refugee youth in early part of the last decade, followed

by the stalemate in the Joint Verification process, coincided with the interests of the Core Group of countries offering third country resettlement as a durable solution to the Bhutanese refugee issue.⁶ Lack of political will to pressurize Bhutan by the concerned parties, the international community, India's reluctance to 'officially' involve itself in the issue due to geo-political interests, brought about the third country resettlement process rather than repatriation to Bhutan.

Many refugees look back to the defining incident of 9/11 that happened a decade ago. They believe that their cause irrevocably changed with the attacks on the United States on 9/11⁷. The advocacy of the resettlement process was dogged with a lack of transparency, secrecy, and misinformation. The initial phase of the resettlement process brings out this less than transparent role of the actors involved in the process, including some of the refugee activists⁸.

By 2004, the concerned parties and the United States seemed to have started focusing on the resettlement option.⁹ The Core Group¹⁰ of countries monitoring the refugee issue brought the focus on resettlement in 2006.¹¹ The Core Group consisted of Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States. While announcing the re-settlement, the initial offer of the United States to accept up to 60,000 Bhutanese Refugees, changed to accepting 'more than 60,000' Bhutanese refugees.¹²

The official estimates of the number of Bhutanese citizens in the US before the resettlement program were about 150.¹³ By 2007, 3000 Bhutanese refugees had applied to the UNHCR for the third country resettlement option.¹⁴ The first batch of refugees started coming to the United States in early 2008.¹⁵ By the end of 2008, the US had resettled more than 5000 Bhutanese refugees.¹⁶ The figures for the Bhutanese refugees resettled into the United States are: 47,843 at the end of June 2011.¹⁷ The figure for the total refugees resettled abroad in all the countries involved has recently crossed 50,000.

***The Nitty-Gritty of Welcome/ "Adapting to a New Culture and Learning a New Language is not for Lazy People"*¹⁸**

The Bhutanese refugees are resettled by the International Migration organization, IOM.¹⁹ The IOM coordinates with the US State Department to work on the refugee resettlement program²⁰.

The US government works with a group of voluntary agencies [commonly known as VOLAGS] to re-settle these refugees. These include the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, and the Ethiopian Community Development Council.

These then work with their local affiliates in each state, like the Catholic Charities, the Lutheran Social Services etc.

For example, in one resettlement agency the procedure goes like this: the US government allots \$1100 for each refugee as a one-time grant to each refugee. The actual amount then given to the Bhutanese refugee varies from agency to agency. In this particular case, \$900 is given to each refugee. The remaining amount goes to buy essentials which are also provided to the refugees, over time or as and when they are needed²¹. The \$900 goes towards leasing an apartment for 6 month period with the rent paid for 3 months.²² The resettlement agency helps with the ‘settling in’ process which involves furnishing the apartment with necessities, to setting up the bank account, and working with the refugees to find employment, among other critical issues.²³

Among the federal programs available to the refugees coming to the US are: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Food Stamps, Public Housing, Social Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income, Refugee Assistance Programs, Child Care and Development Fund.²⁴ However, the most vital issues for the refugees are covered in the details about employment. Many Bhutanese refugees come in with information received from their network of friends and relatives (both from the camps and after arriving) and have a fair idea of the financial details.²⁵

Key to Success

The Employment Specialist introduces the ‘employment statement of understanding’. It elaborates ‘what the agency expects from the refugee and what the refugee can do’, and how they could ‘cooperate and work together’. Emphasis is placed on the importance of English, self-sufficiency and financial stability. Stress is again and again placed on finding a job (‘any kind of job’) and to avail of any kind of transportation arranged by the agency. Stress on the time factor is also an important part of this orientation session. Six months is a general marker to persist in the job, in order to create a positive work history.

Employment, independence, skill training, English as a key to one’s success, a year to apply for the green card and five years to get US citizenship are the things also stressed upon. The need to take these classes in order to avail of the social security benefits is another aspect. An important issue that is stressed is that, ‘most Americans do not get food stamps’ and that ‘most Americans do not get the cash assistance’. However, resettlement staff members point out to the largely positive attitude of the Bhutanese refugees, their support system within the community, enthusiasm to make a life in the US and the general positive response from the Bhutanese refugees.²⁶

Shrestha points out, “even with the best interest and intentions, any type of humanitarian work involving refugees is politicized in that larger structural and institutional forces will influence how humanitarian work is delivered.”²⁷ In this discourse, the overwhelming burden of obligation and gratefulness hampers refugees in raising genuine grievances too. Refugees harbor perceptions and complaints, mostly about the lack of continuing support from the agency/caseworker. This is particularly in the field of employment and has not been addressed by the agencies involved. They also felt that raising a complaint against one person, did not feel good, when the same agency was ‘doing all this for them’²⁸. In many cases, misinformation about the role of the agency leads to such perceptions.

Health care is an important area of concern, both for the refugees and the resettling agencies. Medicaid benefits are provided only for 8 months. These benefits however do not provide services like dental care, eye-care and other specialized care²⁹. The re-settlement agencies co-ordinate with free services and camps but this is one area which has offered challenges and pressure on both sides. “Medicaid is not free but they will help”. Staff members point out to the situation where the refugees end up calling emergency services for small medical issues. Many refugees, particularly the unemployed ones, point out to their inability to access healthcare and the stress on their meager resources force them to call emergency services.³⁰ This puts additional strain on the already overburdened system.

Since the first batch of Bhutanese refugees started resettling in the west, the agency/ies have seen healthcare issues increase in the camps. This is corroborated by the AMDA officials in the camp³¹. Observers also point out that the refugees, who were enterprising and quick to take the initiative of the resettlement opportunity first, had less healthcare issues. The population that was slow to sign up for the re-settlement has more challenges and hurdles in the process. These were related to education, and economic reasons.³² The larger issues and concerns found among this batch of refugees, coming after the initial group of resettled refugees are rooted in health concerns, substance abuse, and low level of education.³³

The population that followed was, in many senses, a population that was slower to apply for resettlement. Many members in this segment were initially against the resettlement process, not for any ideological reason but due to fear of the unknown, lack or perceived lack of educational qualifications and economic status to ‘make it in the west’.³⁴

Several studies on the mental health of torture victims have been conducted among the refugee population in the camps. Studies have found that the Bhutanese refugees are prone to suffering from malnutrition, night blindness, dysentery, mental health disorders, Japanese Encephalitis, malnutrition, malaria, respiratory diseases and measles. Somatic complaints were also common in the refugee population.³⁵ The prospect of

uncertainties and uprootedness of the ongoing resettlement process has increased health issues among the refugees. The Bhutanese refugees carry this burden into the third countries.

Madhurima Badhra, the AMDA director for the Bhutanese Refugees project raises the issues of dealing with increased mental illness related to the concerns regarding the resettlement process. She also points out to the spiraling rate of divorce among the refugees. Several reasons were attributed to this aspect: among several, one of the spouses was ineligible for resettlement, or one spouse did not want to go, family separation due to resettlement. There was also an increased pressure on the services of AMDA, which saw spiraling number of refugees seeking its services. According to Dr. Badhra, while actual camp figures dwindled due to the resettlement process, there was increase in the patients who wanted to have a clean bill of health for resettlement purposes. Senior refugee leader, Dr. Bhampa Rai, a refugee leader and medical doctor, also confirms the increased health concerns among the refugee community. AMDA provides primary health care and has severe constraints on specialized care and further referrals for the refugees. The IOM officials also corroborate the increasing cases of health issues, especially those related to tuberculosis that delayed the processing by several months.³⁶

The American Way of Life/ “As Close to Heaven as Possible...”³⁷

The Bhutanese refugees have the highest suicide rate among the resettled refugees. A study done by the IOM, finds that suicide rate in the camps has increased from 20.3 percent per 100,000 to 27.3 percent, post-resettlement, to 31 among those resettled in the US. ³⁸ Studies find that 11 Bhutanese refugees have committed suicide after resettling into the US.³⁹

According to a study conducted by IOM, the refugees committing suicide in the States appear to be younger than the ones committing suicide in the camps. In all identified suicides of individuals below 40 there seems to be an association with excess of responsibility imposed on non-traditional providers towards the family or with excess of responsibility in females separated from their families and/or other social support networks.⁴⁰

It also points out to the poignant trajectory of the Bhutanese refugee. For nearly 20 years, majority of the refugees who were constrained legally for employment and higher education faced a devaluation of their skills and social roles. While debilitating in many ways, the camps were also places which enabled community ties and ethno-cultural identities. However the resettlement process has once again splintered and fractured these ties.

The figures for suicides committed by the Bhutanese refugees are direct reflection of the prevailing ethos among the camp refugees in Nepal. While the younger school-going/college level population seems eager to resettle in the west, for the elder group, the feeling is more being hemmed in

and left with no other choice. Outward signs of prosperity in the markets lining the entrance to the camps belie the trauma, fears and the suppressed internal violence pervading the camps.

The UNHCR and Nepal government efforts in the Refugee Camps like Happy Nepal and TPO (the Trans Psycho-Social Organization)⁴¹ have elicited simmering resentment from the camp population. While some members of the above organizations are enthusiastic and well meaning, others provide fuel to resentment of the refugees regarding how they feel about the way these issues are handled. Lack of experience in dealing with the issues and the fact that local Nepalese are recruited for these jobs also create mistrust. Many feel that the local Nepalese bring in their negative perceptions and stereotyping of the Bhutanese refugees into their job.

Members of the TPO, almost all of them, who come from non-medical backgrounds, are provided with a training of 6 months. Their main tools were counseling and communication with the affected members of the refugee population dealing with serious issues of family rifts, following the re-settlement process, issues of substance and alcohol abuse. The camp refugees are scathing about the process and the abilities of these officials whom they see as over-paid local Nepalese recruits to pacify Nepal⁴². The refugees question the lack of experience and the youth of the TPO counselors assigned to the camps to deal with serious psychological issues brought about by the abnormal situation of the resettlement process. They also point out that this reinforces the stereotyping of the refugee and the disparaging attitudes the locals hold towards the refugees.

The debilitating conditions in the camps, combined with the anxiety and fears of the re-settlement process, have given rise to high rates of depression, generalized anxiety and post traumatic stress disorders, as well as some psychiatric disorders. These persistent conditions are carried over by the refugees who re-settle. Many refugees feel let down, after reaching the US⁴³. The main issue concerns the gap between the expectations, and the reality in the US.

They point out that while they are prepared for differences, the orientation sessions fall short in preparing them mentally to face the real situation in the US⁴⁴. The refugees point out that it does not prepare them adequately for the reality and that it is too close to the departure date. The IOM staff members and the orientation officers point out that a longer gap between orientation and departure would lead to more anxiety about the impending departure.⁴⁵ One important factor not adequately addressed in the orientation sessions in Nepal, is preparing the refugees to deal with the lack of employment⁴⁶. With information coming in from relatives, friends and neighbors about life in the US, reality has set in for most refugees.

The common complaint from refugees is about the lack of response from the case-worker, decrease in the level of commitment to help and support. In many senses, this arises from the institutional issues which place

stress on the system and the staff who work for the refugees. Agency members point out the need to take care of recent refugees and the limitations of their budget and hiring capabilities. Bhutanese refugees who have been recruited as caseworkers also point out the inability to handle the workload and the institutional requirement to focus on more recently arrived refugees. All these aspects put the burden of finding financial sustenance and navigating on the refugee. Increasingly, spaces like these created when needs are unmet or perceived to be ignored, and one finds that proselytizing agencies step in⁴⁷.

A recently published, UNHCR sanctioned study about the issues with the Bhutanese refugee re-settlement process, highlights the issues inherent in the process⁴⁸. Shrestha's work, based on a case study, from an anthropological standpoint reveals similar issues faced by refugees re-settled across the United States. The inherent contradictions between what one is expected to do (or to serve) and what is received, combined with the stress on meager institutional resources impede the resettlement agency staff. The added dimension of the economic crisis in the US also puts pressure and colors the attitudes of both the staff and the refugee.

Employment

Literate Bhutanese have found a variety of occupations. Many of them work as interpreters and case workers with the resettlement agencies. Many Bhutanese refugees work in the hotel industry as house-keepers, at the front-desk/reception, in hospitals, in grocery chains and stores like Wal-Mart, in seasonal jobs like landscaping, as carpenters, in the meat-packing industry, in fast-food restaurants. In the informal sector, the Bhutanese refugees follow the path of other immigrant communities working in the informal and unregistered sectors as 'helpers', baby-sitters, cooks/caterers and house-keepers.

The need to take a job and 'any job' has worked in several ways for the Bhutanese refugees. Many refugees were forced to take up work in meat-packing industries to supplement their household income.⁴⁹ For refugees, who practice vegetarianism due to their caste and beliefs, this was mentally debilitating⁵⁰. Those who belonged to the upper castes did not want to openly acknowledge or talk about this; they blamed their lack of proficiency in English and opportunities that according to them forced them into these jobs.

Struggling with the American Dream?

Issues have been raised and compared with the previous refugee resettlement processes in the United States. These concern inadequate or inappropriate housing facilities (urban ghettos, dilapidated buildings, and

high crime –rate areas).⁵¹ Refugee Resettlement Watch groups/ anti-immigrant groups also point out the changing nature of the US refugee resettlement program.⁵² Increasingly, the trend seems to settle the refugees in areas other than the traditional gateway cities.⁵³

Many refugees, preparing to re-settle, have lowered their expectations before they reach here. Others in the camps have resigned themselves to the inevitable and there is a loss of optimism, particularly among the middle-aged and the elderly refugees. Even with the increasing information, dissemination from the network of friends and relatives in the US, this group is affected even before the process of resettlement.⁵⁴

The asymmetrical relationship between the resettlement agency and the refugees in the context of a deepening economic crisis in the US, this is further exacerbated.⁵⁵ The status of being dependants on social welfare puts added burden on the recent arrivals. The waves of Bhutanese refugees arriving after the initial group consist of members who have increasing health issues and less qualifications which enabled their predecessors to benefit. As the more ambitious refugees choose to leave the camps first, the ones who were slower to sign up, find the ‘reception’ and ‘warmth’ increasingly strained due to the inherent stress/ challenges placed on the system. The question begs for asking: how does the economic crisis in the US affect the local agency worker’s and the attitude of the American public towards the incoming refugees?

Apart from this, the refugees again deal with challenges to the traditional gender roles in the largely patriarchal Bhutanese refugee community. Community activists and senior refugee leaders point out to friction arising from livelihood issues: women who take up employment often have their salaries coming into bank account opened in their name. Factors like these, challenging the traditional male hierarchy puts stress on the community. While many refugees understand the necessity, acceptance has not come in easily.

Many women are forced to take up employment. Even if it is for the family’s sustenance, traditional hierarchical relations among the family members are challenged by the prospect of the wife and a daughter-in-law bringing in the bread and butter.⁵⁶ Challenges also come from changes in the daily life in which the cultural and social differences are questioned. For the Bhutanese refugees, cultural aspects are often inextricably linked with their religious practices. This also applies to traditional gender roles and those between generations. Resettlement staff point out instances, where refugees and their extended family members, take leave for more than a week to observe the funeral rites. They point out the stress and concern for the refugees’ employment prospects.⁵⁷

In some cases, this has resulted in perverse situations where children hold parents to ransom based on their perceived understanding of the ‘American way of life’- how it is done in America. This recent report

from North Dakota, pointed out the incidences of children calling the police/ 911 when they were refused their favourite drink or dress. According to the director of English Language Learners Program, “The kids get to know the language and the culture, before the parents do. And the parents are terrified.”⁵⁸ She points out to the same issues, faced by refugees in other states where children are quickly placed in school, their parents go to work at isolating jobs such as cleaning hotel rooms or working in chicken processing plants.

The Question of Faith

The issue of proselytizing seems to increasingly dovetail with the re-settlement process. The question one needs to ask is whether it is by design and choice or due to the unique circumstances the Bhutanese refugees are placed in. Many of the VOLAGs are faith based organizations. Resettlement agencies have very clear guidelines on the non-partisan nature and the guidelines from the US State Department and the Office of the Refugee Resettlement. Resettlement agencies are not allowed to take federal grants and advocate conversion.⁵⁹ However the re-settlement process takes place in a system that is burdened. Many proselytizing agencies work in to fill the gaps and provide services that the re-settlement agencies are unable to fill in. A preliminary survey/search on the internet will display how these organizations work. Some are less subtle while others work quietly⁶⁰.

Elderly refugees complain that such groups tended to exploit the discontent and frustration among the younger refugee population. Easy access to networking, a consistent support system to navigate education and job opportunities, seem to prompt many younger refugees to join the activities of faith based groups. Elderly refugees, who are left alone at home, speak about the need for companionship, which prompts them to attend meetings and get-togethers organized by the churches and church groups. Others are reluctant to speak about accepting another faith or visiting such centers. Refugee activists and community leaders opine that it is also a method of survival for the refugees for those who do not feel ‘pulled by faith’/strong pull of faith. They talk about the concern of the refugees for their livelihood and to survive during the recession. Many feel that once the set-up provided by the re-settlement agencies gets over, only the faith based organizations might be left. ⁶¹

Finding Heaven?

So like that famed character from Hindu mythology, have the refugees resettled into the west/US only to attain Trishanku’s *heaven*⁶²? Have they truly achieved a platform for justice? In an age, where the South Asian youth aspires to go abroad, the educated and savvy Bhutanese refugee finds

his or her golden opportunity. Many are comfortable with the expected path of other immigrants in the US. As the system, the process and the agencies use the refugee, the smart refugee 'works and uses' the system and the process. Many educated young refugees who have resettled have already had experience with employment and living outside the camps. These refugees have quickly moved up from jobs like house-keeping, working in grocery chains onto 'better' jobs and even able to enroll themselves as students in universities⁶³. For the rest of the population, the dream is far from robust. Many young refugees who have middle-aged parents find themselves becoming first-time, wage-earners for their families. Many are ill-prepared for the expectations and the responsibilities. Middle-aged and elderly refugee, forced to supplement their incomes, have been forced to find work in less than desirable scenarios. The elderly refugees pin their hopes on the younger generation and better prospects for the future generations, but have resigned themselves to the reality of never regaining what they lost.

An important question that is often left unaddressed in the Bhutanese refugee discourse is the role of faith-based agencies focused on proselytizing work. These agencies often work alongside the resettlement agencies, filling in with volunteers and other support mechanisms in the resettlement system that the agencies are unable to meet. The unequal power relations generated in this situation, with the burden of obligation, also contributes to the process of racial stereotyping.

Politically, the resettled population will lie low for the time being. Many refugee youth, who were 'active' a decade ago, are reluctant to open any discussion that is controversial or 'political'⁶⁴. Others who spoke on the conditions of anonymity, state they do not expect a return to Bhutan in the near future.⁶⁵ Many put forth the hope that they would be able to reach a wider audience and resources through this process. However others were more skeptical of these prospects, terming such aspirants as mere 'computer tigers'⁶⁶.

Senior refugee leaders feel that the expectations of redress for their cause from the west were ludicrous when they were unable to do it for the past 18 years. However many of these refugee leaders also stressed on taking care of their families or at least opening the way for their children to have a better life than they had. Many have no hope from the younger generation who were born in the refugee camps. They feel that this generation will be totally assimilated into the 'western culture'. For those who were born in Bhutan and were young adults in the camps, the frustrations, downward mobility and rigors of life in the US are more real. Conversely, even success and upward mobility might sustain the expectations hope of this group. This group holds more hope for a political solution, not in the near future but in a long-term sense.

However, the geo-political realities of South Asia and the creation of a Bhutanese refugee-diaspora, concentrated in the US will probably chart

an entirely different path for those holding political aspirations. Given the reality of geo-political interests in the region, these aspirants might well find themselves as pawns in the power politics of South Asia. For a population that sought to hold onto to their identity, the path to resettlement has also thrown up difficult questions of faith, identity and nationality. In this process, the Bhutanese refugee networks, by way of online forums, news agencies and communication have also given rise to a vibrant discourse on the issues that concern the refugees. Increasingly these networks have allowed the Bhutanese refugees to take ownership, and become active participants on the questions and narratives of their identity, belonging and citizenship. For the younger school-going generation, the issue of identity and belonging does provoke any deep turmoil or feelings of belonging. However for the older youth, this is an important question which has been given more thought and consideration than many resettled Bhutanese refugees are credited with.

The challenge in these unequal power structures would be more complex than mere physical survival. The Bhutanese refugees find themselves straddling the thin line between 'orientation' and 'assimilation' and the question and character of their identity in this process. For the Nepali-Bhutanese, the flight from southern Bhutan with an 'invisible' and 'unwritten' legacy might seem to end in a distant geographical arc with this re-settlement process. However, the important question would be, whether this would quench their quest for a stable and undisputed identity or not?

Notes

¹ Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal, Cultural Orientation Resource Center Backgrounder, No. 4, October 2007.

Accessed at http://www.cal.org/co/pdffiles/backgrounder_bhutanese.pdf

² The Bhutanese refugees have their own websites, community websites from each region, multiple blogs, websites dedicated to the organizations set up in third countries of resettlement, discussion forums, news websites and so on.

³ The crisis in Bhutan during the 1980s and the issue of Bhutanese refugees have generated a divisive academic community and several contested areas, both in facts and in the way even the narratives and consequent history of the region is constructed. Section on Scholarship on Bhutan in Sreeja C T, Ethnicity in South Asia: A Study of the Nepali-Bhutanese Refugees, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad, India, 2007, pp.49-55.

⁴ Interview with Jogen Gazmere, Beldangi-II, 28 April, 2001 with follow up interviews through email and telephone in 2010 and 2011. Krishna P Khanal, *Human Rights and Refugee Problems in South Asia: The Case of Bhutanese Refugees*, in Contributions to Nepalese Studies (Kirtipur), Vol. 25, No. 2 (July 1998) p. 157

⁵ Interviews with refugee youth in Beldangi I, II, III and Goldhap, April-May 2001. Follow up interviews from 2009- till the present. See also, Sreeja C T, Ethnicity in South Asia: A Study of the Nepali-Bhutanese Refugees, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis submitted to the University Of Hyderabad, India, 2007.

⁶ Detailed analysis of the Joint Verification process from 1993-2003 in Sreeja C T, *Ethnicity in South Asia: A Study of the Nepali-Bhutanese Refugees*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad, India, 2007, pp.241-258

⁷ Interview with Balaram Poudel, R K Dorji on 23 July 2011, Kathmandu. With Tek Nath Rizal, in Kathmandu 25 July, 2011 and Dr. Bhampa Rai, 6 August 2011, Damak. Interview with a cross-section of refugees from the Camps of Beldangi, Timai and Sanischare, July-August, 2011, Nepal.

⁸ Refugees point out to several instances: the first appearance of a 're-settlement' document during the time rumors began circulating about the re-settlement process. This particular document had no seals or symbols of any agency but it solicited personal details with specific questions about interest in Third Country Resettlement. Many refugees filled it out and submitted it to the concerned persons, never to know about what was done with the papers or the information given in them. The refugee activists who distributed these 'forms' [in some accounts, only 'collected'] were later re-settled abroad. Another instance points out to a 'foreigner' who held informal meeting in Beldangi-II asking the refugees about their views on re-settlement to western countries. No information was given about the details of the speaker or the credentials. Interview with Beldangi-II refugees, July 2011. See also Susan Banki, *Resettlement of the Bhutanese from Nepal: The Durable Solution Discourse*, in Howard Adelman, ed., *Protracted Displacement in Asia: No Place to Call Home* [Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2008], pp.48-49. See also Shiva Dhungana, Refugee Watch.

⁹ DNS Dhakal, *Bhutanese Refugee Problem*, A presentation in Brussels accessed at: http://www.eepa.be/wcm/dmdocuments/SAAPE_BhutanNote_0711.pdf, Michael Hutt, *The Bhutanese Refugees: Between Verification and Royal Realpolitik*, *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Number 1, January 2005. p.54-55 Accessed at: http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/pdsa/pdf/pdsa_01_01_05.pdf

¹⁰ http://nepal.usembassy.gov/bhutan_05-16-2007.html

¹¹ Alexander Casella, *Nepal finally waves away refugees in Asia* Times, 15 Dec. 2009 accessed at: <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/KL15Ad03.html>

¹² See Susan Banki.

¹³ http://www.cal.org/co/pdffiles/backgrounder_bhutanese.pdf

¹⁴ *Bhutan's refugees to be resettled from Nepal within months*, 6 November 2007, accessed at: <http://www.unhcr.org/473088d84.html>

¹⁵ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7082586.stm

¹⁶ United States Department of State, United States Department of Homeland Security, United States Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions For Fiscal Year 2010, Report To The Congress*. Accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/129393.pdf>

¹⁷ UNHCR figures provided by the UNHCR Office, Kathmandu Nepal. July 2011.

¹⁸ Comments like there are common from agencies which proselytize. This is not attributed to any re-settlement agency. When religion is intrinsic with culture, it creates an unequal, hierarchical relationship where the proselytizing agencies become the ones to dictate and disseminate 'knowledge' become guardians in helping the refugees 'Americanize'. The burden of obligation to be a 'good refugee'

and gratefulness for the opportunity falls on the refugee. This aspect of the life, faced by the Bhutanese refugees again corroborates Shrestha's work.

¹⁹ For further details on the role of IOM and the US, see <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/united-states-of-america#rr>

²⁰ <http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs2011/162821.htm>

²¹ Everyday items which are not covered by the Food Stamps, like toilet paper, diapers, and such. According to a Refugee Resettlement Coordinator, in Virginia. 13 May 2011, Virginia.

²² It varies from agency to agency depending on the discretion and needs of the situation.

²³ This will vary from state to state and from different agencies. See for example some details about California in http://www.contracostatimes.com/news-special-reports/ci_15967643?source=pkg

²⁴ For a detailed state-wide breakdown of the programs and the matching grants see the Office of Refugee Resettlement website:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/data/state_prg_annual_overview.htm. See also, ORR Manual for the Refugee Assistance and Services, Department of Health and Human Services, accessed at http://dcf.wi.gov/refugee/pdf/orr_manual.pdf

²⁵ Interview with Bhutanese refugees re-settled in Richmond, Virginia, since 2008.

²⁶ Semi-structured interview with a staff member of a Refugee Re-settlement agency in Virginia, May 2011

²⁷ Cash assistance works with that particular State's initiative as a temporary measure to end welfare. Christine Shrestha, *Power and Politics in Resettlement: A Case Study of Bhutanese Refugees in the USA*, UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, May 2011. Accessed at: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opedocPDFViewer.html?docid=4dca7f129&query=Bhutanese%20refugees>

²⁸ Ibid. Interviews with unemployed Bhutanese refugees; some of them who were unable to find employment, Others who were employed and then laid off. May 2009 till the present in Central Virginia.

²⁹ Medicaid facilities are granted for about 8 months from the arrival date.

³⁰ Interview with a cross-section of Bhutanese refugees based in Richmond, Virginia 2009-till the present, who have used the emergency services.

³¹ Interview with Dr. Madhurima Badhra, Director of Association of Medical Doctors of Asia-AMDA, Damak Nepal August 2011. See also http://archives.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=19938.

³² Alice Verheij, an independent film-maker, also points out that the smarter ones got out first and the population that is left behind, has more issues with domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse and is easily swayed to violence. She also points out to the stereo-typing associated with the perceptions regarding caste and race among the refugees. Interview with Alice Verheij 23 July 2011, Kathmandu. For more details about Verheij's project about the Bhutanese Refugees, see <http://aliceverheij.wordpress.com/nepal-bhutan/>

³³ Specific Data is not available for these. However many agencies, involved with the refugees, mentioned the growing rate of mental health issues in the camp. Alice Verheij, an independent film-maker also points out that a larger proportion of refugees who have re-settled belong to the higher castes. For understandable

reasons, this is not discussed openly by the involved parties and UNHCR could not provide any data in this regard. In this case, the concerned agencies will have data that will include the information about caste-wise breakdown of re-settlement figures.

³⁴ Semi-structured interviews conducted with the Camp Refugee officials, in 5 refugees at Morang and Jhapa, July- August 2011. Alice Verheij opines that the

³⁵ Sharma, B. and Van Ommeren, M. (1998) Preventing Torture and Rehabilitating Survivors in Nepal. In *Transcultural Psychiatry* 35 (1). March 1998. 85-98. (TRANS.9) http://www.cvict.org.np/resources/articles/preventing_torture_and_rehabilitating_survivors_in_nepal.pdf

³⁶ Details of the health services provided to the refugees by IOM can be seen in the slideshow here: http://www.nepal.iom.int/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=22&lang=en

³⁷ Words of a Som Nath Subedi, a Bhutanese refugee settled in Oregon, *Bhutanese refugees: American dream tantalizes, deceives*, in http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2010/12/bhutanese_refugees_american_dr.html , 18 December 2010

³⁸ Guglielmo Schininà, Sonali Sharma, Olga Gorbacheva, Anit Kumar Mishra, Who am I? : Assessment Of Psychosocial Needs And Suicide Risk Factors Among Bhutanese Refugees In Nepal And After Third Country Resettlement, IOM Migration Health Division Mental Health, Psychosocial Response and Intercultural Communication Section and Mission in Nepal, 201. Accessed at: http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/studies_and_reports/Bhutanese-Mental-Health-Assessment-Nepal-23-March.pdf

³⁹http://www.refugeehealthta.org/files/2011/07/RHTAC_suicide_prevention_webinar_051711.pdf

⁴⁰http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/studies_and_reports/Bhutanese-Mental-Health-Assessment-Nepal-23-March.pdf

⁴¹ The TPO website says this about its Bhutanese Refugees Project: Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) Nepal has been implementing “Psychosocial Support to Bhutanese Refugees in Camps” project since July 2008 together with UNHCR’s other implementing partners. The overall objectives of the psychosocial support program is to improve psychosocial well-being (reduce psychosocial distress) among the Bhutanese refugee population; promote community resilience and capacity to address psychosocial problems; establish camp and community-based structures and systems of psychosocial care; increase understanding of the psychosocial and mental health status of refugees in the camp, and the level of, and indicators for, social cohesion within the camps, to inform and adapt the psychosocial care package as needed. <http://www.tponepal.org/>

⁴² The work of TPO is seen as another sop to the Nepal government and the local Nepalese youth to compensate for the Bhutanese refugee resettlement process to the west.

⁴³ Series of interviews from early 2009 until the present, with resettled Bhutanese Refugees who were leaders, political activists, journalists, teachers, camps secretaries, human-rights activists. Interview conducted in person, over the phone and through email.

⁴⁴ Interview with a cross-section of Bhutanese refugees settled in Central Virginia from 2009- till present.

⁴⁵ Interview with IOM Overseas Entity Process Manager, S J. Smith, 1 August 2011, Damak, Nepal.

⁴⁶ IOM's Cultural Orientation class at Beldangi Refugee Camp, Jhapa. 3 Aug 2011.

⁴⁷ See two examples from Texas,

<http://www.reporternews.com/news/2011/jan/20/translation-of-faith/>,

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/september/believersmove.html>

⁴⁸ Christie Shrestha, *Power and Politics in Resettlement: A Case Study of Bhutanese Refugees in the USA*, UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, May 2011.

Accessed at: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=4dca7f129&query=Bhutanese%20refugees>

⁴⁹ For example in factories in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. These particular refugees travelled from their homes in Virginia to stay over the week and travel back during the weekends.

⁵⁰ The case of Bhutanese refugee, C D, residing in Richmond, Virginia.

⁵¹<http://www.goerie.com/article/20111002/OPINION08/310029992/Tuzynski%3A-Violence-in-Erie-targets-gentle-Nepali-refugees> ;

<http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/wned/news.newsmain/article/1/0/1771006/WNED-AM.970.NEWS/Buffalo.West.Side.Series.Part.3>

⁵² The following study identifies the cities until 2004. Audrey Singer and Jill H Wilson, *From 'There' to 'Here': Refugee Resettlement in Metropolitan America* found at

http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20060925_singer.pdf

⁵³ Ibid. See also the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants website:

<http://www.refugees.org/about-us/where-we-work/where-we-work-usa.html>

⁵⁴ Interview with AMDA, IOM, CARITAS officials and with a cross-section of Bhutanese Refugees, July-August 2011.

⁵⁵ Shrestha's relevant paper focuses on the issues faced by the resettled Bhutanese refugees. However, it does not focus on the proselytizing groups that work in the system offering volunteer work and support for the refugees along side/ with the resettlement agencies. Christie Shrestha, *Power and Politics in Resettlement: A Case Study of Bhutanese Refugees in the USA*, UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, May 2011.

⁵⁶ Semi-structured Interviews with women refugees based in Richmond, Virginia 2009-the present

⁵⁷ Interview with staff members of a re-settlement agency in Virginia, Sept. 2011.

⁵⁸ Jason Margolis, *Learning a new language* in North Dakota, 20 September 2011 Accessed at <http://www.theworld.org/2011/09/learning-english-north-dakota/>

⁵⁹ Like the Commonwealth of Catholic Charities does not have the policy of conversion/ proselytizing through the ESL classes.

⁶⁰ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/may/migratingministry.html>

⁶¹ Semi-structured and unstructured interviews with a cross-section of Bhutanese refugees, according to different age groups, settled in Virginia, US from 2009- the present.

⁶² Trishanku, a king who aspired to reach heaven in his mortal stage supplicated powerful sages. One sage refused, others cursed him and another promised him help. When Trishanku tried to ascend heaven when the gods barred him, so did the netherworld. The powerful sage who helped him, then created a parallel universe/heaven, *Trishanku's Swargam/ Trishanku's Heaven*. Here, Trishanku thus

gained his own universe but was suspended in the middle, between the heaven, and hades.

⁶³ The 'better jobs' are characterized by the refugees as teaching, desk jobs, case-workers, in some cases, engineers, technology firms. In some cases it also means any regular steady jobs in the hotel industry, hospitals, fast food restaurants, grocery stores.

⁶⁴ Interview with refugee youth, leaders and activists in April –May, 2001 and follow up interviews from 2009- till present.

⁶⁵ On a condition of anonymity, several refugees spoke openly about their prospects and hopes. Many felt that the Resettlement process was in a certain sense the death knell for their aspirations to return to Bhutan. Others had more optimistic hopes of justice, but not in the near future.

⁶⁶ Similar to the phrase, 'paper tigers'.