

RESTRICTED

ABSTRACT

The impact on National Security by the Gypsy Population in Sri Lanka

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Abstract – There are no authentic records available about the history of gypsy's existence or their arrival in Sri Lanka. According to most gypsy leaders, the origin of these people in Sri Lanka starts when a group of Theligu people came from Telangana - India on a pilgrimage to worship the God Murugan (The God of Katharagama). Later, the facility of sea transport between Rameshwaram and Talaimannar was stopped and those people who came for worship got stranded and could not return to India. To sustain themselves they started the nomadic lifestyle and moved from area to area while having no permanent accommodation and managed to live in temporary shelters. By now these people have managed to acquire lands in various parts of the Island and few are living in settlement programmes initiated by the government. They have settled down in form of groups in such a way that complete village consists of their population. This arrangement facilitates them to gather as a group to continue with the traditional lifestyle. Now, though they have their permanent residences along with citizenship, they keep moving from area to area in line with their traditional nomadic lifestyles. This nullifies the value of citizenship as their whereabouts keep changing thus giving rise to inherent security problems. Moreover, due to the nomadic lifestyle they commit fundamental rights violations by indulging in child labour and neglecting education facilities for children. They follow traditional conflict resolution procedure and taking issues to country's legal system is discouraged. This condition is kind of a national security threat when we consider Professor Charles Maier's definition, in which he says that, "National security is best described as a capacity to control those domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion of a given community believes necessary to enjoy its own self-determination or autonomy, prosperity and wellbeing". In addition, Theligu community of Tamil Nadu has initiated activities to promote their language and culture among the gypsy population of Sri Lanka without the consent of Sri Lankan government thus adding another dimension to state's security. Most importantly, this is happening at a juncture where these gypsy people are at a stage to merge into either Sinhala or Tamil ethnic groups. The issues highlighted above have become obvious security threats for the state and addressing these should be done immediately before it could develop to a level of harming the state's sovereignty. This should be analyzed in the backdrop of the words of Amos Jordan and William Taylor (1981), "National security however has more extensive meaning than protection from physical harm; it also implies protection, through variety of means of vital economic and political interests, the loss of which could threaten fundamental values and validity of the state". These paper further offers recommendations to overcome security issues likely to emerge because of the situation explained above.

Key terms: National security, lifestyle, fundamental rights, government policy.