

# THE PROBLEM OF BHUTANESE REFUGEES AND COMPARISON WITH TIBETAN REFUGEES IN NEPAL<sup>1</sup>

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## The Context

Refugee problem is not new in Nepal. After 1950 when the country opened up for the outside world, several refugee groups have taken shelter in Nepal. Among them the Bhutanese are the latest group of all refugees whereas the Tibetans, who largely entered Nepal in 1959, are the first group. With the Bhutanese refugees what is new, however, is the scale and the time when more than 50 percent of Nepalese population live below absolute poverty level. Apart from these two refugee groups, there are other "refugees" living in the country many of whom are not internationally acknowledged as refugees. Important among them include the Burmese of Nepali origin who were displaced after nationalisation act of Burma in 1964; the Nepalese from North-eastern hill states of India due to indigenous people's movement there and Bihari Muslims from Bangladesh were displaced after being alleged of their allegiance to Pakistani forces during the independent movement of Bangladesh in 1971. In addition, some studies also document that Kashmiris and Punjabis are also sheltered in sizeable number in Nepal lately (see, special issue of *Kanun ko phulbari* 1998).

Refugees sheltering in Nepal can be grouped into two broad categories: those with Nepalese ethnic origin and those with other ethnic origin. Refugees with Nepalese ethnic-origin include Bhutanese refugees, Burmese "refugees" and "refugees" from northeastern India. Likewise, refugees with other ethnic origin include Tibetans, Bihari Muslims, Kashmiri and Punjabi refugees. Of all these refugee groups whereas Tibetans are widely acknowledged in the world scale, Bhutanese are gradually being recognized

as such region. However, no specific details of other refugee groups are available and thus their situation poorly known.

The main objective of this paper is to present size, distribution, and area of origin and the context of being displaced among Bhutanese refugees and to compare their attributes with Tibetan refugees in Nepal. Being an introductory paper it is beyond its scope to present detail discussion of underlying reasons on why and how both these groups turned into refugee. Whereas much has been written about Tibetan refugees (Chhetri 1990, Dietrich 1998, Gombo 1985), the literature on Bhutanese refugees is limited (Baral 1993, Phuyal 1998). In this context, this paper focuses more on Bhutanese refugees compared with Tibetan refugees primarily for poorly acknowledged status of Bhutanese refugees in areas outside South Asia<sup>2</sup>.

### **Conceptual Considerations**

Conventional migration research categorizes refugees as forced international migrants who leave their homeland against their will (Petersen 1958; Hauser and Duncan, 1959; Bogue 1969). Likewise UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 specifies refugee as person who owing to a "well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." It is generally assumed that there are some common principles of similarity between political refugees and that they belong to deprived and poor group at the sheltered area. The common principles of similarity between political refugee groups emerge primarily through their cause, sufferings in the process of becoming refugee, adjustment problem in the host area, emotional attachment to homeland, urge to return to their home country and organization of protest activities to this effect.

Empirical research demonstrates two often-contrary positions on the role of refugees in the host country. One position stresses the positive role and posits that refugees represent a pool of potential human capital. It takes the view that for reasons of being young and energetic but deprived of activity space refugees prove very positive human capital. Proper utilization of their skills can largely contribute economic and social development of the host area. Chinese refugee fleeing to Hong Kong from the Mainland China after 1949 is an example. Hong Kong's present status as one of the most commercialized and industrialized cities in Asia owes much to these refugees

(Weeks 1992; Endacott 1973). Its success was built on the backs of an earlier generation of refugees. It is these refugees who were not only young and energetic but also brought skills, talents and motivations to work. And these attributes of early refugees were the main factors behind speedy economic development of Hong Kong.

The other position holds refugees as a trough of potential trouble for the host country. Accordingly, refugees are not only rejected peoples but also the unwanted migrants to the receiving countries (Weiner 1991) especially when host countries are faced with their own demographic pressures (Zolberg 1989; Zolberg et al. 1986). The literature states that at times elites and governments deliberately project cross border migration as threatening national security and integrity (see Bose and Manchanda 1997). Pakistan, which shelters the largest size of refugees in South Asia, is an example of the trouble of refugee for the host country. Pakistan has faced the large scale Afghan refugee problem for more than two decades, the impact of which has been evident on communal violence and the rise of ethno-nationalism (Patel 1995).

As political refugees, the two refugee groups in Nepal namely Bhutanese and Tibetan are expected to hold many common characteristics. But despite general expectations of much similarity between these two groups of refugees, this paper argues that the two referent groups differ considerably from their attributes both before and after becoming of refugee. The position of Nepal government in resettling or repatriating them differs and so is their considerable impact on local and national economy. Moreover, these two movements have occurred under diverse historical and geographical circumstances. The state of Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees indicates that they are close to two extreme positions stated earlier with Tibetans representing relatively positive impact and successful adjustment while Bhutanese representing a negative situation. Furthermore, the Bhutanese, confined to the camps are faced with difficulty in repatriation while any attempts to accommodate these refugees within Nepal has been considered to be disastrous in terms of jobs, housing and education facilities to the natives when facilities such as these are already highly limited in the country.

These two groups in selected attributes is the main focus of fourth section while the fifth section concludes the paper with some speculative note on the future of Bhutanese refugees based on the lessons learnt from the current status of Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

### **Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal**

On 12 December 1990, a group of 60 Bhutanese of Nepalese ethnic origin (BONO) entered Nepal from Kankarbhita entry point as asylum seekers. For humanitarian ground and for reasons of belonging to same ethnic origin, local residents expressed sympathy over their cause. As a result, they provided food and helped them shelter at Maidhar of Jhapa district in Eastern Nepal. Subsequent years witnessed a large flow of BONO who were actively engaged in expressing their opposition to the discriminatory policy of the ruling group in Bhutan. Nepal, already troubled with high rate of population growth, then became entrapped into the problem of Bhutanese refugees.

Bhutanese refugees are citizens of Bhutan who are displaced by recent state policies of *Drukpa* ruling elite discriminating the southerner BONO who are known as *Lhotshampas* in the *Dzongkha* dialect of Bhutan. They have been sheltering outside Bhutan due to "well-founded fear" of persecution. Many BONO turned into refugees primarily because whereas some protested against the discriminatory state policy of language, religion, nationality, and culture, others were forced to leave for allegations that they supported opposition to the government and that their relatives were accused of acting against *tsa-wa-sum* (king, country and the government). Some have regarded their cause as an attempt of "ethnic cleansing" (Pradhan 1998) resulting into denial of the right to nationality for ethnic Nepalese.

Both the sending and receiving countries of Bhutanese refugees i.e., Bhutan and Nepal are small, poor and backward Himalayan kingdoms in South Asia (Haq and Haq 1998). Bhutan is roughly one-third the area of Nepal. They do not share common boundaries. They are surrounded by India on three sides and only on the North that both of them share borders with China (Tibet). The Indian states of West Bengal and Sikkim lie in between these two countries.

Hills and mountains with small proportion of plain land in the South dominate the physical landscape of both these countries. The plain land of Bhutan is called the *Duars* and that of Nepal the *Tarai*. Both these areas were considered malaria prone in the past. The government policy then was to encourage people to come from neighbouring countries and settle there so that these areas could be transformed into arable land (Karan and Ijima 1987).

Except for the population-size and level of urbanisation in which Nepal far outweighs, most other demographic indicators in these countries are comparable. But Bhutan's GNP per capita is almost double that of Nepal. On

the contrary, the population per hectare of arable land is higher in Bhutan than in Nepal (RGOB 1991). At present, most of Bhutan's concentration of settlement is in the valleys and in the South. Nepal's population is also largely confined to the plains (*Tarai*) and the mid-land valleys (CBS 1997). The population concentration is higher in eastern *Tarai* than the western and mid-western ones. Ironically, with the sheltering BONO, it is eastern *Tarai* that has suffered with the problem of BONO refugees.

### **Size, Distribution in the Camps and Main Areas of Origin**

The Bhutanese refugee population is estimated to have reached about 130,000 by 2000 A.D. Most of the earlier estimates in the late 1990s total their size around 100,000. Considering the type of sheltering there are two groups of BONO refugees: those in the camps for which reliable figures are available and those scattered elsewhere. Those sheltered in seven camps number about 98,000 by September 1999 (RCU 1999). Among those scattered elsewhere, estimate of those within Nepal ranges from 8-10,000 (Lutheran World Federation: Annual Report, 1998) to about 15,000 (Pradhan 1998). In addition, no less than 20,000 are estimated to have been living in the hills of Assam and West Bengal (*Refugee Watch* 1996). Thus, the population size of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is estimated to be 110,000 and those outside Nepal e.g. in India about 20,000.

BONO refugees are currently sheltered at five locations in two districts in southeastern Nepal. They are sheltered in seven UNHCR sponsored camps. Among them six camps are located in Jhapa district and one in Morang district (Map 1). Goldhap was the first planned camp to shelter these refugees. Other camps were established later. Latest of all is Khudnabari, located on the northwestern part of Jhapa district. Since February 1993, except for family reunion, all new arrivals have been sheltered in Khudnabari.

More than 78 thousand refugees have been sheltered in Jhapa district. Nearly 50 percent of the total refugees are sheltered in a single location, i.e., Beldangi (Table 1). There are three separate camps in Beldangi. These camps are located quite close to Damak municipality. All three there are among the bigger camps. Sanischare (Pathari) camp in Morang district shelters about 20 percent of the BONO refugee in the camps.

**Table 1: Bhutanese Refugees at Various Camps in Nepal**

Location Camps		Households		Population			
District	Camps	Number	Percent	Male	Female	Total	Percent
Jhapa	Beldangi I	2,524	16.8	8,563	8,109	16,672	17.1
	Beldangi II	3,358	22.3	10,569	10,287	20,856	21.4
	Beldangi III	1,671	11.1	5,394	5,167	10,561	10.9
	Khudnabari	1,959	13.0	6,137	6,057	12,194	12.5
	Timai	1,377	9.2	4,748	4,501	9,249	9.5
	Goldhap	1,348	9.0	4,505	4,169	8,674	9.0
Morang	Sanischare	2,790	18.6	9,687	9,264	18,951	19.6
Total		15,027	100	49,603	47,554	97,157	100

*Source: Refugee Co-ordination Unit, September 1999.*

Of all the camps, Goldhap shelters the smallest number of refugees. The second smallest one is Timai, located in the far northeastern Jhapa. The average household size of refugees in the camps is 6.5 persons. This figure is higher compared with Nepal's national average of 5.6 (1991). The proportion of female refugee is 48.9 percent and that of male 51.1 percent.

Bhutanese refugee problem is area specific. Southern Bhutan is the main area of refugee origin. Administratively, Bhutan is divided into 20 main divisions (districts) called Dzongkhag and 197 sub-divisions called Gewogs (blocks). Most of the refugees have come from 6 Dzongkhags of the South (Map 2). These are Samtse (Samchi), Sarpang (Sarbhag), Tsirang (Chirang), Daga (Dagana), Chhukha and Samdrup Jongkha (Samdrup Jonker). Among these Dzongkhags, the largest proportion of refugees has come from Sarpang Dzongkhag.<sup>3</sup>

Bhutan often claims that many refugees living in the camps are from other places in South Asia rather than from Bhutan. But information about place of origin of refugees among refugees living in camps in Nepal suggests that all refugees there have come from Bhutan and not from elsewhere in South Asia. Among refugees in the camps, 31 percent have their origin in Sarpang Dzongkhag followed by Tsirang (22 percent). Similarly, 19 percent is from Daga and 15 percent from Samtse. Of all the six Dzongkhags, the lowest proportion has come from Chhukha. Above all, refugees have come from about one-third of the total Dzongkhags of Bhutan.

### **The Becoming of Refugee**

BONO refugee problem is a special case of migration that demonstrates what happens when early arrivals and late arrivals occupy different geographical niches (in this case *the North* and *the South*) to develop one's own cultural identity with no or very little interaction between these groups but live in the same nation-state. It is a case where, after centuries of living in harmony, the minority's group in power forces for homogenous national identity by imposing its language, religion and culture to the largest group. The group in power asserts "one people, one nation" whereas the victims argue for "unity in diversity."

The Bhutanese refugee problem is related to the history of Bhutan's early settlement. The Nepalese were invited to settle in Southern Bhutan that was considered as region of refuge by then settlers of Bhutan namely the Sharchops and Drukpas who had occupied the northern parts of Bhutan. Bhutan's demography consists of three main groups: Sharchops, Drukpas and Lhotshampas. Sharchops with their ancestry in the high hills of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are considered the oldest settled group there (Shrestha 1999). They constitute about 30 percent of the total population at present. The ruling *Drukpa* entered Bhutan from Tibet between 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries with Lama Faso as the architect on their entry in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Mehra 1974). Later with the coming of Dwag-wong Nam-Gyal from Kham region, this group established as the ruling class in 1616 A.D. This group comprises about 20 percent of the population at present. The *Lhotshampas*, the present troubled group, entered Bhutan between 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They constitute at least the single largest group although some estimates about them go as high as over 50 percent (Giri 1998).

Once Bhutan was unified around 1616 A.D., Syab-dung Dug-wong Nam-Gyal, the first religious ruler of unified Bhutan began to establish relations with neighbouring countries. There was no unified Nepal then. In this process, he visited Ram Shah of Gorkha (Nepal) in 1624. Bhutan was in desperate need of human resources then. It also had to ensure the extent of territorial control in the South. Subsequent to this visit he invited the Nepalese and encouraged them to inhabit the warm south. On his request, a small group of Nepalese joined Nam-gyal's return visit from Gorkha in 1624 A.D. and 1640 A.D. (Dhungel 1989). With this beginning, the other Nepalese from the eastern hills subsequently followed them in a form of chain migration. This chain migration intensified in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when

population pressure in the mid-hills of Nepal was high, and many Nepalese were migrating to northeastern hills of India for wage work, both agricultural and non-agricultural. During this movement some of them entered Southern Bhutan and settled there. Once this immigrant group prospered through developing resources and turned into distinct group of sizeable population, the ruling group felt them as a threat to their socio-cultural control. In the mean time the *Lhotshampas* also began to argue for human rights and non-discrimination in the local and state affairs.

The main factor behind Bhutanese refugees is the *Drukpa* elite's *perceived fear* of BONO on their established monopoly in politics and demographics (ethnic and religious) of Bhutan together with their *desperate actions* against these *Lhotshampas*. These actions were taken so that *Drukpa* could continue their absolute control over political demography and culture there. This was orchestrated through imposition of carefully designed Acts and *Kaso* (royal orders) that not only expelled many *Lhotshampas* but also were in direct violation of their Hinduism based customary socio-cultural system and life-style. *Lhotshampas* were ordered to adopt Tibetan based *Drukpa* culture, language (*Dzongkha*) and religion (Mahayan Buddhism). Requests of *Lhotshampas* to amend these orders allowing them to continue their customary socio-cultural practice through appeals first and then by peaceful demonstrations further deteriorated the perceived fear among the ruling elite. At the end, they systematically evicted large number of *Lhotshampas* involved in their request for fair share in the state affairs.

Details of factors related to BONO turning into refugee are discussed elsewhere (Subedi 2001). Suffice it to say that main explanation comes from political-demographic perspective. The cultural-religious perspective stressing the conflict as a result of Tibetan Buddhism of ruling group versus the Hinduism based cultural practices of *Lhotshampas* has some merits but the underlying reasons are deeply rooted to the perceived threat to *Drukpa's* future political and demographic control over Bhutan.

The political demography of who should continue to rule and whose identity should prevail in the nation-state is the most important reason behind pushing *Lhotshampas* into refugee status. *Drukpa* groups who have ruled Bhutan for centuries numerically comprise about 20 percent. The *Lhotshampas* who in the beginning of this century were considered as minority groups in the South turned out to be largest group by the fourth quarter of this century. Some reports note their proportion to be as high as 53

percent (Giri 1998). This demographic number means Lhotshampas having advantage over other groups if globalization of human rights and democratic political norms are to be established in the country. Over several decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, their growth rates have been high through both natural increase and migration. They have been exposed more to outside world and have demonstrated to be more entrepreneurial than others, further adding the perceived threat.

In Bhutan, the hereditary monarchy was established in 1907 with Ugyen Wangchuk as the first monarch. The kingdom does not have written constitution. The king with cabinet appointed by himself holds absolute power. In recent decades, with increasing trend of globalization of human rights, movement towards democracy and establishment of democratic governments in neighbouring countries the fear of Drukpa ruling elite surrounding the royal government exasperated for distressing future political stronghold. The infiltration of Lhotshampas in government positions and their ethnic similarities with countries actively involved in restoration of democracy further aggravated the fear. Thus, it was important for Drukpa elite to devise mechanism to keep Lhotshampas off the politico-administrative scene and diffuse (or depopulate) their stronghold south. The ruling elite put forwarded the argument of "nation building" with an agenda of *one people one nation* as the main instrument to serve this purpose. Once actions towards this direction were commented by leading Lhotshampas, the succeeding actions and reactions between those in power and the BONO in general turned many latter groups into refugee.

### **The Tibetan Refugees in Nepal**

The Tibetans entered Nepal as refugees forty years ago. The Tibetans turned into refugees after Tibet came under the control of China in 1959 and the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetans, escaped to India on March 17, 1959. He declared the formation of Tibetan Government in Exile or the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) at Dharmashala (India) in April 1959. Following the Dalai Lama's escape, about 100,000 Tibetan left Tibet to take refuge elsewhere although the numbers differ in various reports (Conway 1975, Michael 1985). The majority joined their leader in India while others stayed in Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

The flow of Tibetans in Nepal in 1959 is a small proportion of the main flow to India. Their total number staying in Nepal was estimated to be

around 15,000 then. UNHCR estimates 20,400 Tibetan refugee populations in Nepal by the end of 1998 (UNHCR Statistics 1998 Overview). The Tibetan refugees entered Nepal through the passes of Tatopani (Sindhupalchok), Rasuwa, Mustang, Dolpa, Humla and Walungchung Gola. About half of them are settled independently in Kathmandu and other places with mainly Tibetan speaking populations whereas about half are living in identifiable refugee settlements. A large proportion has been settled in relatively large settlements in urban areas of the Kathmandu valley and Pokhara. Likewise, there are small settlements of Tibetans in places like Walung (Taplejung), Solukhumbu, Rasuwa, Mustang, Baglung, Lumbini (Kapilvastu), Dolpa and Jumla (Map 4). Nevertheless, their settlements outside Kathmandu and Pokhara are small, and none have population over 1000. Their numbers in most of these settlements are between 200-500 (Dietrich 1998).

No details of specific areas of their origin are available. It is assumed that unlike the Bhutanese refugees these refugees have come from Tibet in general and not from specific sub-regions or districts. During this time no restriction on number to grant asylum was set by the government of Nepal. Initially some of them found shelter with relatives and other Sherpas in the mountain region but when the number crossing Nepal-China border increased it was not possible to find accommodation this way. With host government's approach to accommodate them, it was soon realized that refugees were in need of organized settlement. Many international donors were appealed for support. International Red Cross finally co-ordinated and supervised their settlement in the designated camps. It is often said that the donors often see aid to Tibetan refugees as humanitarian compensation for their state's political inability to help the Tibetan cause" (Norbu, cited in Dietrich, 1998:20).

### **A Comparison Between Bhutanese and Tibetan Refugees**

Table 2 presents a comparison between the Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees in Nepal. This comparison is not exhaustive because the time dimension of these two groups of refugees is different. However, it demonstrates that there are more differences between these two refugee groups than there are similarities. In fact, except that both these groups were forced to leave their homeland and have been known as refugees such as Tibetan or Bhutanese, they differ in most other attributes. More importantly, even though the number of Bhutanese refugees is several times greater than that of Tibetans, their issue is little known outside South Asia.

The physical complexion, the sheltering locations and occupational characteristics of both these refugees are far distinct. The economic success of Tibetan refugees is their most notable feature. These refugees are far better off than one would think of any refugee. For them the free world had reason to express their concern on Tibetan refugee issue because their cause was related to the action of the communist world. Encouraging and supporting them to invest on carpet business and promotion of carpets made by Tibetan refugees in the western world cannot be explained as the actions of these refugees alone. On the contrary, the cause for BONO refugees in the 1990s and at present has been muted in the world arena amidst Afghan refugees, Bosnian case, let alone similar cases in African countries primarily Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Sierra Leone.

The political contexts of these refugees are also different. The Tibetan case has more to do with the political and ideological identity of People's Republic of China (PRC) and retraction of 17-point agreement between PRC and Tibetan government. But the case of BONO refugee is largely related to national ethnic identity meaning whose socio-cultural identity should prevail in the nation-state and an example of failure of timely regulation on immigration. A common characteristic of Asian countries is that national social identity is based on the symbolism of majority ethnicity (Bose 1998). But despite BONO constituting demographically largest group in the country, they have been turned to be victim of nation building and identity making of the group, which is not a majority in the country.

**Table 2: Comparison of Bhutanese and Tibetan Refugees in Some Selected Attributes**

Attributes of Refugees	Refugees	
	Tibetan	Bhutanese
Period of the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily 1959 and early 1960s</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early 1990s</li> </ul>
Known to world opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The problem better recognised because of the involvement of China, the largest concentration of human population and an emerging world power</li> <li>Refugees not individual alone but rather as a national polity ... both the people and the cultural institution took refuge e.g. <i>Dalai Lama</i> taken asylum in India</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorly known in the world arena, Bhutan and Nepal both being small countries and both being dependents on India at various levels</li> <li>Refugees came as individuals and families, and their flow was not associated with symbolic or political institutions</li> </ul>
General Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mongoloid, Tibetan Buddhist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indo-Aryan, Hindu</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complexion similar to people in the mountains of Nepal</li> <li>Mountain inhabitants in Nepal are often considered as their descendants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar to the people in the hills and lowlands in Nepal</li> <li>Many of them could trace their ancestral roots in Nepal</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nepal, the 1<sup>st</sup> country of entry to provide asylum</li> <li>Crossed the boundary and settled in the mountains and mid-land valleys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India, the 1<sup>st</sup> country of entry but did not provide asylum</li> <li>Crossed India and entered Nepal <i>Tarai</i></li> </ul>
Major/minor recipient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India the recipient of the main flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nepal the recipient of the main flow</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refugees in Nepal form a small proportion of the flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nepal the only country providing formal shelter in the UNHCR supported camps</li> </ul>
Occupational features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large groups engaged in activities outside agriculture. Many were rich merchants, businessmen, noblemen and their families (Conway, 1975)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Previously engaged in farming activities</li> </ul>

Attributes of Refugees	Refugees	
	Tibetan	Bhutanese
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once sheltered earning living through non-agricultural activities was not difficult</li> <li>• Majority sheltered in urban areas (e.g. Kathmandu, Pokhara)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once farmland was confiscated, not so easy for them to adapt to other livelihood strategies</li> <li>• Overwhelming majority sheltered in rural areas in eastern <i>Tarai</i></li> </ul>
Success/failure status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the most successful refugee communities in the world of refugees</li> <li>• After only six years no external assistance needed</li> <li>• Developed their own economic niche with carpet business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time gap not enough to assess success/failure status</li> <li>• After 10 years, the need of support is more now than ever before</li> <li>• Not very enterprising activities apparent, mainly concerned with going back though a few have started petty business and some go for wage labour</li> </ul>
Active/inactive status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate them into the economic life of Nepal (see, Dietrich 1998)</li> <li>• Overtime the activism for free Tibet and return to homeland slowed down at least in terms of frequent demonstrations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repatriate them into their homeland as early as possible</li> <li>• Very actively demonstrating against discrimination of language, religion and culture, and for making plea for creating environment of safe return</li> </ul>
Main factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People's Republic of China's control over their territory in an attempt to liberate Tibet under 17 point agreement in May 1951 with assurance to recognise its autonomy, system of self-government, leadership of Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, respect Tibetan's religious freedom, improve people's livelihood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Lhotshampas'</i> perceived fear of ruling groups (<i>Drukpa</i>) in the established cultural and political dominance in the state due to growing number of southerners and their prosperity in the south</li> </ul>

Attributes of Refugees	Refugees	
	Tibetan	Bhutanese
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Perceived problem in the religious freedom in the territory and the escape of Dalai Lama to India in March 17, 1959; their religious leader and the political institution</li> <li>● Deterioration of livelihood situation after the escape of their leader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Systematic imposition of Buddhism based culture, religion, language and social systems, and failure to recognise the cultural and linguistic identity of <i>Lhotshampas</i></li> <li>● <i>Lhotshampas</i> appeal for fair share and reactions against discriminatory policy of the state</li> </ul>
Economic impact in the host community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Largely positive because of the introduction of carpet industry with support from foreigners</li> <li>● Created jobs for the local residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Largely negative</li> <li>● Have taken the jobs of local poor although their low wage rates helped some locals</li> </ul>

Being turned into refugee for diverse political and contextual factors and from two different countries, it is understandable that these two groups of refugees differ many of their social and economic attributes. Interestingly, the official approach of the host government has also been different for these two groups of refugees. During the time of Tibetan refugees for reasons of their relative small size, international politics (communist block versus free world) and the favourable demography of the country, Nepal's approach to Tibetan refugee was to integrate them into economic life of Nepal. On the contrary, in the 1990s, with the troublesome growth of both population and poverty in the country, Nepal is forced to take a policy of repatriating BONO refugees despite their cultural and ethnic similarities with Nepal and public sympathy for their cause.

### Conclusion

Despite uncertainties of their future, optimism prevails among the Bhutanese refugees. So far there is only first generation Bhutanese and they are active plus the time gap is so long compared with Tibetan refugees. At the moment, they appear to be in a state of "nowhere" with failure of nine ministerial level committee talks to have significant achievement to repatriate. There are

several critical issues such as status categorisation, verification modalities, total or conditional repatriation and many others that have left the future of BONO refugees uncertain as it stands at present (*Kantipur* various dates; *Kathmandu Post* various dates). India's approach, which is very critical to resolve this issue, has not been encouraging so far. BONO Refugees are actively pursuing their case through media, street demonstrations (on capital cities of Nepal and India and in southern Bhutan), march to their homeland, and appeal to international organisations (AHURA 2000). The host country troubled by its own demographics, poverty and the political pressure from within is actively engaged in diplomatic efforts to facilitate their safe return.

The case of Tibetan refugees after 30 years in Nepal may be helpful in understanding about what may be the likely future of Bhutanese refugees. Studies report that among Tibetan refugees optimism to return has not gone away (Chhetri 1990). But after second and third generation being brought up in the host country and many early arrivals having taken naturalised citizenship in the host country (Siwakoti 1998), the optimism may be more emotional than real. Even in case of call from the Dalai Lama to go back, many have doubts, others preferred to stay where they are now instead of going to a place about which they know very little (Chhetri 1990). For the Bhutanese refugees it is not unlikely to happen parallel with time lapses especially when the second generation of Bhutanese refugees are brought up in the host areas. Religious, cultural and linguistic aspects that were rather different for Tibetans in their host area and that were disincentive to remain in host area do not apply among BONO refugees because for them, there is hardly any difference in all these aspects in the host area.

Finally, two groups of refugees differ more than they are alike. Even the emotional attachment to the area of origin i.e., the most common attribute of both the groups is not comparable because of the time gap. The Bhutanese seem to be serious to see their future in their homeland but with more time lapses and Bhutan's success in making Nepal agree to categorise, those in the camp into forcefully evicted bonafide Bhutanese, voluntarily migrated Bhutanese, non-nationals and Bhutanese involved in criminal activities. The problem and the repatriation process has become more complicated than ever before.

### Notes

1. A word of caution is to be noted while making a comparison. The two events took place 30 years apart and some of the attributes may not be strictly comparable. While Bhutanese case is latest refugee problem in the 1990s, the Tibetan case is the first and internationally acknowledged refugee problem in Nepal.
2. People outside South Asia also sometimes refer Bhutanese refugees as Nepalese refugees. This was mentioned in the discussion in Asia Conference 2000 held in June 5-7 2000 at Oslo, Norway where the author presented a summarized version of this paper.
3. Data for the place of origin is based on 1996. As a result, the total number is lower than the one presented in earlier Table. It is assumed that the change in the total number in 1999 is not very different from the original distribution.

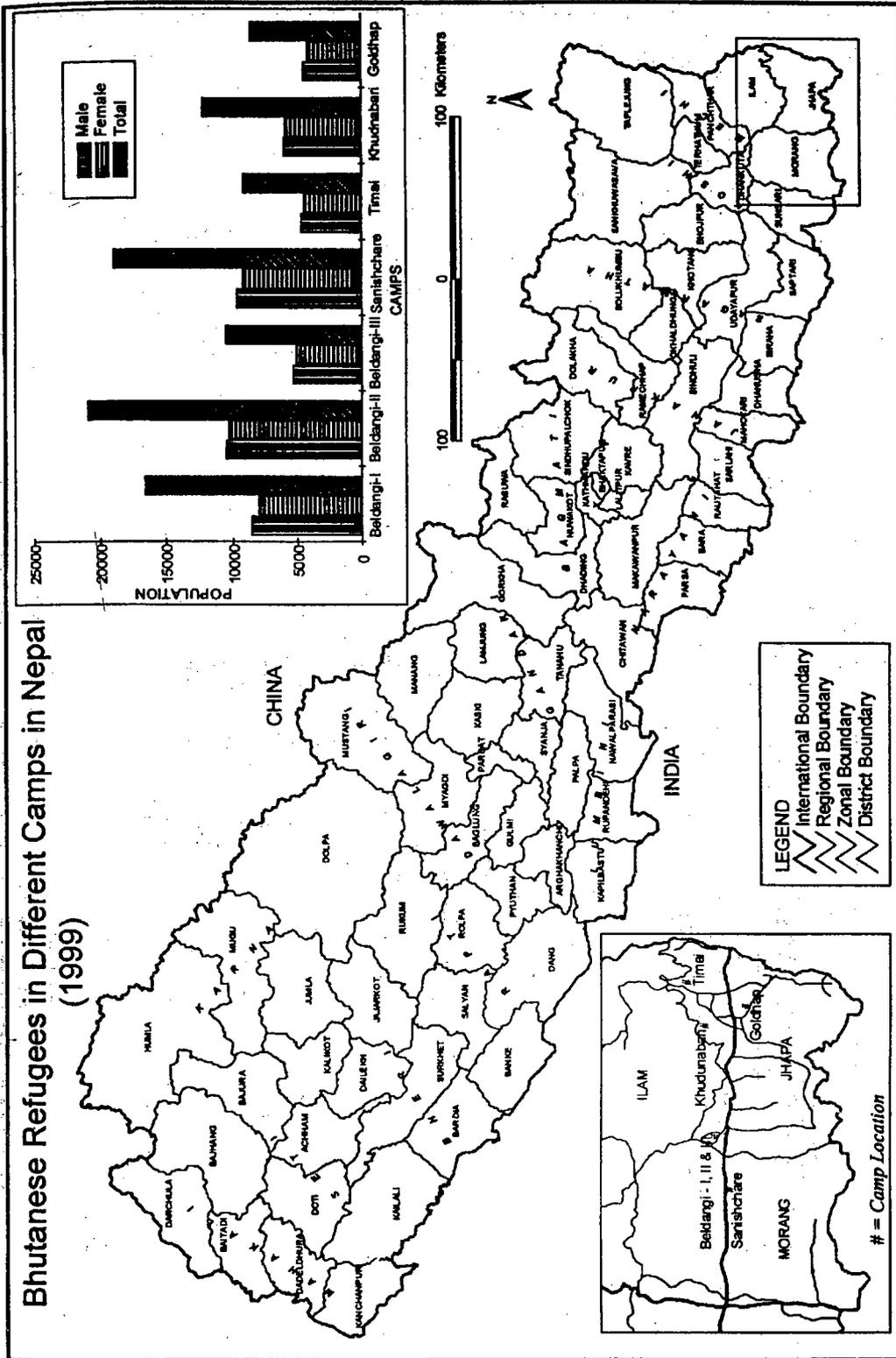
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Map-1



Map-2

