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A Tamil asylum-seeker and his fate in Germany today

A case study

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Siva is born in a Hindu family in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. He is 43 years old. Siva comes from a middle class family. He has 3 brothers and 2 sisters. His father was working as a clerk in the government office. Being the oldest in the family, Siva has the responsibility to take care of his family members.

The political problem started when he just left the High School. He wanted to attend the College. Since there were limited seats allotted for Tamil students he could not be admitted in the College. Therefore, he was attending a professional School. Being a devoted Hindu, he did not like to fight in the “Tamil Tigers” (liberation fighters) even though the “Tigers” wanted to recruit him in their army. It was at that time he got the news that some of his friends were preparing to leave the country to Europe for fear of their lives. Many young people heard the story that in the west people are living in economic prosperity and abundance of wealth. And it is easy to find a job and earn some money and support the family in Sri Lanka.

Siva shared his plan with his family and his father had to somehow find the source of payment to the agent. Siva’s father had to sell his property and borrow some additional amount to make it two lakhs of rupees (Rs. 200,000) so that he could leave the country with his friends for a better future without any delay. The selling of their fruitful land has really affected their source of income. However, the family stood together during these hard days thinking that Siva can help them in buying a better house and bigger land when he starts earning in Germany. Their family hardships would stand only for a short while. Even the sisters were dreaming of better education and rich husbands and making their future brighter. The brothers also dreamed of getting a degree and find a well-paid job in Europe or elsewhere with the help of their elder brother.

Siva left on 20th of June 1983 with five of his friends through different countries with great hardships. On the way, a gangster in Eastern Europe raped one of them. As soon as they arrived in West Berlin the young people were thrilled to see a modern city with all its glamour and prosperity. They thought their dream came true. They were sent to different refugee camps.

The reality hit them after 5 months of stay and German legal procedures. Siva and

his friends were eager to start working so that they could pay back their debts very soon. But he came to know that he was not allowed to work until his case is decided in the court. In reality it may need at least two years or more. He was not allowed to travel anywhere except in his own city. He was to stay in a refugee camp in Krefeld, where there were 230 other refugees living and sharing the common kitchen and bathrooms. He had to share his room with another Tamil man whom he had never seen before. All other friends were sent to different cities and he finally felt lonely and empty. In order to pass the time he started playing cards and started drinking alcohol so that he could forget his pain and loneliness. He has never touched alcohol before in his life. But now, Siva spent his monthly allowance, which he got from the government, with alcohol drinks and gambling.

In the beginning he used to send at least 3 letters home. But later he lost interest in writing to them because he was not able to send any money to them. His father often reminded the education of his brothers and soon coming marriages of his sisters who were ready to be married according to the Hindu tradition of the family. His father also reminded him in his letters of the exorbitant interest he had to pay for the village money lender, who is known for his cruelty, if the clients delay to pay the money back. It was becoming too much for Siva when he thought about home. He simply tried to forget the wonderful time he had with his family in those days.

Siva married a girl contrary to the tradition of his culture, hoping to be able to improve his situation. This was not a good solution. He continued his alcohol consumption and became an addict.

His case was accepted finally, so that he could get a job at a restaurant. He worked for 10 years in the restaurant, which enabled him to support the family. In the meantime, his wife begot him 2 sons and a daughter. Until today he has not been capable of sending money to his family as he still lives in debt. Last year his father passed away due to a heart-attack. Both of his sisters haven't married yet although they have passed the optimal arc for matrimony. Two of his brothers joined the Tamilian Tigers, one of whom died in combat.

Due to all this stress, Siva became an alcoholic, which cost him his job. He is living in an economically poor condition. He has become a psychological wreck. In spite of having moved to Germany with hopes of leading a better and easier life, he has lost sight of his goals and his will to survive. He hasn't seen his parents and native land ever since.