

General Info about Bhutanese Refugees

The Bhutanese refugees are descendants of Nepalese migrants that settled in Southern



Bhutan in the late 1890's recruited by the government of Bhutan to clear the jungles. Over time the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampas ["southern people"] as they were called, prospered and became high-ranking government officials and educators. Over time they made up 45% of the population of Bhutan, but in 1988 they were re-classified as 'illegal immigrants'

In 1989 the King adopted a "One Bhutan, One People" policy.

Nepali language was removed from schools and the King ruled that the entire population was to wear the national dress of the north. The Lhotshampas resisted the policy. Demonstrations began. They were labeled 'antinational'. Widespread arrests, detention, rape, and torture followed. By 1991 thousands started to flee for Nepal via India. The UNHCR established the camps in Eastern Nepal to house over 100,000 refugees – all arriving at the same time. Nepal did not want them. Talks between governments stalled. In 2007, almost 20 years later, the government of Nepal accepted the option of third country resettlement.

Because they lost their citizenship once, many Bhutanese are nervous about their status in new lands. Coming from a very complex caste system, adjustment to western understandings of equality is challenging for many. Because of the caste system one group may feel



uncomfortable living with or near another, and lower caste groups will be passive in the presence of higher caste members.

Extended families lived together, both in traditional housing and in the camps, so it has taken some adjustment to apartment /single unit living. The refugee camps were unique in that they are entirely refugee-run, so democratic process and organization are familiar skills to many. However because there was very limited economic development opportunities in the camps, a generation has passed in which people have not had real opportunity to control their own future economically or socially.

As the children of the first families to arrive in Canada have grown into young adults the transition to Canadian life is following a pattern familiar to newcomers. With a full command of English and education these young people are poised to contribute to Canada in very positive ways. Refugee families continue to arrive (at the time of writing this, 12 years after 3rd country settlement began) and the more established families are supporting their integration into the new situation.

इसले इसतो प्रार्थना गरो कि हे सरगमा
रहनेहेरु हाम रा बाबु तेरो नाम पवित्र
होवस् तेरो राज आवस तेरो खातिर माफिक
सगमा जस्ता तस्ता लोगमा गरी
जावस् हामिलाई बाचना लायेक खोराक
आज हामिलाई देवु अवर हमेहेरुकी
चहण हमेहेरुलाई माफ गर जस्तो हमि
आफना करजदारलाई माफ गरदछौं
अवर परिक्षामा हामिलाई न ल्यौ तर
बुराईदेखि छोडाव क्याहा राज अवर
पराक्रम अवर महात्म मदा तमरो छ।
आमिन ॥

Lord's Prayer in Nepali