Chapter 1

Introduction

In the anthropologist Fuglerud’s words, “the anthropologist is needed not only as the observer but also as a participant and a provider of perspective in dealing with today’s most burning issues – the reshuffling of people” (1998:7). And as the world becomes smaller and smaller, this exactly must be the objective of the anthropologist, wherein his or her work and life must find ways of dealing with the complex processes of movement of people.

The latter half of the last century has been a period characterized by displacement- of people, of artifacts, of traditions and national boundaries. The globalization of culture referred to as “global compression” (Robertson 1987), is characterized by the unfixing of tradition, ethnicity and national identity, where the formulation of ideas and cultural expression is globally exchanged and shared. The worldwide trade links, information systems and migration networks not only convey information about such ideas of global compression, they are also themselves instrumental in the formation of globalized cultural identities.

And herein lies the purpose of the anthropologist, to trace the cultural significance of such global flows, of people, money, goods and information comprising the “transnational migrant” (Rouse 1991:14, Sinclair and Cunningham 2000:2). Thus the anthropologist has to find ways in their work to encompass both their field areas and their societies. The anthropologist plays a key role in tracking these changes for population studies, cultural studies and media studies by his or her perspective of the processes of globalization and cultural difference.

But the anthropologist, argues Fuglerud (1998:9) with Gupta and Ferguson (1992:16), has to move away from seeing cultural difference as a matter of a "world of ‘peoples’ whose separate histories are waiting to be bridged", to seeing it as the “product of a shared historical process that differentiates the world as it connects it”.

The impact of globalization has led to a general reassessment of the meaning and definition of ‘culture’. “All cultures are located in place and time”(Nafigy1993: 2), which implies that 'cultures' across the social sciences and humanities are generally conceived as demarcated from each other and occupying enclosed spaces. However diasporic culture is located at an
intersection. It is never fixed or static and true to its origin (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000:8), particularly in the process of diaspora formation. Thus culture, being an organic outgrowth of a particular place which the society perpetuates, incorporates all forms of movement experienced by people today, shifting the paradigm of the concept of culture from “roots” to “routes” (Clifford 1992:108). The cultures of "home" and "host" do not oppose, but fuse, where the diasporic culture is constantly negotiating for new forms of expression.

My purpose as a researcher in this particular study of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is to offer a perspective, a shift from seeing the Sri Lankan Tamil migrant as the migrant in exile and struggling to adapt to his host country and caught between two worlds, to one of a diasporic community that has constructed a new hybrid identity. The study is a revelation of how the Sri Lankan Tamils are maintaining and negotiating culture, in-between an original home and a newly acquired host culture.

This thesis examines the integration into the host culture by the Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney while asserting their distinct cultural identity. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, though infused with a sense of home, longing for a return and the past, has also tried to get on with the process of living by incorporating themselves into the dominant culture. They have developed a sense of self and have successfully created an “exilic economy” (Naficy 1993:xvi), via their media and culture.

This study does not overlook the fact that diasporic culture, in this case, that of Sri Lankan Tamils, while incorporating into the dominant culture is characterized by ambivalence, resistance, struggles for identity and self-assertion. The study focuses on the process of incorporation into the dominant culture, though not always easy, through the various cultural organizations and institutions, such as, Tamil print media, Tamil associations, Tamil school, Tamil films and the Tamil radio all of which help them enhance and consolidate cultural distinctiveness in Sydney.

a. Sydney as a situated research field.

“World Cities”, a term coined by Patrick Geddes, as Naficy discusses (1993:4), are a “post World War II phenomenon, when the transnational capitalist institutions freed themselves from national constraints and boundaries and began global productions and marketing of
products”. This structural shift has in turn given rise to the creation of ethnic solidarity, where new immigrants have created ethnic economies negotiating their assimilation into the host culture by increasingly turning to the production and consumption of information. These world cities are international and cosmopolitan cities and can be best described as multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural, where forms of entertainment emerge more from a global culture than a national culture.

According to the 1991 Census, 24 percent of Australia’s population were immigrants and some 40 percent of Australians were born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas. Australia’s post World War II immigration policy saw a rise in population growth of British, Irish, and immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. The abolition of the ‘White Australia’ policy in the early 1970s encouraged migration from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, as result of which, according to Kee Pokong (1994), there are now a million Australians of Asian descent, Chinese having become the second largest ethnic group in wider Sydney. In response to this, the Australian Government constructed an impressive array of official multicultural policies and state support, to propagate multiculturalism, giving the country the reputation of one of the most the most successful multicultural nations in the world.

Sydney, the location and the subject of this study, is the pre-eminent multicultural city in Australia, attracting to itself the various cultures of the world. Sydney reflects its diverse cultural composition in its sheer variety of immigrants and refugee/humanitarian communities. (The estimate is that there are over 150 ethnic groups speaking over 100 different languages). The ethnic economies and the very active ethnic media such as community radio, newspaper, video, television have helped maintain the original native language and cultural systems of various cultures. As a global city its significance resides more in its global role than its national role. Like all world cities Sydney's tremendous cultural diversity offers itself as a strategic site for the examination of a number of the cultural processes of diaspora and globalization.

This study contributes to an understanding of this cultural dynamism of the city of Sydney by focusing on the interaction between the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and Australia, largely based on research carried out in Sydney. It aims to facilitate the development of a public perspective on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora - their cultural, religious, political nuances and processes of change in a wider setting of social processes.
According to recent publications in local Tamil newspapers (Eelamarasu 1999, Uthayam 1999), realistic calculations by researchers suggest that the people displaced from the Northern Province of Sri Lanka are close to one third of the entire Sri Lankan population in Sri Lanka. These people can be found on almost every continent. While large settlements are located in England, Switzerland and Canada, there are Tamil communities in Australia, Finland, Lithuania, Japan, Botswana, Germany, Panama and New Zealand.

Since the early 1980s, Sri Lanka has become of increasing economic and cultural importance to Australia. The increased levels of trade between the two countries have been matched by an increase in the level of permanent emigration from Sri Lanka to Australia. Like most countries in the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka, with its large pools of professionals and business people and an English-speaking urban elite, is a significant resource of immigration for Australia.

There has been, however, a lack of any significant academic study on the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic community in Australia. There is no doubt that an increased appreciation of Asia is necessary for Australia, to nurture a strong economic and political future. Though the focus so far has been mostly on east and South East Asia, it is only more recently that South Asia has started to figure in Australia’s range of interest. And what is needed for Australia to create a niche to frame itself, as an integral player in this region is an intimate knowledge of the various contemporary issues facing it. And the better Australia can appreciate the everyday aspects of the life of its various diasporic communities, the better advantage it has in formulating its multicultural policies and enhance its international relations.

b. Plan of Study

The objective of this study is to examine and present the making of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Sydney by presenting their ethnic life as it is framed by formal structures and organizations. This objective is pursued while examining concepts of diaspora, exile and cultural identity formation and negotiation by diasporic communities in host societies.

It is the study of the process of resistance and assimilation of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the host city of Sydney, while investigating questions of cultural maintenance and negotiation,
with a particular focus on Tamil print media, their use of audiovisual media and other Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic cultural institutions.

Nowadays, concepts of ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnationality’ are attracting great interest and in this context Sri Lankan Tamils are definitely a case to consider. Chapter 1 explores this very concept of diaspora. The term diaspora is used because it best captures the essence of transnational flow of culture and images. Diaspora and exile are closely related and because of the exilic nature of Sri Lankan Tamil migration, the chapter explores the nature of exile and the links that exist between diasporas and homelands.

Chapter 2 gives an introduction to the making of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Sydney, followed by an overview of the Sri Lankan Tamil migration processes to Australia and their settlement processes. It traces the history of Tamil migration in general and in particular reference to Australia, while briefly exploring the links that exists between Sri Lanka and Australia. The study of Sri Lankan Tamil migration to Australia encompasses both the Sinhalese and Tamil migration during colonial rule and, the factors in post-colonial Sri Lanka that propelled large-scale migration. Statistics are provided to further substantiate the argument.

This section also provides a parallel study of the changes in the immigration policies in Australia and its aid in the Sri Lankan Tamil migration. It examines the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka from the 1970s onwards, caused by the civil war played out between the representatives of the Sinhalese community and Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

In accordance with the general convention of ethnography, the second section of this chapter introduces the demographic profile of my subjects of research. It briefly discusses the cross-cutting regional differences between South Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils, while highlighting some key aspects of Tamil culture.

Chapter 3 presents the study of formal Sri Lankan Tamil institutions such as the various Tamil associations, Tamil print media and the Tamil school. According to Gillespie, the aspect of organizations, the mutual offer and expectation of assistance is an important part of exile life (1993). This section demonstrates how Tamil cultural institutions aid trans-national invention and dissemination of culture.
Chapter 4 focuses mainly on the audiovisual media culture of the Sri Lankan Tamils. It interrogates the role of Tamil films and Tamil radio in catalyzing and negotiating cultural change. The patterns of use of Tamil films and Tamil radio by Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney are explored, both of which are used to maintain and revise cultural traditions. It is an attempt to assess the economy of production and distribution against patterns of Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic consumption.

The main focus of the chapter is to trace the transnational flow of Tamil films and videos across the globe to Australia. The chapter also briefly discusses the history of ‘Tamil Filmdom’ in India, which forms a very important part of the cultural diet of Sri Lankan Tamils. The next section of the chapter explores the multicultural radio policies of Australia that have prompted and encouraged the growth of Tamil radio. As much as this study is a study of the culture of audiovisual media use by the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic community in Sydney, it is also a study of the businesses because of the close relationship between culture, commercialization and diaspora.

The last chapter discusses some key aspects of the making of Sri Lankan Tamil culture in Australia. Though on the one hand the diasporic longing for the 'imaginary nation' is significant in its diasporic setting, on the other hand ceaseless violence has rendered the homeland a denied category, making it impossible to return home. Acceptance of this situation is helping the diasporic community to peacefully negotiate their identity within the host society. The chapter highlights some interesting factors that are singular to the very nature of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, which aid in the formation of a new and hybrid cultural identity in the host society.

The chapter endeavours to project the view of the members of the diaspora of what it is to be a Sri Lankan Tamil in Sydney, while examining themes of cultural identity negotiation and the meaning of home to them. The second-generation youth that have taken part in this research have been influenced and molded, in a certain sense, by various social and cultural institutions such as family, school, associations and other religious institutions. The chapter is concluded with a closing argument and some projective commentaries.
c. Research Design

This section outlines the methodology and development of the current study. The research was carried out mainly in the latter half of 1999 and the beginning of 2000. There is no doubt that the new millennium will usher in an era of technological advancement, which will only further increase global interconnectedness. And in this context of modern globalization, issues within cultural and social studies will gain more prominence.

The dictionary meaning of ethnography refers to "scientific description of individual human societies" (Oxford Dictionary 1988). It is the definition and analysis of cultures based on extensive and intensive fieldwork in selected local settings. This study uses the methods of ethnography to contribute to these very complex issues.

I have tried to set this study in the context of my own personal and intellectual history and the history of academic research on Sri Lankan Tamils. I am a Tamil from South India. My first involvement as a researcher with Sri Lankan Tamils began in Brisbane when I worked as a part-time research assistant in the faculty of Media and Communications at the Queensland University of Technology. This research in modest ways was to contribute to an ongoing research project on the use of audiovisual media by Asian diasporic communities led by Professors Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair (2000). My fascination and interest in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora grew from there.

The progression of my fieldwork developed from the initial groundwork of reading of the Sri Lankan Tamil migration history and other data collected on Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney, and research carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Department of Multicultural Affairs. Reading and interviews complemented this information with Sri Lankan Tamil informants.

Since I was a relative newcomer to Sydney, I had no established links with the local Sri Lankan Tamil community. Initially my research exercise consisted of paying regular visits to the spice and video shops in the Homebush area, where a majority of the Sri Lankan Tamil population is concentrated (this will be discussed later in Chapter 3). This also gave me a chance to observe some patterns of audiovisual media usage by the Sri Lankan Tamils who
frequented the Tamil video shops. It also helped me to ascertain the more popular Tamil videos and patterns of viewing by the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Sydney.

Initial contacts with informants were also established by attending various cultural activities and film screenings organized by Tamil associations. Posters plastered on the walls of the shops provided information on these activities. Curiosity about me on the respondent’s part paved the way for a more cordial and friendly relationship.

Almost in every such event, I was queried
“Can you speak Tamil?”
“Nalla varu” (Very well)
was my answer and I was immediately met with frank approval and acceptance. The ice had been broken.

In my current study I have employed some formal and informal strategies. A questionnaire survey, which I had initially planned to employ, was discarded because of its formality. What was employed instead was one-off in-depth interviews involving direct and open-ended questions. Most of the interviews were semi-structured (see appendix 1). Trade research was used to trace the complex business connections between films and videos of satellite programs available to the Sri Lankan Tamil population in Sydney. This helped in the mapping of the flow of Tamil audiovisual products that emanate from India.

Once the initial link was established, the next phase involved visiting people at home or offices. Many of these informants were presidents of various Tamil associations, people who teach in Tamil schools and the administrators of the school, shop owners, distributors of Tamil films in Sydney and key figures in Tamil Radio. Because of the established networks between the figureheads of the community, being able to get access to one of them helped me get access to the other informants. My informants for the last chapter were mostly Tamil university or school-going youth who were both first generation and second generation immigrants. Interviews were confidential and interviews with video shop owners were especially structured. At times participant observation was the research technique employed to grasp the overall context.
On a personal level, I established close and reciprocal relationships with my informants. No doubt my Tamil origins established a basic ground from which I could work. What initially started as a multiple data-gathering strategy soon developed into a more focussed study, drawing upon the experiences of a wide range of people known for a period of nine to ten months.

Some informants had to be assured that the study involved very little discussion of the "problem" (referring to the fight for Eelam, which will be further elaborated in chapters, 2, 3 and 6). All interviews were recorded mainly by writing notes and by maintaining a journal. If sometimes, I needed an additional piece of information or to confirm facts obtained during the course of the interview, then second interviews were carried out on the phone.

The present study was carried out over a period of one year.
Chapter 2

Diaspora discourse

Diaspora studies have become necessary to understand the complex ways the human social organization is based in the contemporary era (Gamage 1999:2). The origins of the word "diaspora" stem from the Greek word “disasperien”, meaning to ‘to disperse’. The historic reference of the word “diaspora” is to the dispersion of Jews after the Babylonian and Roman conquests of Palestine. However, it is now more commonly used to suggest the scattering of people from one common culture or belonging to one nation. In post-colonial discourse, the study of diaspora assumes special importance. The cross-cultural settlement of diasporic communities into various host countries is particular to the study of diaspora.

Diasporic processes are not culturally homogenous. The massive flow of migrants, both voluntary and involuntary, has given rise not only to a globalization of economic, political and cultural relations on a large scale, but also to an enormous flow of images, narratives and information which cuts across and challenges established national and cultural boundaries and identities (e.g., Naficy 1993, Gillespie 1993). Thus fragmentation and diversification of markets, cultures and people match diasporic processes.

Diaspora as a cultural phenomenon is an active negotiation between two worlds. It is a process of reconstruction of cultural identities based on resistance and assimilation. Cultural dimensions, be it linguistic, religious or regional, are “primarily sites of contestations of myriad strategies and contingencies and exclusions”. Diasporic culture is located at the “intersection and the interstices of other cultures” (Naficy 1993:2). It not only deals with the problem of location but with multiple locations.

Robin Cohen in his Global Diasporas (1997) while giving consideration to all credible meanings of diaspora, proposes different kinds of diasporas such as victim diaspora, labor and trade diaspora, imperial diaspora and cultural diaspora. He then goes on to say that diasporas exhibit some specific features such as dispersal from an original homeland. This dispersion may be under traumatic conditions. On the other hand it may be an expansion from the homeland in search of better economic conditions. All diasporas exhibit a collective memory and myth about homeland, where the ancestral home is idealized and at times the relationship
with host societies may be troubled. They also demonstrate an attempt to return home. These diasporas sustain a strong ethnic consciousness with a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members while trying to form a distinct, creative and enriching identity in tolerant host countries (1997:181).

Essentially the concept of diaspora describes marginality and displaced belonging characteristic of dispersed people who on the one hand strongly identify with their homeland and on the other hand resist complete assimilation into the host society. Theoretically the word diaspora has to be distinguished from related words such as ethnic, migrant and most importantly exile. Because of the political nature of Sri Lankan Tamil migration (which will be further discussed in detail, in chapter 3), it is common practice to refer to their migration as exilic in nature. Exile identity is no doubt a very controversial and complex topic.

Naficy, while discussing the paradigm and paradox of exile, remarks that while exile can be a ‘dystopic’ or a ‘dysphoric’ experience, it can also be defined by its ‘utopian’ and ‘euphoric’ possibilities.

“Exile is a process of becoming involving separation from home, a period of liminality and in-betweenness that can be temporary or permanent, and finally incorporation into the dominant host culture”(1993:8-9).

Although exile begins with forced departure from the homeland, the imprint, the influence of home continues well into the subsequent phases and shapes them. Liminality and incorporation involves ambivalence, resistance, slippage, dissimulation and even subversion of the cultural codes of both the home and host societies. The end result is not unified or stable. It is an “evolving syncretic and hybrid culture” (Naficy 1993. xvi).

Etymologically, the word ‘liminal’ relates to a point beyond which a sensation becomes too faint to be experienced. Naficy then goes on to suggest three modes to describe the contradictory attributes of exile, where ‘Mode A’ and ‘Mode B’ are expressed by attributes that are not discrete or stable and operate as interplays of signifiers that simultaneously conceal and expose each other. What results is a middle path which is ‘Mode C’, that oscillates between the two modes of exchange and opens spaces of liminality. For example if Mode A and Mode B, for the issue of exilic identity, suggest whole identity and fragmented identity respectively, then Mode C is a liminal state of multiple identity.
To substantiate his argument, he then proposes Van Gennep's (1960:11) formulation of the 'rite of passage' as three phases, which involves separation from the country, the liminal state and the reaggregation of the original community.

However, I propose to alter this formulation to one where the above three phases are in constant process and flow into each other. To substantiate this I propose the model of a cyclic processes (borrowed from the Hindu philosophy, the 'chakra' or the wheel, equates life to cyclic motions).

The centre of the wheel is the core of the diasporic identity. The various spokes of the wheel refer to the various stages of the transnational migrant's separation from home. The phase involves legal formalities such as applying for visas, passports etc, followed by the actual physical crossing across territories. The wheel has been set into motion.

This period also signifies the beginning of profound symbolic cultural and identity transformation, which propels the motion of the wheel next stage, which is the threshold or the liminal phase.

The liminal phase that has been set into motion when the physical separation from 'home' is complete gains momentum in the host country. This state is a state of immense flux characterized at first by bewilderment, then by ambivalence, resistance, nostalgia and longing. The liminal phase is an immense force field and is a period of vast potential. While it forges and questions new identities and cultural practices, it also involves intense cultural maintenance and negotiation with the host society.

Conflicts and questions begin to resolve to some extent in the third phase of integration into the society. It is to be borne in mind, however, that the resolution of either of the first two phases which is still a part of an ongoing cyclic process is never quite complete or constant. The motion of the wheel then moves into the next stage that signifies the transforming of the migrant community into a stable ethnic community in the host country. But the transformation is never complete, as the characteristics of ambivalence of the liminal phase surface often.
While the wheel is in motion, the centre spins on its own axis. Any fragmentation or distortion in the centre will cause the wheel to fall apart. The centre, which holds the wheel, together is the core and signifies the diasporic identity itself. It undergoes a reformation while still remaining whole. What emerges from this flux of cultural identity is a hybrid culture, which can also be defined as "cosmopolitanism" (Hannerz 1990:38). Hannerz explores "cosmopolitanism" as a "state of mind" and a "willingness to engage with the Other" and "maneuver in and between particular cultures". The hybrid culture is open to divergent cultural experiences, and searches for "contrasts" rather that "uniformity". The cross cultural, intercultural and trans-cultural encounters between diasporas and the host society can be examined by the key term 'hybridity', which itself is a "heavily contested term... stresses mixture, cultural interchange and mutual cross fertilization"(Ang 2000:xix)

In reference to the "products of the cultures of hybridity", Hall is worth quoting:
"The new diasporas which are forming across the world... are obliged to inhabit at least two identities, to speak at least two cultural languages, to negotiate and translate between them"(1993: 362)

a. Long-distance nationalism

Though one could examine the Sri Lankan Tamils’ migration as exilic in nature, they are also diasporic in nature because of the interconnectedness with the compatriot communities all over the world. A diasporic perspective places Sri Lankan Tamils in a web of connections with other Tamils all over the world, which helps in the construction of the ‘imaginary nation’. Relationships to other diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil communities all over the world is as important as the primary relationship to the homeland. While Tamil life is given meaning by its reference to Eelam¹, Eelam itself carries the referential burden of unifying the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. This imagination may be marked by “absentee patriotism and long-distance nationalism” (Pieterse 1995: 49). Exile here does not merely refer to geographical location but a state of mind, where, in the Sri Lankan Tamils’ case, they become what they have left behind.

Imagined communities used in particular reference to diasporic cultures, point to how expatriate minority communities may be sustained by a collective homeland myth, fetishised

¹ Eelam is the Tamil name given by the Tamil militants for the liberated nation which they are fighting for.
through cultural memory and transnational desires, and represented by mythical landscapes, invented traditions, stories and ceremonies (Safran, 1991: 83-99, Sinclair and Cunningham, 2000: 8-11, Anderson, 1991). In other words, the relationship between homelands and their diasporic populations is the key to understanding long-distance nationalism.

Skbris (1999: 39) observes that:
The intensity and the attachments between diaspora individuals and their homelands vary and depend on the temporal and spacial proximity.

The temporal aspect refers to the time elapsed since separation from the homeland and the spatial refers to the physical distance from the homeland. However homelands are ‘spatial representatives’, that in addition to being influenced by the fact of geography, it is determined by political and economic factors. The predominance of these factors and motives for emigration from the homeland is decisive in determining the intensity, power and persistence of various questions related to homeland.

In recent times, diasporic communities hold at least two frames of reference, their homeland and the country to which they have migrated. According to Ferguson and Gupta (1992), for dispersed people, ‘memory of place’, where home is distant serves to construct an imaginary projection of it (Said, 1990). This imagination is linked to a network of personal, national, social and cultural identifications and migrants are constantly renegotiating their historical and political alignments with their historical and national selves (Ghosh, 2000).

Toloyan (1991:3) writes that diasporas exhibit
"the traces of struggle over and contradictions within ideas and practices of collective identity, of homeland and nation. Diaspora is concerned with the way in which nations, real yet imagined communities, are fabulated, brought into being, made and unmade, in culture and politics, both on the land people call their own and in exile".

Diaspora studies clearly indicate that the migrant in most cases often maintains strong links with the society of origins. They remain a part of the original social structure, till, one day, they are able to go back. On the other hand, there are migrants, who, though struggle to keep ties with home, the doors finally close on them. Discussions of homeland often use the term ‘nostalgia’. Popular representations of ‘nostalgia’ refer to disaster and despair. However this
is not always the characteristic of the migration process. The relationship between people's loyalties to their ethnic homelands and their integration into the host societies is not mutually exclusive. It is possible to retain a rootedness in the past with successful integration into the host society.

As Sinclair and Cunningham (2000:16) have put it:

"This sense of cultural adaptiveness, innovation and hybridity, which, along with notions of dispersal and unassimilated difference is at the heart of the concept of diaspora, has held fascination for generations of social scientists interested in the dynamics of modernization."
Chapter 3

Sri Lankan Tamils - history of migration to Australia

Tamil migration from Sri Lanka reached sizable proportions after the so called 'Colombo riots' in 1983, when, in a space of a few days, probably more than 2000 Tamils were killed by Sinhalese mob. In recent years, the Sri Lankan situation has developed into a more complex war with shifting alliances. The Sinhalese army, on the one hand, is fighting for a unitary state and on the other hand, the Tamil guerillas are fighting for a separate Tamil homeland. Realistic calculations suggest that almost one-third of Sri Lanka’s entire pre-war Tamil population have been displaced since the war started (McGowan 1993).

There is no doubt that the situation inside Eelam- as the Tamil homeland is called- and connections with the larger diaspora throughout the world is of great importance to Sri Lankan Tamil migrants in their exiled existence. There is an intrinsic link between Tamil diaspora and any radical transformation of the Tamil society within Sri Lanka. In a certain sense the “future of Eelam depends on the Tamil diaspora as much as the future of the diaspora depends on the future of Eelam” (Fuglerud 1999: 3-6)

Just as in the case of the Albanian diaspora in Western Europe whose financial backing has made the Albanian resistance possible (Skbris 1998), so also the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has been instrumental in helping the Tamil resistance against the Sri Lankan Sinhalese military. Mc Dowell’s (1996) study of Tamil diaspora in Europe further affirms the fact that the very aim of this diaspora's location in Switzerland is to fund the conflict in Sri Lanka.

Bhabha (1990) has pointed out that the problem in identification of a national people becomes visible through the syntax of forgetting-of remembering to forget. But forgetting is an obligation that cannot be fulfilled by the Tamils for whom news of violence and killings at home is a daily affair. For diasporic Sri Lankan Tamils, who are consumed by events at home, active participation in those events is impossible, but they are intimately involved vicariously.
However, I have to avoid any misunderstanding at this point. This is a study of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and the making of their diaspora in Sydney. This is a study of cultural identity and practices of the Sri Lankan Tamils not their political activity. While Eelam is important for Sri Lankan Tamils, it does not consume their whole social life in diaspora. Hence little will be said of Eelam, a subject that much has been said about and written about (e.g. Pfaffenberger and Manogaran 1994, Kapferer 1998, Wilson 1998).

a. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an island lying off the south-easterly part of Indian Sub-continent (see appendix 2). It is the last outpost of the Northern Hemisphere, jutting into the still largely unexplored Indian Ocean. The historical geography of the then Ceylon is of special interest, because among all the Asian countries, it had the most contact with European nations. As Dr. Weerasooria (1988:5) notes: "The Portuguese came with the sword and cross, the Dutch with the ledger and lawbook, the British with the roads and railways".

Sri Lanka's central position was a point of intersection of sea routes linking Europe with Australia and East Asia with East Africa. The sea-lanes linking Britain with Australia and New Zealand was considered to be the lifeline of the British Empire.

There have been few links between Australia and Sri Lanka, to say the least. Both nations were formerly British colonies, later Dominions and now equal members of the Commonwealth. Interesting observations can be made about how British governors in Sri Lanka have also subsequently served in Australian states. There has also been the traditional trade between the two countries—Ceylon tea and Australian wheat. Another, perhaps significant link is Endagama's (1985) study of the connection between the Veddas of Sri Lanka and their possible connection to the Australian Aborigines. Last but not the least, is the cricket connection between the two countries.

b. History of Sri Lankan migration to Australia

Studies indicate that early 1880 heralded the migration of Sri Lankans to Australia. James Burns, the well known founder of the Australian firm, the Burns Philp and Company was in
Galle on his way from London and recruited Sinhalese laborers to work as boatmen in Queensland. However, according to Sri Lankan researcher, Pandula Endagama (1985), Sri Lankans migrated to Australia even prior to 1882. There was significant mass migration to Australia, when 500 Sinhalese arrived in North Queensland to work in sugar plantations.

This chapter of the history of Sri Lankan migration to Australia encompasses both the Sinhalese and Tamil migration to Australia. The P and O Steam Company that was incorporated in the 1840 often halted at the port of Galle, one of the most important ports in Sri Lanka, to and from Australia, to England. Owing to the berthing of the ships, the residents of the area became acquainted with Australia by meeting passengers sailing to and from Australia. This social interaction was relevant, in so far as the majority of Sri Lankans, who migrated to Queensland and other parts of Australia, were mainly from Galle and surrounding areas.

A study of some other factors that influenced emigration from the island indicates that the collapse of coffee industry in 1870s and 1880s and the ensuing hardships created the push factors that Sri Lankans responded to. This group of early immigrants in the late nineteenth century worked in the plantations in Northern Queensland as indentured laborers. During this time, some major Sri Lankan newspapers such as Times of Ceylon, The Ceylon Observer, The Ceylon Weekly Observer devoted a few columns for news about Australia. The topics covered were about life in Australia in general, the prospect of Sri Lankan planters to settle in Australia, Ceylon Tea in Australia etc. (Weerasooriya 1988).

Another strong factor that had an impact on the migration of Sri Lankans to Australia was the island's strategic position during World War II, after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. Sri Lanka became Lord Mountbatten's South East Asian Headquarters and many of the allied forces were stationed in Sri Lanka.

**c. Post-Second World War migration**

Consequent to Sri Lanka’s independence and the ending of World War II, the majority of Sri Lankan migration to Australia commenced. Commenting on the significant migration from the island, after the nineteenth century, Dr Bernard Swan (1987) wrote that it was an exodus that mounted due to pressures generated within the country.
The nineteenth century Sri Lankan immigrants consisted mainly of laborers, artisans and entrepreneurs. The migrants who came after the independence in 1948 were mostly Burghers\(^1\) who belonged to the labor force age group and had skilled expertise that Australia needed. Also, their European ancestry may have gained entry for them in relation to the White Australia Policy.

**d. Tamil migration**

In this section, I have arranged facts and events in order to provide a brief history of the changing immigration scenario in Australia, providing a parallel study of factors influencing migration of Sri Lankan Tamils to Australia.

In order to understand the migration patterns of Sri Lankans to Australia, it is important to first discuss the ethnic composition of the Sri Lankan society. A brief study of the ethnic composition of Sri Lanka indicates that it is varied with religious, linguistic, cultural and political differences. The population consists of various ethnic groups of which the Sinhalese form a majority seventy-five percent. This majority group populates mostly the Southern province.

The principal minority who form twenty-five percent consists of the Sri Lankan Tamils, who can be divided into three main categories of Tamil-speaking people. Seven percent of this Tamil population are Indian Tamils who live in the central part of the country. These are the descendants of the Tamil plantation workers who were brought from South India by the British. The Sri Lankan Moors who live on the east coast represent another seven percent of the population and their origins can be traced to Muslim traders who, many years ago, visited Sri Lanka. Also the east coast and Northern Province, mainly the Jaffna district, is inhabited by the final 11 percent of the country's Tamil population who form the most important category and consist of the Tamils originating from Sri Lanka. Though they belong to the same group, this category of Tamil speaking population can be divided into those belonging to the East and those to the North. The difference between the two groups lies in the caste composition and caste ideology. (Hollup 1994, Fuflereud 1999, Weerasooria 1988). The

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\(^1\) Burghers was the racial connotation used for the urban ethnic group with European ancestry in Sri Lanka,
Burghers constituted 0.3 percent of the entire Sri Lankan population after independence. However, there are no recent statistics of their population in Sri Lanka.

Australian migration history indicates that the first phase of changes in the immigration policies in the post World War II period arose from the country's need to develop its resources, for which a large population was required. The Commonwealth parliament, through the Immigration Restriction Act had introduced the White Australia Policy in 1901, which prevented people from non-European origins from entering Australia (Jupp 1991). This policy was maintained until the early 1970s but some non-European migrants managed to enter the country nevertheless.

A study of the 1986 census report by Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, indicates that Sri Lankan immigrants who numbered at 627 by 1901, increased to just 700 by the end of 1947. These immigrants were mostly skilled and unskilled workers, who fulfilled the need for labor.

In 1973, a second more important shift occurred, when the Whitlam government formally abolished the White Australia Policy and since the late 1970s, Australian governments endorsed a policy of multiculturalism. During this time, the migrant category defined as 'distinguished and highly qualified', referring to those professionally qualified were given preference in immigration. Also, Australia had the tradition of accepting refugees from different countries on humanitarian ground (Jupp 1991, Skbris 1999).

These changing trends in immigration policies in Australia were complemented by the rapid political and socio economic changes that were taking place in Sri Lanka consequent to gaining independence from British rule in 1948.

The colonial possession of Sri Lanka by the British had created a westernized culture and value system. The language of the government was English and the English educated Sinhalese, Burghers and Tamils gave rise to an urban middleclass, characterized by urban occupations and wealth. The establishing of missionary schools by the British and the availability of English education, had advantaged the Tamils from the North, for gaining better employment in the Southern Sri Lanka which possessed better natural resources and hence created more employment opportunities.
On the other hand, there was strong resistance to foreign domination, which took the form of religious and cultural awakening. The attainment of independence in 1948 created a new political consciousness and opposition to western domination and gave rise to the ‘Sinhala Buddhist revival’. This was also a period of the rise in Tamil nationalism. (Fuglerud, 1999: 18-25)

Looking back at the history of this time, there is no doubt that there were three main factors that influenced this nationalistic sentiments among the Sri Lankan Tamils (Fuglerud 1998). The first factor, and the most important one was the implementing of ‘Sinhala Only’ policy of 1956, where Sinhalese was made the country’s single official language.

Second was the colonization policy, which involved the settlement of landless Sinhalese peasants and slum dwellers within what Tamils regarded as their own ‘homeland’ (see appendix 3).

The third was the ‘standardization’ of examination scores for admission into universities, that was implemented in 1970s and which meant that Tamil students would need a higher score than Sinhalese to be admitted. During this time the Sinhalese-Tamil relations got out of control and the controversy eroded to severe communal conflicts. Separatist Tamil sentiment gained more momentum.

The economic and political instability seemed to have created the push factors among the Tamils, who now lost their privileges. There was severe ethnic antagonism, where Tamil militants’ heightened nationalist activities worsened the situation in Sri Lanka further. The anti-Tamil riots that broke out in 1977, opened the “secession which was now perceived by Tamils as a precondition for physical security” (Fuglerud 1999: 32). Following these events is the most controversial and turning point in the Sri Lankan history, the 1983 race riots, during which it gained high international profile.

Sri Lankan migration to Australia had already started before the civil war started. Following the riots of late 70s and early 80s, significant numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils fled Sri Lanka and migrated to various countries on humanitarian and refugee grounds. Early 1970s was also a period of ‘brain drain’, during which many professionally qualified Tamils, who fitted into the ‘distinguished and highly qualified’ category left Sri Lanka. This would probably account
for the high representation of professionally qualified and skilled among the Sri Lankan Tamils in Australia.

The early 1980s in Australia saw the next phase of immigration policy changes. Family reunion was given priority over the independent intake, this program extending not only to spouses, dependent parents and children, but also immediate relatives. These changes in the immigration policies in Australia and the growing ethnic unrest in Sri Lanka, gave rise to an obvious large-scale migration, as clearly indicated by the census report of 1996 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

e. Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney- a demographic profile

A report by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (1997), lists the Tamil group as the tenth fastest growing group in New South Wales between 1991 and 1996. The Tamils who numbered at 5360 in 1991, increased to 9072 in 1996, an increase of 69.3 percent.

The Tamil group in Australia can be divided into those originating from Sri Lanka, Tamils from South India, Tamils from Malaysia and others such as Tamils from Singapore. Out of this Tamil group, Tamils originating from Sri Lanka numbered at 5152, forming 56.8 percent of the Tamil population in New South Wales, the Tamils from South India numbered at 1960 forming 21.6 percent of the population, those from Malaysia numbered at 489, forming 5.4 percent of the Tamil population and the other Tamils constituted 6.7 percent of the total Tamil population. Tamils born in Australia formed the final 9.5 percent of the Tamil population.

In spite of the fact that the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is a small diaspora, in recent times, the diaspora has gained prominence and a high international profile, owing to the civil war in the homeland. The diaspora of Sri Lankan Tamils is a recent one, with most of the overseas settlement occurring after 1970s, when the relations between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils deteriorated further.

The South Indian diaspora as mentioned earlier, is mostly motivated by geographical relocation, and are those migrants, who the current migration policy would “blandly categorize as economic migrants” (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000:11). They are people who want to improve their life chances, those for whom Caplan (1995) coined the term “culture of
emigration”, i.e., an understanding that “life is abroad, not here”. The displacement of South Indian Tamils is not necessarily permanent. They can, unlike most Sri Lankan Tamils, make the customary visit back home. This is the “astronaut syndrome” as Sinclair et al. (2000:38), describe as, referring to the more affluent Taiwanese diaspora who often travel to Taiwan “which is a part of the contemporary diasporic experience for this type of migrant”. The South Indian Tamils in Sydney mostly belong to the professional or skilled category.

In comparison to the South Indian Tamil migration, the Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants’ arrival in Australia is significantly diverse. There is diversification in the diaspora in the socio-economic background, their sources and the circumstances of their arrival in Australia. The number of the first Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants before the World War II is not very significant. The migration history with respect to the internal civil war in Sri Lanka shows that, one third of the entire pre-civil war Sri Lankan Tamil population have been displaced internally, while another third have been displaced externally since the war. In Australia most of the Sri Lankan Tamils are settled in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. Not all Sri Lankan Tamils have come directly to Australia. Many of them are doubly displaced who have migrated to Australia from England, Ireland and other parts of Europe, in quest for a better economic life.

The Sri Lankan diaspora in Sydney also includes overseas students who have come to Australia to study and belong to the category of slow settlers. There are also those immigrants who have arrived in Australia under the family reunion programme and those who have qualified under the ‘business category’. These people have come to Australia with capital that has enabled them to set up small businesses.

Higher levels of education, skill and professionalism distinguish the new immigrants. These immigrants are proficient in English language and due to their colonization by the British till the late 1940s, are familiar with western values and institutions. In general, the community shares an urban background. According to the 1996 census, only 92 among the Tamil population in New South Wales did not speak English at all. This indicates that most Sri Lankan Tamils are proficient in English, which gives them a greater facility to adapt to life in Sydney.
One Sri Lankan Tamil informant pointed this out to me. “Look...”, he said proudly, as we were walking, drawing my attention to signage of local shops in Homebush, owned by Sri Lankan Tamils, that sell spices and videos; “we don’t need to put up signs in our language (referring to Tamil) like other Asian communities do, because almost all of us can read and write English”.

Because of the scattering of the diaspora all over the world, many Sri Lankan Tamils are well traveled. The caste and religious distinctions that were much prevalent before the civil war, became less apparent, as the whole population was united in their cause. This becomes more apparent in the diaspora situation. Though the cultural life of the Sri Lankan Tamils is mainly manifest in food, religious rituals and especially the language, these practices are not intrusive within the host society, giving them the reputation of a secular outlook.

Though the Eelam evokes nostalgic emotional reverence, this has in no way stopped the diaspora from integrating into the Australian society. And though the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora was a consequence of major political and economic upheavals, the diaspora in Sydney is prosperous, vibrant and active.

The social life of the Tamils can be appreciated in the context of its demographical and topographical features. The diaspora is mostly concentrated in suburbs of Homebush, Flemington, Auburn and Strathfield. All these suburbs are densely populated, multi-ethnic suburbs, where the Sri Lankan Tamils live with other Tamils from South India, Malaysia and Singapore, and other ethnic communities from Vietnam and China.

Like Ghosh's (2000) Indo-Fijians, the South Indian Tamils and the Sri Lankan Tamils have common religious and cultural practices. They share the same intense interest in Tamil movies, celebrate same festivities and eat similar food. However the communication is fraught when it concerns their political ideology. The South Indians have little or no interest in the Sri Lankan Tamils’s preoccupation with the Eelam problem.

As one South Indian Tamil remarked to me:
"It's not that I am indifferent to their (Sri Lankan Tamil) predicament, after all we are all the same, but I just do not share their passion for the Eelam problem. No doubt the violence disturbs me and I see no signs of a reconciliation between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka. It must be pretty hard for the Sri Lankan Tamils here to see their families suffer back home but at least they are safe here".
Chapter 4

Diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil institutions

a. Sri Lankan Tamil associations

"I look forward to these cultural activities that are conducted by the Tamil associations", a second generation Sri Lankan Tamil informant told me during the annual Diwali cruise. "Though I don't attend each and every activities like my parents do, I attend most of the important ones like film screenings or like this one. It gives me an opportunity to wear traditional clothes, eat nice home food and meet other Tamil friends. We talk about movies, relatives, and the situation in Sri Lanka amongst other things. I have visited my home in Sri Lanka two times but I don't think I will ever go back for good. But I am sure these occasions give my parents a feel of the everyday life back at home- you know a home away from home".

Most diaspora associations are voluntary associations which provide security and unity to the diasporic communities. They establish networks and group affiliations. These associations act as a point of reference and function as a source or mediator of that particular diasporic cultural identity. They socialise their children by playing a PR role either by default or by design. Diasporic associations have a significant status because they aid both the diasporic community itself and the host society by acting as a symbolic representation of the homeland and embody values to be the desired universals for the diaspora. The most important function of these associations is to perpetuate and transmit ideas of the particular diaspora and mould the second generations’ view of the homeland.

The most common diasporic associations or organisations are clubs, temples, schools, churches and other religious institutions or other such defined congregations. Since most diasporic associations are seemingly homogeneous through either common religious or political ideology, it can be safely assumed that an association is a fair representation of that particular section of the diasporic community it embodies.

According to Dr Weerasooria (1998) Sri Lankan associations date back to the 1950s. Today there are nearly sixty-five Tamil associations in Sydney (see appendix 4). Today there are several different associations and clubs in every state. These Tamil associations differ according to ethnic composition, and aims and objectives. Some of these associations
comprise predominantly of Sri Lankan Tamils as their members, while other associations have predominantly South Indian Tamils as their members.

The divisions among these Tamil associations are mainly based on their political ideology. For Sri Lankan Tamils, their associations’ activities are mostly preoccupied with the situation at home and are heavily influenced by political factionalism while South Indian Tamils centre their association activities on cultural maintenance. It must be emphasised here that there is no miscommunication of any sort between the two groups, but a healthy indifference by South Indian Tamils towards the political pursuits of Sri Lankan Tamils.

However participation in cultural activities such as Tamil film screenings, movie nights, musical nights, or the Deepavali cruise is equal for both groups especially amongst the second generation Tamils. The Tamil associations in Sydney are extremely vibrant and active. The associations can be categorised as mainly cultural, literary or student based and also business or profession oriented (as indicated in table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Tamil associations</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literary</td>
<td>At least one Tamil association per university campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Eastwood Tamil Centre Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mt. Druitt Tamil Centre Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NSW Federation of Tamil Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Hillstar Sports Club</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NSW Sports Club</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sydney Tamil Sports Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rappers Sports Club</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Religious

Sri Venkateshwara Temple Association Inc.
Sri Shiva Mandir
Tamil Church of NSW
Sathya Sai Organisation of Australia

Political

Eelam Tamil Association

Some associations also publish their own newsletters, which carry advertisements, local news both in Tamil and English and also information about cultural activities organised by the associations. Some associations also have their own websites.

The objective of these Tamil associations is mainly to foster Tamil language and culture. Sri Lankan Tamil associations also aim to further the cause of Tamils by organising charity activities and the money collected is sent back home. Fund raising is one of the most public activities of Sri Lankan Tamil associations. There has been considerable concern and inquiry with regard to how much of this money is used for charity and how much of it is used to fight the civil war and support the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. It is a highly debated topic that has in recent years caused worry to the Canadian and Australian governments.

The war has caused cohesiveness in the Sri Lankan Tamils' diasporic settings and is most obvious in their association activities. Attending any of these activities is an acknowledgment of the support for Eelam activities from which the South Indian Tamils keep a safe distance. In Sydney the diasporic activities indulged by Sri Lankan Tamils and the South Indian Tamils are not as separated as it is in Melbourne. There is a healthy interaction between the two groups in cultural activities involving music concerts, Tamil films and other common religious festivals. Visitations to homes are mostly limited to their own groups. Discussions between the groups mainly revolve round common cultural interests, while Sri Lankan Tamils constantly refer back to Eelam in their gatherings.

Cultural activities such as film screenings, Tamil musical nights and cruises are the most popular cultural activities amongst the Tamils. It gives the Tamils an opportunity to wear traditional Tamil attire and indulge in other Tamil cultural manifestations such as food and language. These activities are advertised in local community newspapers, newsletters and posters. Tamil radio plays the most important role in advertising these cultural activities.
Light music concerts featuring film music is one of the most popular activities conducted by Tamil associations. The light Tamil music concert presented by Sydney Tamil Manram and Sydney Tamil Sangam in October 1999 featured cine playback singers who were flown to Australia by the associations. They performed songs from Tamil, Telugu and Hindi films accompanied by live orchestra. The show was well publicised and promoted by posters, advertisements and radio. The tickets costed $15 for adults, $10 for pensioners and children and $50 for reserved premium. The Sri Lankan Tamils that I accompanied attended the concert with their two children. The singers sang to a packed house dressed in their traditional best and they sang along some popular film tunes with them. The night ended with a delicious dinner most of which was cooked at home by families of the members of the associations themselves.

These diasporic Tamils who attended the show, both Sri Lankan and South Indian, spoke Tamil much more fluently and "correctly" than the Tamils back home in Sri Lanka and South India. There was pride in the Tamil culture, its food and its attire. Some of the members had brought along their Australian friends who undoubtely seemed to enjoy the show, the colours and the food.

Most Tamil associations comprise of first generation Sri Lankan Tamils as their members. There is a significant though not regular participation by second generation Sri Lankan Tamils. However more recently the second-generation Sri Lankan Tamils have attempted to organise themselves and have formed associations in different universities. The second-generation Tamil associations are different from the first generation Tamil associations in that they are less prone to divisiveness and are more cosmopolitan. While the barriers between the South Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils are further broken down these associations still adhere to Tamil traditional values.

The Sydney University Tamil Society is one of the most dynamic Tamil associations and has mostly second-generation Tamil university students as its members. It is a non-profit non-political association that was established in 1991. The association consists of an executive committee consisting of mostly Sri Lankan Tamil students from Sydney University campus
which makes the overall decisions for the society, and a sub-committee that consists of professionals and students from other university campuses.

In more recent years the Sydney University Tamil Society has grown in popularity and strength and is highly regarded by the Sri Lankan Tamil community all over Australia. One of the most important cultural activities conducted by the association is the uni-fund project, which funds the study of Tamil students in Sri Lanka by providing valuable facilities for student laboratories and libraries. The association provides the students with textbooks, computers and fund for overseas studies. The association also organises competitions for Tamil schools children in New South Wales. In addition they organise regular movie shows, annual cultural programs, annual dinners and cruises.

One of the most ambitious and innovative projects of the Sydney University Tamil Society is the publication of the Tamil guide. Commonly referred to as the "Yellow Guide" by the Tamil community, the Tamil Guide is a guide for Tamils, by Tamils and of Tamils in Sydney. The guide is a bilingual publication that was first published in 1997. Ever since the first publication, the guide has been updated with a supplement in 1999.

Sustained mostly by advertisers, the guide carries an index comprising of Tamil accountants, Tamil lawyers, Tamil marriage brokers, Tamil tutors, Tamil astrologers (refer to appendix-5) and other valuable information covering all aspects of the everyday life of Tamils in Sydney. The Tamil Guide also provides a list of Tamil associations and a calendar of Tamil events and festivals.

According to the Saumya, the ex-president of the society, the guide provides an:
"opportunity for businesses to advertise and aims to bring together the information about the Tamil community activities together".

As a foreword, the Kalappai sub-committee of the Sydney University Tamil Society writes about the guide:
"... The result of our dedicated efforts to collect and collate a list of services provided by Tamils and which may be accessed by Tamils....

1 Telugu is one of the four major South Indian languages that are spoken in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The other three major languages are Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.
The motivation for the publication of such a guide is "... to foster and facilitate communication within the Tamil community" (1999:3)

Because of the feasibility of production costs and the availability of Tamil printers, the guide is printed in India. It is distributed amongst the Sri Lankan Tamil community and other Tamil communities in Sydney and other states of Australia. It is also distributed to Tamil communities outside Australia, in Europe, Canada and New Zealand.

The Tamil Guide is an indication of the viable migrant economy in the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Sydney. The guide is an evidence of the established economic, cultural and social links in the Sri Lankan Tamil community not only in Sydney or Australia but also the greater Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora all over the world.

b. The Tamil language heritage

"I am your mother. The learned called me Tamiltay. You are all called Tamilians. You and I are extricably bound together forever and ever through language". (Panchanathan n.d.)

Of particular importance of the revivalist element of the ‘Tamil nationalism’ of the Dravidian movement ¹was the Tamil language, declared as the official language of the Tamil Nadu State in South India.

¹"O Divine Tamil, we bow to you who reflect the glories of the ancient Dravidian” (lyrics from a song in the Tamil film “Nadodi Mannan”, released in 1963). The Dravidian movement was the anti-Brahmin movement. Hindu culture is a synthesis of both the Aryans and the Dravidians. The Brahmins heading the Indian caste structure were identified with the Aryans who imposed their rule on the older Dravidian culture. During the British era, Government positions and special privileges went to the Brahmins in keeping with the early policy of the British to accept and adopt the caste structure. Brahmins had always fostered the study of Sanskrit, which was the heritage like caste, village or religion. of the Aryans. Tamil Brahmins tended to look down on the vernacular Tamil and embellished their own Tamil with Sanskrit words. With the exit of British from India, an anti-Brahmin movement gained force that created a sense of solidarity among the non-Brahmins. This was a highly dedicated movement that made the Tamil language the most important element of this movement. The Tamil nationalistic movement in Sri Lanka is a part of this Dravidian movement.
In 1956, this linguistic nationalism in turn exerted its influence on the Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist movement in Sri Lanka. In a broad perspective the Sri Lankan Tamil liberation struggle may be said to have taken momentum with the declaration of “Sinhala Only” policy of 1956, where Sinhalese\(^1\) was made the country’s single official language.

In general, the Northern Province of Jaffna, where the majority of Sri Lankan Tamils live is composed of a broad spectrum of caste and religion. And the Sri Lankan diaspora all over the world is composed of this very spectrum of castes and religions. However Tamil language can be seen as overriding dividing identities. Suseendirarajah (1980) observed that when she asked the villagers in Jaffna what their religion was, most of them answered ‘Tamil’. My experience as a researcher among the Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney was similar. Smolicz (1981) is of the opinion that every ethnic group has a certain core value which makes it the main proponent for that group and defines the group’s identity. In the case of Sri Lankan Tamils, their core value lies in the Tamil language. In Jaffna, reverence of language is learned from an early age and and through out childhood, is deferred to as a holy subject. This reverence of language can be observed in the following quote from an article in a local Tamil ethnic newspaper in Sydney:

“...Knowledge of our Tamil heritage, and all things Tamil, is just as important as the knowledge of the language (Tamil) we speak”. (Elamarasu 2000)

In recent times, there has been great jubilation among the Tamils in Sydney over the announcement of the NSW government to include Tamil language in the new HSC syllabus in 1999. According to an article published in a Tamil newsletter published by the Tamil Mandram, police minister and member of Strathfield Hon. Paul Whelan, made a complimentary comment on the Tamil language and Tamil community:

"Tamil belongs to the Dravidian group of languages. It is widely spoken in Southern India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore as well as Australia. The inclusion of Tamil in the new HSC reaffirms the important role the Tamil community has played in shaping multicultural NSW"

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\(^1\)Max Muller was able to ‘class the idioms spoken in Iceland and Ceylon (Sinhalese) as cognate dialects of the Aryan family of language’ (in Fuglerud 1999: 14).
In Sydney, the Homebush Public School on a Saturday afternoon is a site of hectic activity. For the Tamils, it is time for them to take their children to the school for Tamil language classes. Boasting over 300 students currently, the Tamil study centre Homebush Inc. is one of the nine Tamil schools in NSW that comes under the Federation of Tamil Schools. The other schools are run in the suburbs of Wentworthville, Mt. Druitt, Eastwood, Ashfield, Seven Hills, Wollongong, Auburn and Holsworthy.

The Federation of Tamil Schools is a member of the Ethnic Schools of New South Wales, which is an incorporated administration body that represents over 160 ethnic schools in New South Wales. The federation also provides benefits like public liability insurance, membership and insurance. The Federation of ethnic schools is in turn represented by one nominated member in the Community Language Program, a sub-section of the Department of Education and Training. The Community Language Program, the support for which is provided partly by the Federal Government and partly by State Government, funds the ethnic schools.

The ethnic schools have an individual right to claim grants directly from the Community Language Program. In addition to funding and support, the Community Language Program also conducts regular long term and short-term accreditation courses and workshops for community language schoolteachers, which qualifies them to teach. They also aid individual ethnic communities in conducting training programmed to train teachers to teach in ethnic languages.

The Tamil Study Inc. in Homebush was started in 1987. The school currently employs eighteen permanent teachers and five relief teachers who work on a voluntary basis with a small allowance of $3.00 per hour. The classes are run every Saturday between 2-4 pm. Most students fall in the primary school age and some are of high school age. The teaching of Tamil language is free for the students but a non-compulsory voluntary contribution of $5 per month is requested from students to cover costs of food and drinks provided to them during school breaks. The Community Language Program also aids the school by providing a per capita grant for each student to cover costs of textbooks and other stationery.

According to the principal of the Tamil school, Mrs Ambika Jeganathan, the aim of Tamil schools is to "promote Tamil culture by encouraging the second generation Tamils to develop
their Tamil language skills”. The school conducts regular cultural activities including annual sports and cultural day called ‘Kalaivela’, in which Tamil children from all the nine Tamil schools participate. They also celebrate all Tamil religious festivals. The Student Representative Council organises a monthly Tamil program of 45 minutes every month in the school, comprising of Tamil songs and skits. The school has earned many awards over the last two years such as the Minister’s Award given to outstanding students.

Integrating it into the host culture is the main objective of Tamil schools to promote Tamil language. For example, textbooks for primary schools are in Tamil but the syllabus revolves around Australian fauna and flora, the Australian native environment and other general information about Australia.

High school children are informed about public and social issues in Australia while learning the mother tongue. Students participate in public debates that are carried out in Tamil on topics such as the referendum for the republic and so on. Topics that are applicable to the general community in Australia are taught to students in the Tamil school that gives them a perspective of the multicultural set up of Australia.

As one administrator of a Tamil school puts it:
“The purpose of the school is not just maintaining our Tamil language and culture but understanding other cultures too.”

c. Tamil print media

Cultural maintenance which is the first position that diaspora presses is reinstated by community newspapers. Anderson (1983), while expressing his views on how print capitalism was instrumental in forging the ‘imagined community’ of the nation (UK), wrote that the media and other cultural consumption play a key role in constructing and defining contesting and reconstituting national ethnic and other cultural identities.

Diasporic print media not only brings awareness to the global character of the diaspora but it also reflects the very local nature of how diaspora is experienced. Diaspora media speaks for the diaspora and shapes the experience and discourse of diaspora. The deployment and utilisation of diasporic media is a significant mode of homeland interaction with the diaspora.
There is a wide range of Tamil Print culture that has evolved in the recent years in Sydney. The two most popular Tamil newspapers are the *Uthayam* and the *Eelamarasu* published locally in Australia. *Uthayam* is a free monthly publication, published in Victoria and the *Eelamarasu* is a fortnightly publication published in Sydney and sold for 0.50 cents. The range of Tamil print media in Australia also includes Tamil and English newspapers, film magazines. Political magazines that are mailed to Australia both from Sri Lanka and South India on request. These newspapers and magazines cost anywhere between $2.50-$4.00, which covers the postage charges and furnish the local Tamil community with current news, political and economic news with fair coverage of Tamil cinema. Both *Uthayam* and *Eelamarasu* have experimented with English-Tamil bilingual format but the share of English text is very small in *Eelamarasu*. These newspapers also carry supplements of newspaper editions that are published by the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic community in London and Canada.

In addition to the newspapers, the other Tamil periodicals include those published by the various Tamil associations in Sydney. In terms of the content, they mostly feature current news in the Tamil community in Sydney and some entertainment news and are mostly published in English. The content in these periodicals mostly depends on the target audience. While it can be assumed that newspapers who are primarily driven by news target the more older and first generation Sri Lankan Tamils, the periodicals by the associations target both older and younger generations in the Sri Lankan Tamil community. They are directly financed by the associations they represent while the Tamil newspapers are sustained purely by advertisements of businesses that service the Sri Lankan Tamil community. The sufficient funds from the advertisers allow them to survive by charging no fees or nominal fees to their readers.

The Tamil ethnic press in Sydney is highly influenced by the intellectual elite in the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic community. Skbris (1999:89) is of the opinion that the intellectual elite in diasporas are commonly guided by the belief that the spreading and propagating of particular ideas and information serves the interests of the survival of their ethnic culture outside the homeland. The diasporic community newspapers reinstate cultural maintenance, which is the first position that the diaspora pursues.
The articles in both *Uthayam* and *Eelamarasu* project a celebratory sense of the self in the host society. The newspapers also act as a tool for political propaganda. There is an overwhelming antagonism towards the existing Sinhalese government in Sri Lanka and glorified information of the guerrilla fights and massacres at home in Sri Lanka are a constant feature in these newspapers. Headlines such as "Tamil Nadu police ban Eelam rallies", "500 civilian casualties in Madduvil", "Shortage of medical supplies in Vanni", "Sri Lankan police accused of sexual brutality", often evoke powerful images and emotions in the community (*Eelamarasu* July 2000:6).
Photo 1- Asia Pacific shop interiors in Homebush

Photo 2- Display of Tamil film posters in Homebush Trading Centre
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0417 046 927

DIRECTED BY
SUDDER, C

Programme and time subject to change

ADVANCE BOOKINGS - PHONE: 9726 07

can be made by credit cards, (Bank Card, Master Card, Visa)
A fee of $1.00 will be charged per transaction.
All credit card bookings should be made 3 hours prior to showtime.

Photo 3- Poster advertising the screening of a Tamil movie
Photo 4- Tamil music concert organized by Tamil Manram and Tamil Sangam in October 1999

Photo 5- First year students in Tamil School
Chapter 5

Audiovisual media use by Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney

Contemporary diasporas can be better understood by an analysis of the information flow that aids the process of interaction between homelands and diasporas. Gillespie in her study of the audiovisual media use by Punjabis in Southall in London comments that “national boundaries” are challenged by “the globalizing tendencies in media and by accompanying changes in the patterns of cultural production, distribution and consumption” (1993:3).

The study of diasporic audiovisual media is not entirely new, the best known being Naficy’s study of Iranian television in Los Angeles (1993), Gillespie’s study of audiovisual media use by Punjabis in Southall in London (1993), Dona Kolar Panov’s study of videos of war in the local Croatian community in Australia (1997) and the more recent study of Asian diasporas and their audiovisual media use edited by S. Cunningham and J. Sinclair (2000).

Agreeing with Anderson (1983), Gillespie argues that cultural and ethnic identities are constructed and defined, contested and reconstituted not only by print media but also the audiovisual mass media and other cultural consumption. Diaspora communities maintain their links with a whole cultural world outside their host country mostly by mass media. This transnational flow of images has brought about a global culture that has interconnected different diasporic cultures.

The study of audiovisual media use by any diasporic community is as much a study of businesses as it is a study of the culture of media. It demonstrates the close links between diasporas, culture and globalization. This chapter discusses the audiovisual media culture of by the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic community in Sydney and the role it plays in the formation of cultural identity among the Tamil migrants. An analysis of the media consumption by the Tamil diasporic community is important as it enables us to study issues of ethnicity and cultural identity, in the context of their everyday lives, as shaped by use of media from home. It focuses on ways in which Tamil migrant culture is shaped by both cosmopolitan and diasporic experiences while shedding light on broader issues of media culture.
While exploring the general audiovisual culture amongst Sri Lankan Tamil migrants, the chapter highlights the ways in which Tamil films and videos are used by diasporic communities both to maintain and negotiate cultural traditions. The consumption of media by the Sri Lankan Tamils mainly revolves around Tamil films and local television media. On one hand, Tamil films reaffirm culture and on the other hand, use of local media challenges and reinvents culture. This intensifies the process of cultural maintenance and cultural negotiation by the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Sydney.

a. The Tamil Film Industry

From the early 1940s, the market for the Indian film production has been an area inhabited by millions giving it the reputation of the world’s largest centers of production of films. Burma and Sri Lanka were being administered as a part of India and within this area no barriers, political, economic and linguistic, had barred the way to Indian films. However the film industry producers had to contend with several linguistic pockets such as Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Bengali.

For the Sri Lankan Tamils, their cultural diet of Tamil films, from even before the beginnings of the Tamil war, was profusely imbued with elements from the Dravidian movement (see section on Tamil language in Chapter 4), which spread across from Southern India from the early 20th century onwards. The history of Tamil films in Sri Lanka began with Abdulla Esoofally (1884-1957), who moved throughout South East Asia including Sri Lanka with his ‘bioscope’ as a tent showman (Barnow and Krishna 1980). During the silent era, films depicting stories from the Indian epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha, in their varying versions were released in Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaya, Sumatra and Java.

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1 The centers of production for Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Bengali are in the cities of Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Calcutta respectively

2 Indian sense of community has been fostered by common cultural legacies similar to Iliad and Odyssey, the most remarkable of which are the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. They are oversized tales of adventure involving Gods, heroes and mortal men as well as mythical animals.
While the mid 20th century saw Tamil films struggle to keep pace with its more dominating counterpart, the Bombay Hindi film industry, the more recent years have seen the Tamil industry consolidating its position in the all India market. Path breaking films such as Roja (rose) and multilingual films such as Bombay produced in Chennai have helped the Tamil industry establish a firm foothold in the country.

Presently, the market for Indian films is unrestricted and caters to the Indian, Sri Lankan, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi diaspora all over the world. Particularly Tamil films enjoy a thriving market in Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, Britain, Europe and Australia all of which form a "geolinguistic region" (Sinclair et al 2000: 41). Urban and global in their settings, these Tamil films with their universal themes of love, family bonding and sacrifice transcend national boundaries and diversities and offer powerful representations of traditional Tamil culture. Some of these films are shot both in rural and western locations such as America, Canada and more recently in Australia.

Commenting on Indian films, Manas Ray (2000:17) writes that Indian films "have created a spectatorship aware of the specific requirements of the diasporas". They have coped with the challenges of globalization by creating a worldwide network by which dispersed disporas are still connected to the homeland culture.

b. Tamil film screenings

Most Tamil associations are oriented towards cultural maintenance, which they pursue by organizing various cultural activities such as Tamil film musical nights, Deepavali cruise, Tamil dramas and other such cultural events. Among these activities Tamil screenings are the most popular.

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2Deepavali is an important Hindu festival, which is a festival of lights and celebrated in the month of October/ November.
My Sri Lankan Tamil informants often listed attending a Tamil *padum* (film) screening as their favorite Saturday night out.

"We get the tickets in advance at the local shops (Tamil). Most of these Tamil movies run to packed houses, moreover there are only two to three screenings", informs a Tamil film devout.

Another young Sri Lankan Tamil tells me:

"It's three hours of pure entertainment. The songs, dances, costumes- everything is colorful. It's a different experience watching it on the big screen unlike videos. It's a kind of nostalgic feeling when you watch these movies. They transport you to another world"

*Hey Ram* starring Kamal Hassan and Shahrukh Khan, a blockbuster Tamil movie was screened in Sydney in the Roxy Parramatta theatre on a weekend in February 2000. The three shows on Friday, Saturday, Sunday ran to packed houses. There were simultaneous screenings in Melbourne that ran to packed houses too. George Street in Parramatta was flooded with Tamils both Sri Lankan and Indian who had been waiting in the line for nearly an hour. These Tamil speakers in Sydney can see first release Tamil films, mostly released in two rented commercial theatres in Paramatta and Hurstville. The ticket prices range from $6-7 for children and concessions and $10-12 for adults. The demand for Tamil film reels among the local distributors is very high. The networks are elaborate.

Distribution both for national and international markets is centrally organized from Chennai¹. Overseas distributors² in Singapore and Europe buy world rights from distributors in Chennai and in turn sell rights to local distributors in Australia. These films are flown to Australia by airfreight.

The popularity of a film amongst the local Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora may depend on various factors such as actors starring in the films to the music director or the director of the film. Stars no doubt constitute the main obsession of Tamil film devotees, the most popular among them being Rajnikanth, one of the highest paid idols in the history of films in India. His popularity extends to Canada, England and even Japan.

¹ Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu State is the hub of all Tamil film activities.
² For example, the Ayangaran movies based in London are of the most popular overseas film distributors among local Tamil film distributors.
The music director, usually a composer-arranger-conductor continues to have a status second only to the star. The prodigal musical director A R Rehman and whiz kid director Mani Ratnam are the other two people whose names dictate the success of a film ensuring its box office success among the local Sri Lankan Tamil community.

The competition to buy distribution rights for Tamil films is really fierce and the prices paid are very high. If a Tamil film cost approximately $800 in the early 1990s for its distributors, it now costs a whopping $30,000. Similarly if it cost $35 to classify a 21/2-hour Tamil film by the censorship board in the 1990s, it now costs $1,579 to classify the same length Tamil feature film. Sometimes distributors pay money to the Tamil film producers even before the filming process begins.

All Tamil films are screened in Sydney on the same day as its release in Chennai. The official release day for Tamil films is Friday, both in Chennai and Sydney. The screenings are advertised in the local Tamil newspapers, posters (e.g. see appendix-6) and most importantly radio announcements.

One Sri Lankan Tamil distributor I spoke to expresses his concern:

"If a new Tamil film is screened late even by a week after its release in Chennai, it means that the distributors here in Australia will not make their money, as the local video shops will be inundated with cheap pirated video copies of the film."

An average of two new Tamil films are screened every month, each film running over an average of 3-4 sessions. Depending on its popularity and returns from the ticket sales, the film may be screened over a few more sessions. Holiday seasons such as Deepavali and Pongal1 may see the release of even more than four films a month.

Attending film screenings is a principal weekend leisure activity for the Tamils in Sydney where divisions and barriers between different Tamil ethnic community groups are broken down. It is a sort of social event where the community gets to interact with one another and generates discussion and fosters notions of togetherness.

1Pongal is another important Tamil festival that marks the beginning of a New Year. It is the festival of harvesting and is celebrated in the month of April.
c. Videos

It is dinnertime and the Solomon household play a new Tamil movie on the video, Khushi that has been passed on to them by another Sri Lankan Tamil family that live in the neighbourhood. A very impressed Chandra, the mother, tells me "it was highly recommended by my cousin who lives in London". Darshi, the 20-year-old daughter who migrated to Australia when she was three with her parents resigns herself "I was hoping to watch Talented Mr Ripley on the video. I guess I have no choice now, the majority wins". Ammu the youngest 10-year-old who is currently undertaking classes in classical Bharathanatyam is glued to the television. The titles are fast-forwarded. Darshi, inspite of herself, gets more involved in the movie."He is not bad looking", she comments on the actor. Ammu (the second generation Sri Lankan Tamil) who reads and writes Tamil asks her mother constantly the meaning of any archaic Tamil word that she does not understand. The father who is the quietest is seemingly enjoying the movie extremely. The film has been shot in a village that he grew up in "It reminds me of home", he says nostalgically.

Gillespie (1993) has observed that the VCR has been appropriated as a means of recreating cultural traditions among diasporic communities. Tamil film videos are, perhaps, one of the most important tools in reaffirming culture among the Sri Lankan Tamil migrants in Sydney. It is an extension of the dynamic market of the Indian film industry and enables an experience for maintenance of cultural links with home. It is mostly a family centered activity, a popular past time mostly with the older generation.

There are 8-10 Tamil shops in the western suburbs of Sydney, which rent popular Tamil films on videos. These video shops are different to the regular mainstream video outlets such as Blockbuster or Video Ezy. The shops that rent out Tamil videos also sell spices and other cooking essentials. In addition they also sell jewelery, Tamil newspapers and periodicals, audiocassettes and CDs. Each shop has an average of 2000-3000 videos, comprising of Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali and Tamil films.

Boasting 3000 Tamil films, the Homebush Trading Center is the largest Tamil video outlet in Sydney. According to the storeowner, Mr. Bala Krishna, the Homebush Trading Center is the only video shop that caters exclusively to the Tamils in Sydney. There is a counter on which a photo album of the movie posters of Tamil films is displayed. Customers choose videos after browsing through the album. Old movies are rented out for as little as $1.50 per week. New movies cost $1.50 to rent overnight and $2.00 per week.

The most popular videos are those films that star Rajnikanth, Kamalhassan and Karthik among the male stars and Rambha and Aishwarya (the former Miss World) among the
actresses. Director Mani Ratnam and music director A R Rehman are the other two crowd pullers.

Most of the overseas distributors for local video shop owners are based in Singapore, Europe or Dubai. Studies of distribution circuits (see flowchart in appendix-6) show a lateral distribution of videos. These videos circulate in other parts of Asia and Europe before reaching Australia. Video shop owners in Sydney reported that lately as piracy laws are being tightened in Singapore distribution of pirated tapes have become less frequent compared to Malaysia, which has now become a more popular distribution center for Tamil films.

The videos for Tamil films cost anywhere between $12-18 with postage, the price varying according to the popularity of the films. These videos are available in Australia 3-4 days after their release in India. They are pirated copies, which are made in theatres in India with hand held cameras. The quality of these tapes is very poor with extreme color contrast, blurry images and poor sound. Once the tape reaches Sydney, the local distributor makes 10-12 copies of the original tape and sells it to various shop owners. The shop owner in turn makes 30-60 copies of the tape and rents it to his eager customers.

Most video shop owners themselves complain about the quality of the tapes.

"We are aware that the quality of these tapes is very bad. Even my family themselves complain about these tapes. But what can we shop owners do? We have to keep up with the competition. If I don't do it someone else will be doing it.

In spite of the poor quality the Tamil film videos remain the most popular pastime for the Tamils in Sydney and are appropriated by elders as a means of recreating and maintaining cultural traditions.

The second most important category of Tamil videos are those videos which are video recordings of popular Tamil programs shown on Raj TV and Sun TV, that form a part of the satellite television in the Indian subcontinent. The opening of the economy in the Indian subcontinent and the coming of the Star Television satellite network in the early 90s saw the launch of ambitious television channels such as Star TV, Zee TV, Sun TV, Raj TV etc. Among the 12-15 channels, Sun and Raj cater exclusively to Tamil viewers.
The programs shown on Raj and Sun are mainly film-oriented programs, soap operas, television dramas, film songs, and current news including politics. These programs are selected according to the local demand in Australia among the Tamil migrants, taped on video at home mostly in India and sold to the modest middle person in Singapore or Malaysia. He in turn arranges for the tapes to be shipped on a weekly plane flight from Singapore or Malaysia to Sydney. The piracy issue also includes the unauthorized taping of television programs on Raj TV and Sun TV and exporting them to diasporic markets.

Referring to the portability and reproducibility of video (Cunningham and Sinclair 1996:2-3) talk about the “time space compression”, through which common “cultural regions are united”. The flow of Tamil films clearly links distant parts of the Tamil diaspora and has given rise to a global diasporic consumer culture. The significant consumption of these videos clearly demonstrates the importance of how media especially films is used to maintain cultural links and enhance and consolidate cultural identities (Naficy 1993).

In addition to the above two categories there is a third one which is the most controversial category of Tamil videos. These are the ‘videos of war’, locally and cheaply produced by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and targeted mainly at the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora all over the world.

"The government in Sri Lanka do not disclose true information to the public. These tapes depict the real truth about the freedom fighters in Sri Lanka and their plight", comments my elderly Sri Lankan Tamil informant.

The way these videos are used is selective. The homeland targets its diaspora with particular information and the diaspora willingly accepts and disseminates this information. These videos depict the bloody battles in Sri Lanka between the minority Tamils and the Sinhalese army. It presents the Sinhalese army as the main aggressors and emphasizes the successes of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in guerrilla wars often with tragic outcomes. The aim is to evoke nostalgia among the exilic Sri Lankan Tamil community and to garner support for the cause of Eelam.

My patriotic informant tells me in hushed voice that if anyone in Sri Lanka were caught with these tapes, they would be imprisoned. He has a collection of 10-12 of these tapes in his shop
and secretly brings out one tape from behind the shelves. Later as we sit together watching the video, he says

"It brings tears to my eyes", and

he confesses:

"It's been more than twelve years since I fled Sri Lanka and migrated to this country as a refugee. I have been back only once since then. I did not go back even when my mother died. My brothers and cousins there in Sri Lanka are still fighting."

This exile genre of Tamil videos has its own themes, narratives and tragic representations from home. Most of these videos feature interviews with prominent LTTE leaders and other members who talk about their cause, fight and the victories and tragedies of war. It also captures bloody war scenes between the Sinhalese army and the rebels. These documentaries mostly convey patriotic messages from Tamil rebels to the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, camouflaged by soft music and tragic images. The videos are popular mostly among the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils for whom these images are a reminder of what they have left back home and the very reason why they left home. Though produced cheaply with ordinary hand held digital cameras, these videos carry a certain appeal of shared common destiny for the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora that is spread far and wide. CDs and cassette tapes singing the praise of Eelam, the Tamil rebels and their heroic deaths accompany them.

In addition to the above collection of videos, the shops also sell audiocassettes, CDs and VCDs. Film videos are also brought into Australia by the diasporic travelers themselves. Most of the video renters are women and mothers whose film consumption also includes glossy film magazines from Sri Lanka and India, which informs them the latest film gossip and news from Tamil cinema.

d. Film talk

Many researchers (e.g., Scannell 1996:11) in their study of media have argued that mass communication is a shared cultural resource and reveals structures of identities, performance and social interaction of viewers. For the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Sydney, films act as a form of social lubrication not only within the family and the local community but the greater Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora all over the world. The consumption of Tamil films is not a private affair but constitutes a broad cultural activity.
For example most conversations between the customers who visit the Tamil shops in Sydney revolve around the latest releases of Tamil films. A common complaint by video shop owners is that most often a Tamil video rented by a customer does its customary circulation amongst other family members, relatives and friends before its return to the shop, and hence is financially disadvantageous to them.

Customers choose Tamil videos, old or new, based on the recommendations by relatives or friends. The success of Tamil films screened anywhere abroad before their release in Australia depends on the feedback that the Sri Lankan Tamil community members get from their relatives or friends abroad. Clearly films play a socially cohesive role in establishing interpersonal communications. Most Sri Lankan Tamil respondents when asked to list what they thought films taught mentioned the films acted as a point of reference for the Tamil culture, and most importantly performed the function of teaching the Tamil language.

In conclusion, the intricate networks through which Tamil films flow into Australia indicate how global communications influence the formation of cultural identities. Films subject the second-generation migrants to cultural identity negotiation. These young migrants make use of the resources such as Tamil films that are available to them to negotiate viable cultural change.

**e. Radio**

The second section of this chapter deals with that significant part of diasporic media, the radio, focussing concretely on the interlinking media reception and appropriation by the Sri Lankan Tamils. Radio plays the dual role of not only providing information in general to the Tamil diaspora, but also satisfying their specific cultural needs. The institutions of mass media, i.e. the newspapers, radio, and television, are crucial means of communication in modern society. They provide information and entertainment and act as catalysts in the field of culture and education. The radio, in particular, with its easy availability and long hours of broadcast, is integral to the diasporic media.
The development of ethnic radio has long been examined and encouraged in Australia. In 1978, the Commonwealth adopted the report of the Review of Post-arrival Programs and Services for Migrants, The Galbally Report (1982). One of the guidelines was that

Every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice and disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures.

The Federal Government earlier to 1978 had adopted a similar set of principles for ethnic radio known as The Criteria for Ethnic Broadcasting. Based on the recommendation of the Gallaby report, ethnic radio was conceived as a site for developing multiculturalism whereby specific ethnic communities may maintain their culture while simultaneously other communities could extend their knowledge of coexisting cultures. The government then provided the multilingual broadcasters 2EA and 3EA with a concrete form as the Special Broadcasting Service, the SBS. Established in 1978 as an independent statutory authority, the SBS was created to maintain, fund and extend ethnic radio and its evolving sibling, “multicultural television” (Shrimpton, 1999).

In 1982, the Working Party of the department of Communication and Immigration and Ethnic affairs presented a report to its ministers, which concerned itself with the provision of radio programs directed to specific ethnic communities.

At that time when the paper was presented, ethnic radio was provided through
1. The Commonwealth funded, independent statutory authority, SBS, which operated through the station 2EA (Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong) and 3EA (Melbourne including Geelong)
2. A number of independent, non-profit public broadcasting stations, licensed by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT), most of which received Commonwealth subsidies for the production and transmission of ethnic radio programs.
3. A number of profit-making commercial radio stations licensed by the ABT.

It is during this time in the early 1980s that crucial and important developments can be traced in the evolution of Tamil Ethnic Radio. The history of Tamil Radio started back in 1975, when Mr R.K. Ram, a Tamil migrant from Sri Lanka presented a half-hour monthly Tamil
program on Radio 2EA. The program constituted interviews with famous local or visiting Tamil artistes, professionals and other prominent Tamil personalities.

This program was soon taken over by Mrs Dervi Bala who compered till 1992. The Tamil program developed to a fortnightly half-hour program and gradually to a weekly 45 minutes program. This increased frequency of the Tamil program was in proportion to the increase in the Sri Lankan Tamil population in Australia. Currently the Tamil program on SBS is a weekly one-hour program. The content of the program is mostly information based.

In 1992, the Federal Labor Government granted a large sum to the Multicultural Radio Association, the MCRA, to cater to ethnic communities. The regulation of the MCRA allowed 25 members from a specific community to form a group that would be given weekly 45 minutes airtime. The services of the members were totally voluntary except the management.

The Tamil group, at this time, started the Tamil Muzhakkam (Tamil Beat), a weekly 45 minutes program for the Tamil ethnic community. The content of the program was varied, featuring film songs, news, children programs and other entertainment. Tamil Muzhakkam became very popular with the Tamil community, which was considerably large now in Sydney. However, the MCRA went bankrupt in 1997 and the program was taken off air for about 9 months. Tamil Muzhakkam is back on air now and is a two-hour long weekly program, aired on Saturday evenings from 8-10 pm.

1992 also saw the granting of licences to ethnic communities, area wise, to start radio stations. That is, community groups in particular government areas were given power to start radio stations. The head of Tamil Vaishnavi enterprise, at this time, negotiated with Bankstown Council and initiated a one-hour weekly Tamil program called Malai Mathuram (melodious garland), aired on Sundays from 6-7 pm. The program featured Tamil film songs only and its increasing popularity goaded the starting of several other Tamil programs.

In 1993, Mr Bala Singha Prabhakaran applied to Cumberland Community Radio (2 CCR) in Baulkham Hills and negotiated a one-hour Tamil program called Muthamil Malai (Tamil pearl garland) on Sundays from 7- 8 pm. In 1995, another one-hour Tamil program was aired on Friday nights from 9-10pm. It was aired on 2 SER, run by the University of Technology, Sydney. The one hour air time cost $ 90 per hour and was managed by the Tamil community
Cultural and Media group partnered by Mr Bala Singha Prabhakaran, Mrs Shamini Stores and Mr Tilaga Prabhakaran. The program was highly popular as it started the first Tamil talk-back program to the Tamil-speaking community.

_Inbathamil Oli_

The Tamil group headed by the dynamic Mr Bala Singha Prabhakaran pioneered a 24 hours Tamil radio program in Australia, _Inbathamil Oli_, in 1996. At first the idea was abandoned because it was very expensive. However, a test broadcast was finally aired in March 1996. At first _Inbathamil Oli_ piggybacked on existing radio stations with most of its funding provided by subscriptions.

With considerable success, Mr Prabhakaran formed the Tamil Media Group, Sydney Pty Ltd, in May 1996. At first broadcast to 90 people, by the end of 1996, the subscribers had increased to 400 in Sydney. The broadcasting slowly extended to listeners in the Melbourne area and by 1998 the Tamil Media Group had managed to obtain a licence to broadcast on their own station.

By September 1997, the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic community in Canberra could subscribe to the station. Today _Inbathamil Oli_ broadcasts to subscribers' worldwide in Singapore, Canada, Europe, and Sri Lanka with 5000 listeners all over the world. The subscription rates are $99 per annum or $45 half yearly, with an initial cost of $150 in the first year. Another option is to secure a life subscription to the station for $300.

The program is transmitted on a pre-tuned FM frequency that cannot be received by regular radios. The subscribers need a special receiver, which has the ability to act as a transmitter and then relays to all radio receivers in a private establishment. The transmission to subscribers outside Sydney uses higher radio waves. The licence used by _Inbathamil Oli_ is highly sought after because of its high-density classification.

With a vision to "weave a thread of cultural integration amongst a geographically dispersed community, targeting to reach every Tamil anywhere in the world" (_Inbathamil Oli_ brochure-1998), the program has achieved much in a short span of time. It was the first in the world to produce an interactive program with an overseas radio studio (_Singapore Oli_) and had
talkback programs with listeners from both countries. Apart from being the first diasporic radio stations to broadcast a live talkback show with a radio station (Shakthi FM) in Sri Lanka, it also broadcasts lives in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. It is also the one and only Tamil radio station in the world, broadcasting live to three overseas countries- Sri Lanka, Singapore and Canada.

Most of the shows on Inbathamil Oli employ a magazine format, incorporating various elements such as news, commentary, interviews, film music and advertisements. The radio generates revenues from ads and the sale of radio receivers. The program director, Mr Bala Singha Parabhakaran divides the program content as 40% film songs, 10% commercial radio announcements, such as movie screenings, advertisements for cultural activities, church prayers, campaigns\(^1\), Tamil school studies, 15% people interaction programs where they air their views, 10% "educational culture" and 25% news both international and local.

The talkback programs are undoubtedly some of the most popular programs. The marriage of two technologies, the radio and the telephone has turned radio call-in programs into potent media for expressing exilic tensions as well as strategies of resistance to assimilation (Naficy, 1993). The radio call-in programs allow listeners to call in and air views on various issues, thus presenting a plurality of viewpoints on various issues, not only from and of the Sri Lankan Tamil migrant community in Australia but all over the world. Telephonic newscasts, especially from Sri Lanka are another form of bringing the diaspora together and are important for Sri Lankan migrants who are constantly spurred and influenced by the highly volatile political situation at home, in Sri Lanka. Thus the telephone is a powerful instrument used not only for information but also to disseminate various points of view. Inbathamil Oli also broadcasts newscasts that cover politics and current events, which is downloaded from the internet. Also other diasporic radio programs produced in other parts of the world are downloaded from the internet and broadcast to the local Tamil diaspora.

\(^1\) One of the most successful campaigns carried out by Inbathamil Oli was for the Australian Bureau of Statistics in their 1996 census. Question 13 in the questionnaire provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics determined the language spoken at home by the informant that sometimes elicited the wrong response from the second or third generation Tamils who spoke English at home. During this time, Inbathamil Oli did a huge campaign, where in their listeners were requested to answer the question correctly if their origins was Tamil. The success of the campaign was obvious in the significant jump in the statistics from the 1992 census to the 1996 census in which the actual figures of the number of Tamil people residing in Australia emerged. As a result they were recognised as a community which helped them gain valuable grants and aids from the government.
The estimate is that Inbathamil Oli has nearly 15,000 listeners in New South Wales and Victoria alone, out of which 90% are Sri Lankan Tamils. The target audience comprises 40% of older people who are mainly pensioners, 40% working middle-aged and 20% youngsters. Programs between 9am –5pm are devoted to the older audience whose prime interests revolve round news, current affairs, religious and cultural programs and film songs from old Tamil films. Programs in the evening from 5.30-7.30pm feature mostly songs from Tamil films, mostly recent ones. According to Mr Prabhakaran, the emphasis is on entertainment, as the target audience comprises of working middle-class Tamils, who have just arrived from work or are travelling back home, in their cars.) The 7.30pm –10.30pm programs are an eclectic mix of news, film songs, interviews and announcements on any major events in the community. The programs catering to the youth is normally hosted by university students who encourage youngsters to learn language and provide educational information on Tamil culture revolving topics on Tamil history and traditions.

Throughout all the programs, the program producers and hosts place particular emphasis on the correct use of Tamil language. Like most ethnic groups, the Sri Lankan Tamils' core values lie in their language and the radio performs the informal task of keeping up the nationalist sentiment among Tamils in Australia. Today, the numerical representation of Tamil ethnic community programs on radio is significantly high. However, what is more important is its sociological significance, in general, for these Tamil immigrants who are here to stay.

f. Tamil Community Television

By the end of my research, Mr Prabhakaran informed me about the commencement of a Tamil television channel, which was due to commence by the end of October 2000. The channel would telecast Tamil programs to the Tamil community via satellite. The programs would initially be telecasted for two hours daily on community television and would act as a radio for the rest of the day. There would be extended hours of telecast on weekends. The production centre for Tamil Television would be based in Sydney and would be telecast nationally to all states of Australia.
The audiovisual signal would be linked up to satellites via special dish antennae that would be installed in the viewers' home. Decoding through 'smart card' would control the audiovisual signal. The card is like a subscription card without which it was not possible to receive the signal by the viewers. The whole project was estimated to cost $1.65 million per annum and this would be then divided by the number of subscribers to determine the subscription fees.

Following the footsteps of the Tamil diasporic community in Europe and Canada who produce television programs for their respective local Tamil diaspora, the Tamil Television in Australia will cater to its own Tamil diaspora by producing programs that will showcase local Tamil talents and will focus also on current affairs and community news. Negotiations are also being held to buy television productions from India and telecast them in Australia.
Chapter 6

The making of the Sri Lankan Tamil cultural identity

The experience of the migrant or diasporic people is central to contemporary societies (Appudurai 1990, Hall 1987, Hannerz 1990). Hall writes with great insight about the cultures of diasporic people that cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identities produced in the era of late modernity (1992: 273-326).

"The products of the new diaspora created by the post-colonial migrations must learn to inhabit two identities, to speak two cultural languages, and to translate and negotiate between them" (1993:362)

On the one hand, diasporic people show a determination to maintain their traditional elements and on the other hand they show openness in embracing outside influences and are willing to adapt and change. The diasporic traditional core constitutes a set of values that gives the diaspora its cultural identity and is subject to intense negotiation and reconstruction in the host society. The core of these cultural values is inherently associated with a specific relationship to the ethnic homeland. The traditional core though in a constant flux, remains unchanged when it is being passed from one diasporic generation to the other remains.

Studies suggest that there is an active and highly interactive relationship between ethnic homelands and diasporic populations. Khan observes that the definition of diasporas depends on the "thematic dimension of displacement"

"The relationship between 'here' and 'there' is a continuous dialectic process of transmission of knowledge, information, and beliefs and practices...." (Khan 1995:8).

For the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, the longing for Eelam as an independent political identity has influenced the formation of its diaspora consciousness. The conditions of flight are also important to the diaspora because it influences their relationship with the homeland.

The history of Sri Lankan Tamil migration indicates that the Sinhala nationalism of 1956, which favored the ethnic majority spurred on a large-scale migration of the Tamils to various parts of the world. Migration in these circumstances was not seen as disowning the native Tamil but protecting it. This in itself presented a paradoxical situation to the Sri Lankan Tamil
diaspora. On the one hand migration offered safety by detachment from direct involvement in the war and was the perfect alternative to fighting. On the other hand this very absence of direct involvement makes the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora passionately nationalistic about their homeland. The diaspora is sustained by a "collective homeland myth" (Saffran 1991). Homeland to the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is the forbidden fruit, the imaginary nation that is not physically accessible nor actually existent and hence very sacred. Located on the outside of their primary social field by an act of their own choice and cut off from the process of violent social change taking place in their country of origin, the Sri Lankan Tamils have to construe new meanings of their own migration. Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora nationalism, though physically independent from the developments at home constantly makes reference to it.

The reality of long-distance transmission of ethno-nationalism is not necessarily the same for all diasporic groups and depends on varying factors such as historical experience, the size of the diaspora and the current events in the homeland. Commenting on the nature of exile of the Sri Lankan Tamil, Fuglerud (1999:54) writes that for the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, the homeland myth of Eelam counters their tribulations of flight. Exile is not merely a physical separation from home. The Tamil exile becomes in the host country what he has left behind by internalizing the "Tamil martyrdom". It is this attachment of the imagined community to the imagined place that causes a blurring of here and there and infuses the diaspora with nostalgia in the host society. This nostalgia is a key element in the particular identity of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora.

The question now is, what are the distinct processes involved in maintaining and negotiating the Sri Lankan Tamil identity cultural identity in the host society? To answer this question we need to look at the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora from another perspective. Having been exposed to the western culture as a colony of the British, the Sri Lankan Tamils have always shown a cultural openness. Their transnational networks demonstrate a willingness to dislocate and capacity to adapt. Banks (1957:202-203) noticed that the Sri Lankan Tamils are engaged in a complementary relationship with the western world.

Also, the process of integration of Sri Lankan Tamils in the host society is aided by their proficiency in the English language. Even during the period of British colonization, the British administrators favored the Sri Lankan Tamils who were exported for their
industriousness and proficiency in the English language. This export of Tamil manpower helped the flourishing of the Jaffna economy. Education was recognised as an asset by the Tamils even as early as 1921.

"The Jaffna (Tamil) parent realizes than an English education is a valuable asset and is readily convertible top cash... Hence it is that hundreds of parents of the farming and laboring classes, who have themselves received no education, insist on English education for their sons. This education is often acquired in a spirit of self sacrifice..." (Ceylon Administrative report a-6, 1921)

In general the urban English speaking Sri Lankan Tamils who have arrived in Australia have education and transferable professional skills that allow them to leapfrog other low income groups. They do not categorize as an ethnic underclass but have desirable jobs and housing. The Sri Lankan Tamils seem to require only minor adjustments to make use of what serves their interests by truly incorporating modern western culture.

So what constitutes the cultural distinctiveness among the Sri Lankan Tamil in Sydney? What makes the Sri Lankan Tamil identity a hybrid exilic identity in Sydney? What form does the negotiated cultural identity of the Sri Lankan Tamil take in Australia? In what context are the cultural differences played out, contested and negotiated by the Sri Lankan Tamil immigrant in the host country of Australia?

To examine the logic of ethno-nationalist processes and their capacity for survival in diasporic communities, one needs to study the organisational structure of the diaspora, the interaction processes between homelands and diaspora as well as the social climate in the host country. If "state multiculturalism", as S. Cunningham and J. Sinclair see it with reference to Australia, is "co-optative in so far as it offers space for cultural maintenance and respect and tolerance while acquiring conformity to liberal democratic practices and acquiescence in the hegemonic position of dominant (British-Irish) cultural formation" (2000:30), then Australia with its promotion of multiculturalism provides a fertile ground to these Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic elites who with their predisposition to adapt and tolerate endeavor to maintain their culture fit into this framework. They could be categorized as "mobilized diaspora" (Armstrong 1976:405), whereby the members offer nation-states valued service and skills by deploying their linguistic, network and occupational advantages to modernize and mobilize in the host country.
Socially, economically and politically Australia and Sri Lanka are radically different. However, the exchanges between the Sri Lankan Tamils with Australia are characterized by a shared colonial history, hence providing a less tumultuous context in which identity is maintained and negotiated. What Australia immediately offers to the Sri Lankan migrant is a safe haven from the daily violence and better economic conditions. As home becomes a denied category, the immediate security offered by Australia to friends and families is welcome and the diaspora increasingly tries to adapt to the Australian way of life. This could be true of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora anywhere in the world.

Also maintenance and negotiation of Sri Lankan Tamil cultural identity in the host society is aided by modern technology. The globalization of media and images has made interaction between different Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas who reside in different continents relatively easy and regular. Globalization has enhanced their practical and economic roles showing them to be particularly adaptive forms of social organisation. Physical location is no major obstacle in such a global transnational network flow and aids cultural maintenance while finding a negotiated place in the host society.

Hall states that the "consequences of globalization on cultural identities are erosion, strengthening and emergence of new identities" (1992:273-326). This emergence of new identities is not at odds with the host society. The formation of this new hybrid identity is characterized by maintenance of cultural distinctiveness while adapting to the new host culture.

A first generation Sri Lankan Tamil parent who is the father of two boys aged six and eight describes this rather simply:

"My family and I speak Tamil at home. My two sons who were born in Australia read, write and speak Tamil and English. When the boys are at home they speak to each other in Tamil but once they step out, they unconsciously and invariably converse in English. Its natural that they speak in English to each other and with the other children in school".

The question of identity formation especially for the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils becomes more complex. No doubt the negotiated cultural distinctiveness is shaped by their cosmopolitan and diasporic experiences. Their location in history, language, politics and culture informs and transforms and forms their cultural identity. The attachment to the
homeland for the second generation Sri Lankan Tamil could be a mediated process where Tamil culture is disseminated by parents and various diaspora organizations, which play a decisive role in how sentiments of homeland manifest in the subsequent generations.

At a distance, the diasporic identity of the second-generation migrant or the young migrant is imaginatively constructed by transmission of cultural knowledge by the elders. Although many Sri Lankan Tamil migrants harbor a secret wish to return one day to the liberated Eelam, these migrants who have fled the militant movement. Among the militant groups in Sri Lanka such as TULF\textsuperscript{1}, EPRLF\textsuperscript{2}, TELO\textsuperscript{3} etc. the most important is the LTTE whose presence is manifest in the entire Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. Though they claim to be a socialist organization, it is common knowledge among the Sri Lankans that they are ruthless in the means they employ, and often young Sri Lankan Tamils are conscripted under gun-point into their service. So though there is the longing for home, what is more important for most Sri Lankan Tamil parents is that their youngsters have to be protected from the clutches of the liberation fighters.

A documentary on SBS in September 2000 insinuated that the diasporic Sri Lankan Tamils all over the world funded the guerrilla activities of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and that arms were bought by money collected through various cultural activities, Sensitive to the stigma attached to the Sri Lankan Tamil as an ethnic group, whose collective actions are politically driven, there is a strange weariness among the Sri Lankan Tamil youth in Sydney while discussing the Eelam problem. I interviewed a young second generation Sri Lankan Tamil adult who expressed:

"I was extremely embarrassed by the documentary. Surely there is no smoke without fire. I will think twice now before I attend any of these cultural activities".

Gillespie (1993:2), while referring to the second generation Punjabis in South Hall in London, is of the opinion that for the second generation immigrants, the question of identity is subject to particularly intense negotiation and out of that crucial interstitial point in their lives, new identities and dynamics of cultural change emerge. No doubt the second generation Sri Lankan Tamil youth similarly exemplify the ambiguous character of cultural identity.
formation in the host country. What is more important is that they make evident the deft and skill with which they pragmatically switch codes between the host culture and home culture.

A report in a newsletter published by a local Sydney Tamil association reads:
"Sumathi has topped in the state...in two units of Biology in the examination. She scored first in her school and came second in the state. Apart from several school activities like debating, choir, Sumathi can also play the Veena\(^1\) very well. She has also graduated in Bharatanatyam\(^2\).

Sumathi exemplifies the second generation Sri Lankan Tamil who has adopted all of the western school activities such as choir and debates conducted by her catholic school but on the other hand has retained her cultural identity with her pursuits of Tamil classical dance and music.

Reji, my 24 year old Tamil informant (who is born to a Sri Lankan Tamil father and South Indian Tamil mother) priding over this very cosmopolitanism tells me:
"When people in Australia ask me about my origins, I tell them I am an Australian Tamil. I can cook Sri Lankan food and love eating other cuisines. At home I enjoy watching Tamil movies with my family as much as I enjoy watching other movies in the cinema. I am learning Bharatnatyam and also play the piano. I have mixed friends of various cultures, but I suspect I will marry someone only from my culture".

During the one time I spent with Reji (and her other Tamil peers) I came to appreciate the way she negotiated relations within the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic society in Sydney and the host society. She completed a Bachelor of Science degree in forensic science with honors and had sat for exams to join the Australian army. She works part-time as a waitress in a restaurant that is popular for its new Australian cuisine. She drives to work listening to her Tamil CDs conversing with me in Tamil and switches to English\(^3\) at work. She is extremely popular with her colleagues who refer to her as 'darkie', which she takes no offense to at all.

\(^1\) Veena is an Indian classical instrument used mostly in Carnatic style of music.

\(^2\) A form of Indian classical dance that originated in Southern India.

\(^3\) Though Reji moved here when she was twelve, she speaks English in impeccable Australian accent that she has "consciously" developed. However, when we conversed she invariably spoke English with an impeccable Indian accent.
She is an acclaimed Bharatanatyam dancer in community, she played a charming host to her Tamil family friends talking about Tamil movies and songs and evades discussing the Eelam problem. She is engaged to marry a Tamil from South India.

What we are observing here is definitely not a culture clash but a more dynamic account of diasporic cultural change. Reji and her peers stand for the quintessential diasporic youth who harness their cultural resources while they reinvent, negotiate and transform their cultural identity within the host society. No doubt Reji and her peers have their set of concerns, which is shaped by the local and diasporic context they inhabit. But through these very concerns what is emerging is a viable cultural distinctiveness through negotiating with the diverse resources available to them in the host society. While trying to assume a cosmo-global identity they examine and negotiate their cultural, racial, national and ethnic identity.

For the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, the obligation to homeland and the maintenance of original culture and tradition is imperative and essential, but their realization of this is a conscious decision. Exile identity can be elaborated with reference to Charles Taylor's anthropological and philosophical study of "The Person" (1994), where he talks about 'politics of recognition'. In the heart of the diaspora consciousness, there is a need for recognition. In other words there is a need for recognition of 'dignity' which expresses a universal and democratic value.

This dignity for the diaspora is the ideal of authenticity, a unity that describes the essence of what it is to be a true Sri Lankan Tamil. My Sri Lankan Tamil informant, Angie tells me:
"It is not only about maintaining your language , culture and tradition, it is most importantly about observing strong moral and ethical values and being a true appreciative society that we live in".

Though the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has strong organizational potential, it is also in the process of constructing a new hybrid diasporic identity and it is quite clear as to which direction this Tamil diasporic identity will take. Reinvent, maintain, challenge, revise, assimilate, negotiate and integrate- these are the words that have been constantly used in this study to describe the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. While all these processes describe ambivalence, which involve rethinking the notions of ethnicity, out of this ambivalence emerges the making of a hybrid diasporic cultural identity.
As Hall states:

"They (new diasporas) bear the traces of particular cultures, traditions, languages, systems of beliefs, text and histories, which have shaped them. But they are also obliged to come to terms with and to make something new of the cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them. They are not and will never be unified culturally in the old sense, because they are inevitably the products of several interlocking histories and cultures, belonging at the same time to several homes and thus to no one particular home.
They are the products of diaspora consciousness. They have to come to terms with the fact that in the modern world identity is always an open, complex unfinished game-always under construction"(1993:362).

The formation of a diasporic cultural identity is selective. Today the formation of cultural identity is more globalized, cosmopolitan, creolized and hybridized than ever before.

Finally, Salman Rushdie (1991:394) writes

Those who oppose the novel (The Satanic Verses) most vociferously today are of the opinion that the intermingling with different cultures will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. The satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in the mongrelization and fears the absolution of the pure. Melange, hotchpotch a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives to the world and I have tried to embrace it. The Satanic Verses is for the change by fusion, change by conjoining. It is a love song to our mongrel selves.

This indeed is a utopian view of the evolution of new dynamic hybrid cultures.
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Appendix (I) - Semi structured interviews with video shop owners

1. When was this shop set up?

2. What do you sell in this shop in addition to the renting of the videos?

3. What is the number of video collection in the shop? What languages are they in?

4. What is the collection of the Tamil videos? What are the different kinds of Tamil videos?

5. How many videos do you rent in a week?

6. What does it cost for the videos to be rented for both the new films and old films?

7. What are the most popular Tamil videos? Who are the most popular Tamil actors and actresses and directors?

8. Which genre of Tamil film is the most popular and among which generation?

9. Do you observe any particular patterns in the renting of the Tamil videos (age, gender etc)?

10. Where do you buy the Tamil videos from? Who are the distributors?

11. What do they cost?

12. How many copies of them are made?

13. Do you have any comments on the piracy of the Tamil videos?

14. Finally some information about you and your family- when did you arrive in Australia? How many in your family? What do they do? Do you watch Tamil movies yourself and how often?
Appendix (2) - Map of Sri Lanka

Location:
Latitude 5° 55' to 9° 50' N
Longitude 79° 43' to 81° 52' E

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean lying off the south-eastern part of the Indian sub-continent. The stretch of water separating Sri Lanka from the mainland is called the Palk Straits — and is just 35 km across at its narrowest.

Physical features
The island itself is substantial in size — covering 65,610 sq. km, and measuring 447 km from north to south and 219 km at its widest.

The land formation consists of a mountainous area (located just south of the island’s centre) where peaks reach a height of 2,500 metres, surrounded by coastal plains. These plains form narrow strips to the west, south and east, while broadening out into a vast tract to the north which in fact covers over half the length of the island.

Climate and seasons
In the lowlands the climate is typically tropical, with average temperatures of 27°C in Colombo. At the higher elevations it can be quite cool, with temperatures going down to 16°C in Nuwara Eliya (an altitude of 1,880 metres).

Sri Lanka receives rainfall from two monsoons and from conventional precipitation. The south-west monsoon brings rain from May—July to the western, southern and central regions, and the north-east monsoon produces rainfall during December—January in the northern and eastern regions.

Although seasonal rains can be heavy, bright, sunny and warm days are the rule — even at the height of the monsoon.
Appendix (3) - Map of envisaged (shaded) Tamil Eelam State

Provinces and districts of Sri Lanka, 1981. The shaded area indicates the envisaged Tamil state (Eelam).
Appendix(4)- List of Tamil associations in Sydney

1. Abaya-karam (Helping Hand)
2. Anjali Tamil Society
3. Ashfield Balar Malra School
4. Australasian Federation of Tamil Associations Inc.
5. Australian Institute of Tamil studies
6. Australian Tamil foundation
7. Balar Malar Tamil Association Inc.
8. Catholic Asso.of Sydney Tamils
9. Central College (Jaffna)
10. Christian Tamil Congregation
11. Chundikuli Girls’ College (Jaffna)
12. Eastwood Tamil Centre Inc.
13. Eelam Tamil Association (Australasia)- ETA
14. Guindy Engineering College (Madras)
15. Hartly College (Point Pedro)
16. Hillstar Sports Club
17. Holsworthy Balar Malar School
18. Homebush Tamil Study Centre Inc.
19. Indian Cultural Advancement Society of Australia ICASA (Inc.)
20. Jaffna College
21. Jaffna Hindu College, NSW branch
22. Jaffna Hindu Ladies College
23. Kalappai Magazine
24. Mahajana College (Thellipallai)
25. Manipay Hindu College
26. Mt. Druitt Tamil Study Centre Inc.
27. NSW Federation of Tamil Schools Inc.
28. NSW Sorts Club
29. Patricians of Jaffna- Australia
30. Ramanathan College (Jaffna)
31. St. Micheal’s College (Batticola) Alumni
32. Saiva Manram Inc.
33. Sathya Sai Organization of Australia
34. Sevenhills Balar Malar School
35. Siruvar Thirumurai Kalakam
36. Sri Shiva Mandir (Minto Temple)
37. Sri Venkateswara Temple Association Inc.
38. Sydney Music Circle
39. Sydney Sports and Social Club (SSSC)
40. Sydney Tamil Christian Fellowship (STCF)
41. Sydney Tamil Manram
42. Sydney Tamil Performing Arts and Literary Academy
43. Sydney Tamil Resource Centre
44. Sydney Tamil Sangam (Estd 1977)
45. Sydney Tamil Sports Club
46. Sydney Tamil Youth (STY)
47. Sydney University Tamil Society (SUTS)
   - Unifund Project
   - Tamil Competitions
   - Kalappai Magazine
   - Tamil guide
48. Tamil Church of NSW
49. Tamil Coordinating Committee (TCC)
50. Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization (TEEDOR)
51. Tamil Kural
52. Tamil Mullakkam (Radio 2000)
53. Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO)
54. Tamil Senior Citizens' Association NSW Inc.
55. Tamil Senior Citizens' Benevolent Society
56. Uduvil Girls' School (Jaffna)
57. University of Western Sydney Tamil Society
58. Vani Tamil Cultural Asso.
59. Velanai Central College (Jaffna)
60. Vembadi Girls' School (Jaffna)
61. Wentworthville Tamil Study Centre Inc.
62. Wesley College
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12/56-60 Burlington Rd, Homebush
Maharani Sahadevan(Pg 16)..............9764 6763
18/84 Albert Rd, Strathfield

Bharatha Natyam Classes
Nanthini Handakumar..................9758 6704
36 The Causeway, Strathfield South

Blinds
Global Blinds Baufhems Hills

Bridal Dressing
ASHTA BRIDAL Dressing
Beauty Culture(pg 16)...................9764 6454
12/56-60 Burlington Rd, Homebush
Maharani Sahadevan(Pg 16).............9764 6763
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Appendix (6)-Distribution circuits

TAMIL FILM INDUSTRY
CHENNAI

Local

Overseas

Middle-east  Europe  Malaysia  Singapore

AUSTRALIA
The Making of the Sri Lankan Tamil Cultural Identity in Sydney

Name: S.L. Challam
Master of Arts (Honours) - School of Humanities
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2001
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
Lodgment of thesis

I hereby certify that the research undertaken for this thesis contributes to an original work except where it is indicated otherwise. It has not been submitted for a higher degree at any institution.

Student name: Sheetal Challam
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Thesis title : The Making of the Sri Lankan Tamil Cultural Identity in Sydney

Signed : [Signature]
Dated : 14/Jan/2022
Contents

List of illustrations and Appendices

Summary 1
Preface 2

Chapter 1- Introduction 3
   a. Sydney as a situated research field 4
   b. Plan of study 6
   c. Research design 9

Chapter 2- Diaspora discourse 12
   a. Long-distance nationalism 15

Chapter 3- Sri Lankan Tamils- history of migration to Australia 18
   a. Sri Lanka 19
   b. History of Sri Lankan migration to Australia 19
   c. Post-Second World War migration 20
   d. Tamil migration 21
   e. Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney- a demographic profile 24

Chapter 4- Diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil institutions 27
   a. Sri Lankan Tamil associations 27
   b. The Tamil language heritage 32
   c. Tamil print media 36
Chapter 5- Audiovisual media use by Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney
   a. Tamil film industry 38
   b. Tamil film screenings 39
   c. Videos 40
   d. Film talk 43
   e. Radio 47
   f. Tamil Community Television 47

Chapter 6- The making of the Sri Lankan Tamil cultural identity 53

Appendices 54

Bibliography 62

69
Illustrations and appendices

Illustrations

Photo 1- Asia Pacific shop interiors in Homebush.

Photo 2- Display of Tamil Film posters in the Homebush Trading Centre that exclusively rents Tamil film videos.

Photo 3- Poster advertising the screening of a Tamil movie screening.

Photo 4- Tamil music concert organized by Sydney Tamil Manram and Sydney Tamil Sangam in October 1999.

Photo 5- The first year students in Tamil School.

Photo 6- Tamil video magazine produced by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Questionnaire used to interview Tamil video shop owners 62

Appendix 2- Map of Sri Lanka 63

Appendix 3- Map showing the envisaged (shaded) Tamil Eelam State 64

Appendix 4- List of Tamil Associations in Sydney 65

Appendix 5- A page from the Tamil Guide 67

Appendix 6- Distribution circuits for the Tamil film videos 68
The Making of the Sri Lankan Tamil Cultural Identity in Sydney- a summary

This study endeavors in exploring the diasporic processes of Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney, their vibrant cultural life, their migration patterns, their long-distance nationalism and their audiovisual media consumption. In doing so it presents a social profile of the Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney while exploring the communities’ demographical and topographical features.

Sri Lanka is the last outpost of the Northern Hemisphere, jutting into the still unexplored emptiness of the Indian Ocean. Though a small island, nearly a quarter of its population has migrated abroad, to the United States, Middle East, Australia and Europe. Sri Lankan migration dates back to the late nineteenth century and early 20th century. The ethnic unrest in Sri Lanka and the changing immigration policies in Australia were the major factors influencing migration of the Sri Lankan Tamils to Australia.

There are nearly sixty-five Tamil associations in Sydney alone. These associations strive to retain the Tamil culture and enrich the migrant experience of the Sri Lankan Tamil community which has retained a strong cultural identity in the host country. My study delves into these very various aspects of the everyday Tamil cultural life, like Tamil periodicals, Tamil associations, Tamil films and Tamil schools. It is an attempt to understand the individual, cross-cultural and communal dynamics of the way these cultural institutions are used by the Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney to maintain and negotiate their cultural identity in Australia.
THE MAKING OF THE SRI LANKAN TAMIL CULTURAL IDENTITY IN SYDNEY

Preface

Only another breath will I breathe in this still air, Only another loving look cast backward,
And then I shall stand among you, A seafarer among Seafarers.

- Khalil Gibran (The Prophet, 1923)

During the course of my research, my Sri Lankan Tamil informants constantly questioned my interest in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora.

"You are a South Indian Tamil. Why are you writing about Sri Lankan Tamils?", they incessantly asked me. My answer every time was that as a researcher, I found the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora more interesting because of the nature of its diaspora processes. While South Asian Indian Tamils' migratory movements are mostly characterized by geographical displacement and in search of better economic conditions, the Sri Lankan Tamils' patterns of migration are more diasporic processes, whose populations dispersed between various locations and maintained a "group consciousness defined by a continued relationship with the homeland" (Saffran, 1991, Fuglerud, 1998).

The dynamic processes of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora are intrinsically linked to the volatile situation in the homeland and have constantly influenced radical changes in the Tamil society in Sri Lanka and vice versa. While being physically divorced from the disturbing events at home, the Sri Lankan Tamil migrants keep themselves informed of everyday events and struggle to cultivate and maintain ties with the homeland.

This study explores these very diasporic processes of Sri Lankan Tamils in Sydney by focusing on their vibrant cultural life, their migration patterns, the long distance nationalism and their audiovisual media consumption. It is more specifically a celebration of a diaspora which while maintaining a strong ethno-nationalist sentiment, is also striking a chord, taking a middle path and integrating its dynamic self into the Australian way of life. It is a study of the ways in which the Sri Lankan Tamils are maintaining and negotiating their cultural distinctiveness with the host country, in this case Australia.

Most importantly the study is recognition of the efforts made by the Sri Lankan Tamils to create a home away from home.