Return Migration of the Tamil diaspora?

Regional Identity Across Global Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the return migration of Tamil diaspora to and from the cultural home in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and host landscapes in the United States, particularly Cleveland, OH. Through an autoethnographic approach—including interviews in Tamil Nadu and the United States—as well as references to visuals and soundscape, the paper demonstrates how the image of an idealized home and the concept of 'returning' are constantly in flux. Ultimately, the paper emphasizes how state-based reverse migration takes precedence over a national reverse migration, especially as a construct of Tamil diasporic cultural transmission.

INTRODUCTION

"You know, you get used to the life here. Your circle is here in the U.S. Only your family is there, so you don't know what is going on and it is much harder to navigate, let alone get anything done. We can maintain the aspects of the culture here and visit there" – Jyothi

"Some of the things that make it bad, the garbage and all, I wish could change. But still, there is something about it – the people, the language. You don't get lonely there. The U.S. can be isolating. When I first came to the US, I was so alone. I felt that I was losing what I had. I didn't even know my husband" – Poorani

Regionalism

Massey (1994) argues that globalization creates a "mobilization" of culture – an expansive spread and mixing of cultures. Chacko (2007) suggests that many cultures are not only relocating, but after time, exhibit a type of "reverse" migration.

While the concept of 'return migration' is necessary to counteract the academic emphasis on assimilation, it is also important to understand that it is contextual as well as situational (Ley & Kobayashi, 2005). This concept also does not apply to all individuals who have relocated, nor does it exist as a static concept. When addressing return migration in the context of Tamil identity, the concept of an Indian homeland needs to be challenged. In the United States, Indians are often grouped into an all-encompassing category of 'Asian Indian' with the idea of the cultural home being that of a greater "India" (Rangaswamy, 1994; Skop, 2012)

The purpose of this paper is to examine the vitality of 'return migration' in the context of regional identity as well as illuminate the importance of a lived, fluid experience. To understand experience, concepts of identity and community through regional loyalties must be addressed.

Imagined Communities?

Everyone must have a nationality as everyone must have a gender – this is the "socio-cultural concept " that Anderson (2006) deploys as the basis of *Imagined Communities.* The Census, the map and the museum are three components through which "nationalism" is reproduced (Anderson, 2006). "Asian Indian" is the category that defines the nationality of a group of peoples in the United States. However, according to Anderson's (2006) definition, many state-based identities of India vary according to a regional "nationalism." They have their own politics, anthems, and other markers discussed in the next section.

BACKGROUND

Diaspora vs. Ethnicity

Rather than relying on ideas of "ethnicity" to situate concepts of return migration, this paper utilizes the dialectic nature of diaspora. Barth's (1969) concept of ethnicity permeates social sciences; however, this concept serves not only as a replacement for race, but also as a static way to understand identity among people (Nagel, 1994). In order to conceptualize a concept such as reverse migration in terms of identity, it is important to remember that it is not only "situational" but also "changeable" (Nagel, 1994).

Not only is the use of ethnicity socially constructed, ambiguous and contested, but is also based on the experience of being an "other" (Berry & Henderson, 2002). Often it is used to refer to "minority groups" when the majority is the standard white (Zelinsky, 2001).

Many academics voice concern that the term is used too broadly and signifies any type of ethnic, social, or religious group of people when thought of as a single entity (Rozen, 2008; Braziel, 2008; Brubaker, 2005). However, because part of my focus is on the United States and many members of the Tamil community return home, it is important to understand diaspora not as a method of classification, but rather as a process of dispersion as outlined by Brubaker (2005) and Dufoix (2008).

In addition, the Indian government sees all Indians as a diasporic group and it is treated that way in other arenas as well (Joshi, 2003; Report Of The High Level Committee On The Indian Diaspora, 2001; Sharma & Annamalai, 2003).

'Asian-Indian'

To situate reverse migration within the framework of a regional Tamil identity rather than a return to a unified India, a subset of equal standing to Asian Indian needs to be acknowledged. Geographic literature tends to homogenize this particular group of people. This lack of acknowledgement becomes problematic especially when looking at organization issues of the Indian state as well as immigration. Various cultures exist among the peoples who are clustered in the same category as well as tension between various state-based identities.

Chola mandalam

There exists a distinction between the 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' cultural streams (Stein, 1977). As North India clings to the "Bharat" view of India, South India, particularly Tamil Nadu emphasizes the concept of Chola *mandalam*, (Coedès, 1996; Miller, 1998; Stein, 1977). The Chola reign, also known as the "Golden Age" of Tamil society, expanded other concepts of Tamil culture beyond the immediate Tamil region (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Stein, 1977; Subrahmanian, 1972). During this period, Rajendra the Great (1012 – 1044 C.E.) "Indianized" Southeast Asia, perhaps one of the first recorded Tamil migrations and the beginning of Chola *mandalam* (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Subrahmanian, 1972, Stein, 1977). The spread of the Tamil culture not only allowed various exchanges with the North, but also solidified the Southern region as historical autonomous (Stein, 1977).

Said (1994) noted in the late 70s that ideas of the "Orient" permeate academia. Academics create a dichotomy of Eurocentric "Western" civilization and the foreign, Easternized "Asia" (Said, 1994; Klein, 2003). Chakrabarty (2000) demonstrates this dilemma using 'middle-class Bengali' history to illustrate a

Eurocentric view of "modernity" and how this view affects current research methods.

Tamil Identity and History

Culture and identity do not exist as inherent traits for they are both learned and reinforced. India's long and rich history, from the Indus Valley, to the Mughal Invasion in the North, the Chola reign of the South and finally to the British Colonial period that led to an independent nation in 1947, fosters a culture of diverse landscapes.

Geographers and academics such as Skop (2012), Rangaswamy (1994), and Bhardwaj and Rao, (1990) identify an incredibly dissimilar pan-Indian landscape, attributing the regional landscapes and state boundaries as a source of primary identity for Indians. While many Indians hold onto their regional identities with ferocity, the people of Tamil Nadu have an observable individuality that is identifiably different from that of the North (Jacob, 2009). Differences in sounds and culture based on language help distinguish many of the regional identities (Rangaswamy, 1994).

The languages of the South, especially Tamil, come from a completely different language family than those of the North. While Hindi, Bengali, and many of the Northern languages are based on the Indo-Aryan language family, the Southern languages come from the Dravidian family (UCLA, 2012). The opposition to North Indian languages, especially Hindi, is strong in the South, particularly in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Pondicherry (Schwartzberg & Bajpai, 1992). After India's independence,

the Southern states wanted to reorganize administrative lines set by the British to reflect linguistic barriers (Kulke & Rothermund, 1986).

Tamil, in particular, one of the oldest languages of the Indian subcontinent (as well as the world), exhibits poetic qualities that surpass Greek in precision and structure (Kalidos, 1976; Panneerselvam, 2008, 732; Schwartzberg & Bajpai, 1992; UCLA, 2012).
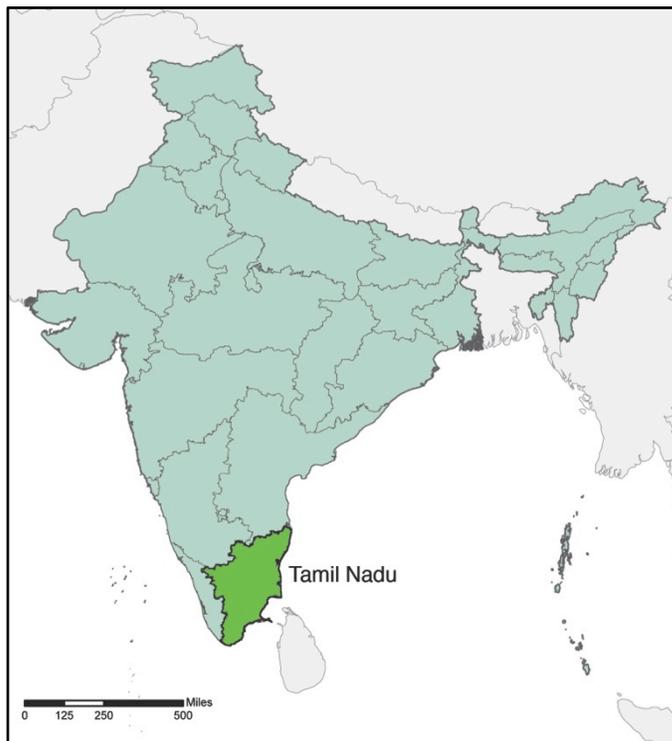

Fig. 1, Tamil Nadu highlighted within the state of India.

Cultural Landscape

Beyond a shared history, ties to a cultural home can be understood through the lens of the cultural landscape. The "humanized" cultural landscape is symbolic of the relationship of a people to a space and the reinforcement of a shared identity (Fint, 2008; Groth & Bressi, 1997; Muir, 1999). It is through these spaces or

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landscapes that we can see the reflected culture of a group of people. Interaction

with and through specific spaces highlights the importance of specific elements that

carry the culture across boundaries (Groth & Bressi, 1997).

Cultural landscapes are often constructed in a visual nature with sight as the

first experience interacting with a space (Lawson, 2001). Sight, through a visual

landscape reveals "geographies of a place" (Freeman, 2011). Composition, color,

light, spatial organization, and content all are components that create the

relationship to a space (Gatrell, 1991; Freeman, 2011; Rose, 2012).

Soundscape

In understanding practiced environments[1], visuals alone do not represent

the collection of human senses. The proximity of an object or space determines what

elements are most important in recognizing that space or object (Lawson, 2001).

While seeing is the first experience in interacting with a space or person, it is least

intimate (Lawson, 2001).

Physically, while sound is not the first experience in human interaction with

a space, it is more intimate than sight. Once the visual representation has been

assessed and solidified, the sounds reinforce sight and reveal the practiced

experience (Lawson, 2001).

In understanding many of the regional Indian identities, it is important to

examine the language and sound structure that create unique, distinct associations

(Rangaswamy, 1994; Bate, 2009). Understanding the role of soundscape in the

Tamil diaspora contextualizes the regional identity.

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[1] Jain (2008) indicates that static landscapes need to be thought of as practiced environments – not just visually defined, but rather through action and "practice."

DATA AND METHODS

Site Specifics

My fieldwork in India lasted a little more than three weeks. I visited many of the Northern cities and villages of Tamil Nadu including Chennai City, Vellore, Pondicherry, Thiruvallur district and surrounding villages, Kanchipuram, Arakkonam, Tirithani and Sholingur. I also visited areas of Karnataka, as a means of comparison, including Bangalore and Mysore.
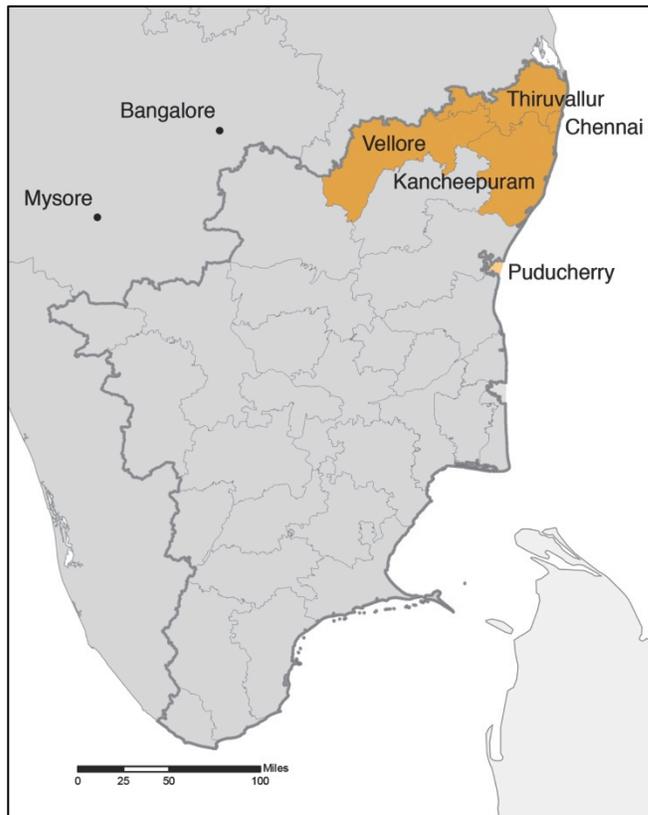

Fig. 2, The highlighted areas indicate the districts that I visited in Tamil Nadu. Puducherry (also known as Pondicherry) is highlighted, which is technically a Union Territory rather than an official state of India. It is not considered a part of Tamil Nadu, though Tamil is widely spoken. Mysore and Bangalore are also included on the map as cities and districts visited in the state of Karnataka.

The three-week period permitted enough time to gather data in terms of an

overview. The experience, despite its time limitations, gave me a point of

comparison for the Cleveland Tamil community.

In addition, though I do not speak Tamil fluently, with my father's assistance,

I was able to understand the context of various situations as well as surpass a few of

the language barriers. This gave me a somewhat unique perspective. I was not

necessarily Tamil, but I was not American either. I had some blended elements of

each, which allowed me a less restricted, insider's experience while at the same

time, the alternative experience of an outsider looking in. I approached the

fieldwork using a participant observational method. I recorded entries into a

logbook on a daily basis and also kept photographs, sound clips and videos.

In relation to my research in the United States, when this thesis is complete, I

will have spent two years attending festivals and getting to know members of the

Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam. In a *visual culture,* dominated by images as Rose

(2012) describes, understanding the visual landscape should be the first method of

landscape analysis. The composition of the entire scene or spatial organization of an

already existing space, redefined in terms of cultural elements, helps us identify the

specific culture that is reproduced (Groth & Bressi, 1997; Rose, 2012). After

collecting some of the visual and aural data through participant observation, I began

engaging in conversation with various members of the Sangam and participants in

the Tamil community.

The Autoethnographic and Landscape Approach

Unstructured conversation allows not only for a wide range of responses, but

also a comfortable environment for the interviewee (Valentine, 2005). In addition, participant observation-based research allows geographers to "understand more fully the meanings of place and the contexts of everyday life" (Kearns, 2005, 195). Participant observation through ethnography permits the use of experience in a particular place documented through field notes as well as conversational interviews (Tacchi, Slater, & Hearn, 2003). Most importantly, however, it is the unstructured nature of the interview that constructs a more feminist-driven method of "telling a story" of a human being (Davidson & Layder, 1994).

The autoethnographic approach supplements ethnographic methods through addressing the personal in relation to larger themes (Besio, 2003; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Tedlock, 2000). This approach also sheds light on the researcher as a "bicultural insider/outsider" (Tedlock, 2000, 466). The inclusion of the researcher as a subject within the research addresses not only possible bias (of the those engaged with the research), but also relations and social constructions within the research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Tedlock, 2000).

While inclusion of the personal creates a more realistic experience and aids in fostering research transparency; overall, I use a mixed qualitative methods approach that went beyond personal. Visuals, sounds and interviews along with various ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches create a more inclusive and less Eurocentric approach to the data.

TAMIL NADU

Interviews

To understand some of the qualities of being "Tamil" in the cultural home, I asked the participants what it meant to be Tamil. In Tamil Nadu, language and physically living in Tamil Nadu were very important elements to maintain the Tamil identity.

Vimal (who lives in rural Thiruvallur district) said:

> To be Tamil, you can live here and learn the language. You don't have to be blood (though it helps with blending in), you just have to understand the culture. North Indians[2] don't always understand this aspect. They are sometimes rude.

Jaya (who lives in Mylapore) said:

> To be Tamil, you can live here and learn the language. It is important to learn the language and it is not hard. You just need the right people to show you. North Indians sometimes feel better than us and they don't respect our culture.

Dheera (who lives in Anna Nagar) said:

> Learn the customs, the language and come and live here.

(She expressed excitement for the fact that I was dressing as a Tamil girl).

Gopal (who lives in a village outside of Thiruvallur) said:

> Learn Tamil and live here for some time.

Sethu (who lives in Vellore) says – Come live here and learn the language.

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[2] When they spoke of "North Indians" they were referring to Hindi-speaking people. Interestingly, I was often mistaken for a "North Indian Hindi girl" by looks alone, rather than an American.

Though not a part of my direct interview process, I made note of a few interactions that highlighted the distinction from North India. **Gopal's** father is from North India near the Nepali border, but his mother is Tamilian. **Vimal** and **Gopal** were close friends and while I was interacting with them, **Gopal** heard that I spoke more Hindi than Tamil (though he worked in the IT industry so we always conversed in English). As he was saying a few scattered Hindi words, **Vimal** said to him, "You don't speak Hindi. Why are you doing that? You are Tamil."

Another incident that emphasized living in Tamil Nadu (and/or space with a large Tamil-speaking population) involved my father 's conversation with one of the taxi drivers, **Anand**, regarding his 'nationality' and the experience of being an NRI[3] away from his country for more than 30 years. The driver told him that he should come back and live in Bangalore or Chennai. He also said that his language would come back perfectly if he stayed for an extended period.

The above interviews highlighted language and location as intricate parts of 'being Tamil.' Both language and living in Tamil Nadu seemed to be important factors of Tamil identity. These factors must be learned over time – thus living in the physical space is the best way to acquire such a knowledge and experience. Note that the physical space is not India, but rather Tamil Nadu or areas with a large Tamil population.

A second incident with my father in Bangalore, demonstrates how this culture must be immersive and learned. At the church we visited, there was a man of

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[3] This is an interesting concept, because my father is "technically" an Indian citizen with an Indian passport. He does not hold an OCI or PIO (as I do). Yet, because he does not live there, he is still considered an NRI.

British English ancestry, **Jay**, who was approximately 65-70. At first glance, one might have assumed that he was a tourist or visitor, but as soon as he spoke, he revealed a heavy South Indian accent. He spoke Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and English. He told my father that he, **Jay**, was more Indian than my father of 'Indian blood' because he had lived his whole life in India, reiterating the notion that culture is in fact learned and seems to have less to do with ancestry. He was inundated with South Indian culture and knew little of his family's British ancestry. Though he looked different, he was as much of a South Indian (if not more than) my father who had left many years ago.

Images of Tamil Script

Fig. 3 and 4, Visible Tamil politics and semiotics in Chennai City. Pictured is Selvi jayalalithaa jayaram, "Amma," chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

Fig. 5, The stage décor of the Sathguru Music Hall in Mylapore, Chennai displays Tamil and English script.

Fig. 6, Shopping district in Thiruvallur city. Many of the signs reflect Tamil before English.

Fig. 7, Near the Thiruvallur district, outside of the main city, almost all of the signs are in Tamil, whereas, Thiruvallur city has some English elements.

Fig. 8, Stores in Mylapore, Chennai. English is much more visible, but Hindi does not appear.

Fig. 9, Tamil and English store names are equivalent in size in the new Express Avenue in Royapettah, Chennai.

Fig. 10, Street shopping strip in Pondicherry highlights Tamil/English script. Hindi is not visible.

Fig. 11, A man plays a *nāgasvaram* contributing to the soundscape. It is played during religious ceremonies on the streets of Mylapore outside of the temple.

Soundscape examples

The soundscape of rural Tamil Nadu is vibrant with musical elements – songs echoing from Hindu temples, drums beating, chanting, Christian church services on a loudspeaker, and children singing hymns to name a few. Additionally, the natural soundscape qualities reflect that of the local wildlife as well as everyday performed tasks. An example of the soundscape that I recorded on December 13, 2013 can be found at this link: http://youtu.be/gWFnAvdV3b8. In the distance, during the day, auto noise can be sorted out of the jumbled soundscape – sometimes horns or beeping or the sound of motorcycles.

Although soundscape in Chennai has similar sound and visual elements to rural Tamil Nadu, it follows a different construction. The environment of the urban center or the natural components of rural life seems to dictate what sounds may or may not be heard (e.g. birds or traffic sounds). A recorded example of the Chennai

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city soundscape from December 17, 2013 can be found here:

http://youtu.be/iJ49NK7rL5A.

Despite small differences in rural and urban soundscapes, the importance of sound and semiotics in Tamil Nadu, though implemented in different ways, cannot be ignored. Through examination of Figures 3 through 11, it is clear that a sense of cohesiveness surfaces through semiotics and sound. Tamil script and the Tamil soundscape are apparent in almost all of the figures, including the more rural areas (sometimes even more so). Soundscape proves to be an essential to establishing Tamil identity.

THE UNITED STATES

Interviews

Replicating my fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, I asked the participants what it meant to be Tamil. The participants emphasized language, culture (though described as culture rather than a way of life), and visitation to Tamil Nadu, but not the necessity to live in the physical space.

Jyothi says – Anyone whose ancestry and family hail from the state of Tamil Nadu are known as Tamils. So it's your family that determines if you are Tamil. A lot of it is just osmosis so living in Tamil Nadu for an extended period will definitely help the process since you will be immersed in the language and day to day customs.

Poorani says – You learn the language. You visit for periods at a time. You don't have to live there, but it helps to visit often.

Prabhu says – You learn some of the language and definitely should visit.

Geeta says – Great question! Not sure I am the right person to answer it. I am not a Tamil. I am a Kannadiga but married to a Tamil. Speaking the language, following the traditions of the state, participating in all the festivals, aware of the history of Tamils and Tamil literature (Tamil is one of the oldest living languages, I can speak but not read or write) is important. You will want to visit if you do all the above but by itself is not sufficient.

Bala says - It is the real inner feeling that the Tamil speaking community has within them, the passion and pride, being possessed by (at least) a sizable group of Tamils, that they have towards this mighty language. This Love and Pride possessed by millions of people towards the Language combined with its rich Literature keep the Language alive. Needless to say that Tamil Language is one of the Living Classical Languages. So a proper understanding of the Language, blended with the knowledge and love for the Tamil Culture, are the key points that would make one a Tamil. Apart from learning the Tamil Language, Get yourself educated about its rich literature, the Culture, and other related stuffs. Of course, visiting Tamil Nadu would greatly help you to understand these better.

Tirtha says – You need to visit. You will not know it until you visit. You can learn Tamil, it is in your blood.

Neesha says – I am from Bangalore. I don't even speak Tamil. I come to the events because I have many Tamil friends. The language and history are important.

Devi says – My husband is Tamil. I am from Utter Pradesh and came here when I was 8. I don't know the language, but I love the customs. It is different from the North, but it is also similar. We are a small community here so we try to stay together.

Sneha, Devi's daughter, says – My mom is North Indian and my dad is South Indian. People always ask me, 'Are you North or South Indian?' I have no idea. I am not Tamil. My extended family is. I was born here. I don't speak any of the languages, though I can understand some Hindi. My mom tells everyone that my dad is Tamil. He was technically born in Kerala and grew up there. His family is Tamil and that is what they spoke in the house. I don't know.

I was surprised to find that many people that attend Sangam events were not 'Tamil' by their own definition. **Jyothi** says that many people attend, but choose not to become members for various reasons. One thing that I gleaned from the interviews as well as the observational research was the difference in the experience. Each person had a different experience that they called Tamil and language was the only thing that remained the same. However, unlike my interviews in Tamil Nadu, the emphasis on living in the physical space diminished. To be Tamil, one could visit and did not have to live in Tamil Nadu.

"Reverse" Migration?

I spent the most time with **Jyothi** and **Poorani**. Over the year that I came to know them, I realized two things: 1) they had similar, yet very different experiences and 2) they had different views on India, Tamil Nadu and returning to the cultural home.

Poorani returns to Tamil Nadu often and hopes to move back someday, while **Jyothi** only likes to visit. They both came because their husbands found better economic opportunities in the United States. Neither of them had met the husband before moving to the United States. **Jyothi** was excited to come, while **Poorani** was devastated. She described her first years in the U.S. as miserable and she missed Chennai every day that she was away from it. Now, she has adjusted and her children are all here. Her husband passed away before her children were grown and she says that if they were not here, she would move back permanently. She is very up-to-date with affairs back in Chennai. We had a conversation about Amma (Selvi Jayalalithaa, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu) and her presence in Chennai city.

Meanwhile, I mentioned 'Amma' to **Jyothi** and she replied with, "Oh. She is the chief minister again? I never know what is going on as far as politics." **Jyothi** also says that it is difficult to go back and stay because things are very inefficient.

I discussed my visit to India with **Poorani**. We talked about the various temples in the rural areas (she had visited most of them) as well as the Ashrams, villages and the poverty. She said:

> You know, it is sad. Those people have nothing. They don't worry about identity and these things. But they are happy. I go there and I realize that we have too many things that we worry about here. So many people with nothing.

I felt that I could relate to **Poorani** in the way that she described India. I had experienced some of the same feelings once I returned from my fieldwork. My father is Tamil, but I am much like **Sneha** in not knowing what connection I have. I felt very

strongly about not India, but South India. I was only there for a period of three weeks, but it serves to show a connection that was established.

I also told **Jyothi** about my experiences after returning from India. She was surprised at some of the places I had gone. She said, "Christabel, even I have not been to a village."

In terms of modes and diasporic practice as mentioned in Chapter 2, Dufoix (2003) stresses that the diaspora often preserves the 'old ways' of carrying on the culture. This is evident from the method in which heritage is passed from one generation to the next. An emotional and psychological attachment creates an individualized experience in relation to the cultural home. As the interviews show, each person feels differently about not only what it means to be Tamil, but also about returning home to Tamil Nadu. The history is treated with great respect and strengthens the Tamil pride.

Images of Tamil Script in NE Ohio

Fig. 12, A recent adult PIO card (left) and Indian passport (right). The PIO resembles the Indian passport. The language on both identification documents is in Hindi and English.

Fig. 13, Semiotics used at events.

Fig. 14, Bharatanatyam dance of Sangam children and color are indicators of the harvest.

Fig. 15, The infusion of American architecture with Tamil elements.

Soundscapes in Northeast Ohio

Festivals such as the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana illuminate the Tamil soundscape in Northeast Ohio. Though it encompasses a larger South Indian audience, the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana has specifically Tamil elements. The festival celebrates composer Thyagaraja, one of the beloved composers of all time and the head figure of the 'Trinity' –including Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Shastri (Hansen, 1999; Viswanathan & Allen, 2004). Originating on the Kaveri delta in Tamil Nadu as a celebration of Thyagaraja's disciples to honor the composer following his death, it spread to the United States in 1978 (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004). The Cleveland festival began as a small gathering of South Indian families and has now grown immensely over the past 36 years.

The CTA reflects the South Indian soundscape and more specifically, the Tamil soundscape. While the performances are not all conducted in the Tamil language, the foundation of the event is directly linked to Chennai city. An example

of one of performances on April 6, 2013 can be found here:

http://youtu.be/uECnPmbzOiI.

In addition, the Thyagaraja performances utilize periodic complex tones that reflect the Dravidian landscape in tonality, pitch, structure, and composition (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004). These periodic complex tones, identified by Hartmann (1998) incorporate speech patterns of the Tamil language. Much of the conversational language reflects Tamil (though Telugu and Malayalam are sometimes audible). Additionally, as demonstrated above, the semiotic elements reflect Tamil script, especially in the merchandise.

Other examples of soundscape include festivals such as Thai Pongal or Deepavali, organized by the Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam. Both festivals open with the invocation to Goddess Tamil or Tamil Mother, the state song of Tamil Nadu, *Neerarum Kadaludutha,* followed by the United States *Pledge of Allegiance*. It is not until the end of the program that the audience sang the Indian National Anthem, *Jana Gana Mana.* Similar to the Pongal event, the entire program is conducted in Tamil. A recorded audio example of the Tamil language at the function on November 23, 2013 can be found here: http://youtu.be/C0TinzOgZ8w. The conversation is Tamil as well with Tamil music surfacing throughout the event.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary finding indicates that ideas of 'return migration' are case-specific. Each individual has varying levels of attachment to and interaction with a particular place and experiences 'Tamil' in a different way. Moreover, when 'return

migration' does occur, it can happen at the regional level. Regional identities, rather than national identities, can become the main source for 'return migration.'

In addition, it is important to conceptualize identity within 'return migration' beyond academia. Those outside of academics in the United States may utilize categories such as 'Asian Indian' or 'Hispanic' because those institutional categories persist. These categories mask and potentially allow others to misread subtle nuances in various cultures. In turn, it affects cultural interactions not only in the United States, but also in other parts of the world. It also perpetuates stereotypes and ideas of 'race' that are purely social and societal constructions.

Tamil and American Identity

The time I spent with **Jyothi** and **Poorani** lends a greater understanding of how those situations play out in everyday life in the United States. Tamil Identity is complex and situational as is the desire to return to a "cultural home." In the United States, the lines are more blurred than in Tamil Nadu. As the interviews in both Tamil Nadu and the United States show, the emphasis on living in the physical place/state varies. Those in Tamil Nadu feel that it is important to live in Tamil Nadu while those in the United States, have varying loyalties to return.

As indicated in the previous chapters, while ethnicity is one lens through which to view a regional population such as the Tamil population, it is necessary to consider the Tamil as a diaspora because of their dialectic relationship with the cultural home as well as avoid an Anglo-centric view. As Kalra, Haur, and Hutnyk (2005) state, ethnicity is not dialectic, nor is it helpful to understanding 'return

migration.' Many members of the Tamil population in Cleveland also come on temporary work visas, so they return to the cultural home.

In addition, the label of 'ethnic' in the United States, seems to denote a 'white superiority' and grouping as an 'other' or 'non-white' (Berg, 2012; Berry & Henderson, 2002; Braziel, 2008; Nagel, 1994; Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Zelinsky, 2001). When Zelinsky (2001, 49) describes ethnicity in the United States, he says, "What possible innate quiddity is common to all? I am not aware of any, except perhaps their alterity, their not being properly Anglo-American."

Final Remarks

In geographical terms, it is important to rethink the evaluation of 'ethnic landscapes' and/or 'return migration' to a specific country. As highlighted in this paper, many of the categories placed on populations, such as 'Asian Indian,' can be deconstructed beyond broad categories. Rather than evaluating communities or groups of people as displaying 'markers of heritage' or having loyalties to specific countries alone, the incorporation of the 'lived' and fluid experience is essential. Soundscape is increasingly vital to this lived experience, but is also important to understanding that identity varies upon situation and context.

Identity becomes important when homogenization or stereotyping occurs. It does not indicate inherent traits, but rather is learned and reinforced both by internal and external forces. In addition, it is the experience as well as the interaction that lends to contextualizing identities. Because identity is not only complex, but also a non-static experience, so is the concept of return migration (Cresswell, 2003; Jain, 2008; Ley & Kobayashi, 2005).

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