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Integration of Sri Lankan Tamils into the Finnish Society

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<p>There are many different ethnic minority groups living in Finland. This study aims to look at Sri Lankan Tamils and their integration processes in Finland. Sri Lankan Tamils living in Finland face many problems during their years in Finland, including the weather, language acquisition and other cultural differences. Six different Sri Lankan Tamils living in Finland were interviewed to get their perspective on their early years and after in Finland. The interviews were focused on a few main factors affecting the integration process including; work life, culture, overall happiness and racism. Berry's theory of acculturation was used to assess the integration process.</p> <p>The results of the study identified a few different factors contributing to the integration process of Sri Lankan Tamils. Language acquisition, integration into the work life and owning a house signalled proper integration into the Finnish society. Furthermore, racism and cultural differences were identified as the main stressors against the integration process.</p>	
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<p>Suomessa asuu monia erilaisia etnisiä vähemmistöryhmiä. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tarkastella Sri Lankan Tamilisiä ja niiden integraatioprosesseja Suomessa. Suomessa asuvat Sri Lankan tamilit kohtaavat vuosiensa aikana Suomessa monia ongelmia, kuten sää, kielen hankinta ja muut kulttuurierot. Haastateltiin kuutta Suomessa asuvaa Sri Lankan Tamilia, joiden tarkoituksena oli saada heidän näkemyksensä varhaisvuosistaan ja sen jälkeen Suomessa. Haastattelut keskittyivät muutamiin tärkeimpiin integraatioprosessiin vaikuttaviin tekijöihin, mukaan lukien; työelämä, kulttuuri, yleinen onnellisuus ja rasismi. Integrointi prosessin arvioimiseksi käytettiin "Berry's acculturation teoriaa".</p> <p>Tutkimustuloksessa tunnistettiin muutamia eri tekijöitä, jotka vaikuttavat Sri Lankan tamilien integraatioprosessiin. Kielen hankinta, integroituminen työelämään ja talon omistaminen merkitsivät asianmukaista integraatiota suomalaisen yhteiskuntaan. Lisäksi rasismi ja kulttuurierot tunnistettiin pääasiallisiksi stressitekijöiksi integraatioprosessia vastaan.</p>	
Avainsanat	Sri Lankan integration, Acculturation, Finnish immigrant integration, Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Tamil interview

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1 Introduction

Nearly 4% of EU residents are immigrants. Immigrants are seen as people in need of resources, but we fail to see, that once they are integrated properly into the employment system, they are virtually indistinguishable from a native citizen; immigrants start paying taxes when they are employed, offer more work force to the country etc. It is good to note that Immigrants' social and economic integration improves along with their stay in their host country.

Improper integration can cause number of problems for the immigrants, along with thoughts of worthlessness, isolation and loneliness. For the host country however, it means spending more resources to economically support the immigrants.

Finland does not have a long history of hosting immigrants; it has a low ratio of immigrants to host country citizens when compared to other Nordic countries and it is struggling to integrate its immigrants into the labour market. Statistics show that the number of immigrants in Finland has increased by 10-fold when compared to the 90s. There has been no evidence to suggest that the number of immigrants arriving to Finland will dwindle.

Immigrants in Europe total around 20 million (Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2015). It is important that they are integrated properly into their host country; improper integration can cause a divide between the immigrants and their host country citizen, causing a "us vs them" situation. Integration of immigrants in a host country concerns several sectors, the most central ones include labour, education, housing, early childhood education and care, cultural, sports, youth and social and health policies. There is around certain amount of Sri Lankan in Finland. Under 18 and over 18.

According to N. Laurensyeva (The Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy, 2017), Integration can be understood from two different perspectives. For immigrants it means, developing a sense of belong to the host country; this can be viewed as accepting and acting accordingly to the host countries values and views. For the host country population, it means accepting immigrants as part of their society. Also,

Social cohesion between immigrants and the host country has been linked with individual wellbeing and considerable economic implications (A. Alesina, R. Baqir, W. Easterly: Public Goods and Ethnic Divisions, 1999). However, immigrants and host country population differ in many cultural and social aspects; possibly making it harder for socio-economic integration.

2 Target group

The target group of this thesis is “Sri Lankan Tamils”. Most Sri Lankan Tamils live in the northern part of Sri Lanka and their language is shared by Southern Indians. The Sri Lankan Civil War played a very big role in the movement of Sri Lankan Tamils to foreign countries including Finland.

In this study, I will be partnering with the “Finnish Tamil Organisation” who will be providing me access to the interviewees. The organisation hopes to use the data that is gathered to better the integration process of Sri Lankan as most Sri Lankan Tamils are members of this organisation. The organisation also organises events for Sri Lankan Tamil youngsters as well as adults.

The organisation would benefit from the data that is gathered regarding the integration of Sri Lankan Tamils as it would help accomplish part of the organisation’s goals. The data gathered here could be used to improve specific events created by the Finnish Tamil Organisation. The research data could also be used to guide new members of this community to integrated into the Finnish society better.

3 Integration

A lack of social integration leads to what Durkheim saw as a dangerous state of mind. He called it “excessive individualism” (Egoistic Suicide, 1987). These types of mindsets and practices will only broaden over time once they go unnoticed or un-acted upon. Improper integration in this context can lead to disconnected immigrants in the host country’s society and might cause radicalism in some cases.

To further illustrate, isolation from society through improper integration can cause thoughts of worthlessness that can be prevalent on individuals who feel or are isolated from society. This further supports that fact people need to be integrated into a society especially for people who are from a different culture or of different background living in a country that is largely different from their own. We can draw that fact that people who are not integrated well into a society is at risk of all that accompany exclusion, example: drug use or association with deviant clusters as well.

One of the reasons for lack of immigrant integration is seen as lack of effort or acceptance from host country and lack of exposure to different culture and ethnicity can cause such problems. We see refugees as people in need of resources but fail to notice that they bring resources to the country itself, explains Fernando Chang-Muy, J.D. in an interview with the Social work podcast (2009), then follows to point out that Einstein was a child of immigrants himself. To further illustrate, once immigrants are fully integrated into a new country, for example: starts to work, pay taxes; they are virtually indistinguishable from a native citizen in terms of resources they provide.

One of the ways to make integration easier is to understand what type of background an immigrant comes from and what types of trauma they might have experienced in their home country. Working in a manner that doesn't evoke past trauma for a certain immigrant is crucial and beneficial for overall integration.

3.1 Different ways of Integration

Studies have also shown that economic differences between native population and immigrants reduce over time (European Commission: Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2016), indicating considerable amount of time is needed for economic integration process and that integration process is not immediate. The process of immigrants' social integration could also be improved with time considering skills and knowledge that could be acquired by the immigrants during their stay in their host country, e.g.: knowledge of laws, language, culture etc. One of the crucial elements that could be detrimental to the social integration of immigrants is that initial beliefs and preferences are harder to change, then again it is difficult to define social integration in terms of beliefs and preferences.

One other crucial factor for immigrant integration is “citizenship”. A citizenship in a country gives the immigrants employment opportunities, right to vote as well as other rights making them basically indistinguishable from a native citizen in terms of law. Giving immigrants the right to vote will also empower them to be politically active further supporting integration.

When a citizenship is given to a child born in a country regardless of their parent’s background. A study finds, it encourages further incentive for parents of the child to participate in local communities and use the countries native language as well (C. Avitabile, I. Clots-Figueras, P. Masella: *The Effect of Birthright Citizenship on Parental Integration Outcomes*, 2014).

Immigrants who have newly arrived in a foreign country are likely to settle in closer within their ethnic communities. Immigrants who settle in closer might have a harder time integrating into a new country as they might not have the need to learn a new language or communicate with people outside their communities. On the other hand, having a close support community might help the immigrants find work easily, provide them with necessary information, etc. Considering majority of the immigrants are from a refugee background, being in a close familiar community might also make the immigrants feel sheltered and help provide them with a safe place to then be slowly integrated into their host society.

Although for immigrants, being in a tight familiar community could be welcoming, study finds low levels of language proficiency for those immigrants in their host country (P.W. Miller: *A model of destination-language acquisition*, 2001). While studies have found link between strong ethnic clustering and a sense of low host country identity, it does not however find link between “intense cultural and religious identification” according to N. Laurensyeva (*The Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy*, 2017).

3.2 Statistics

According to Immigrant Integration Policy Index (2015), “Within the EU, nearly 20 million residents (or 4%) are non-EU citizens”. 56.5% of those reported non-EU citizens are unemployed, according to the same source. From this, we can draw the conclusion that even though many of those immigrants might be new to the country, the process of being employed for immigrants in a host country could be improved. Immigrant Integration

Policy Index also state that EU immigrants' risk of poverty and social exclusion is about 49% twice that of native citizens.

Sources from Immigrant Integration Policy Index (2015) also points out the fact that 37% of non-EU immigrants that are unemployed are low-educated, further illustrating the fact that education is also a crucial factor in integration of immigrants.

For the purpose of integration, both native citizens and immigrants should be able to co-exist without the feeling of uneasy between them, as it can it can bring out the agenda of "us vs them". Misinformation or lack of information is not only affecting immigrants' ability to find work, but also the whole integration process as people with lower host country language proficiency tend to live in enclaves; studies have found that those immigrants who tend to live in enclaves have lower integration rate (B.R. Chiswick, P.W. Miller: A model of destination-language acquisition, 2001).

In an article, Immigrant Integration Policy Index (2015), points out that public opinion on immigrants in EU are generally divergent and uninformed. According to them in 2012, 2/3 of the EU population thought that immigrants should have equal rights, whereas in 2014, 57% of EU citizens thought that immigrants evoke "negative feels". This is further driven by the fact that the public "grossly overestimates" number of immigrants. Correcting public estimates on the number of immigrants tend to improve public attitude towards immigrants, states Immigrant Integration Policy Index (2015). As evidenced by these studies, information/education seems to improve both part of immigrant and native population's process towards better integration and lack of information can only hurt the process.

3.3 Berry's Theory of Acculturation (1974, 1980)

Berry (1980) has proposed that the two-key factor in the "model of acculturation" are "Cultural Maintenance", which corelates to valuing and preserving cultural identity and "Contact and Participation", which corelates to involvement with the dominant culture and other cultural groups.

According to Berry's theory, there are "4 acculturation strategies" related to the interaction between "Cultural maintenance" and "Contact and Participation" factors (Quadric-modal acculturation model; Berry, 1980; 1984).

Table 1: Quadric-modal acculturation model (Berry, 1980; 1984)

	Identification with Heritage culture. High	Identification with Heritage culture Low
Identification with Host country culture. High	Integration	Assimilation
Identification with Host country culture. Low	Separation	Marginalisation

3.3.1 "Assimilation" (Quadric-modal acculturation model; Berry, 1980; 1984)

First factor is "Assimilation", where an individual assimilates and do not maintain their cultural identity while seeking cultural contact with other cultures. Assimilation could be evidenced in immigrants by; change in their language preference, adoption of dominant values and attitudes of the host country, memberships in distinct social groups different their own and distance between political or ethnic identification of their original ethnic group.

3.3.2 "Separation" (Quadric-modal acculturation model; Berry, 1980; 1984)

Second factor in the model of acculturation is "Separation", it could be evidenced in immigrants when; they place higher value on their original culture and when they wish to

avoid interaction with people of different cultures in the host country. Example: Lack of interest in learning host country language.

3.3.1 “Integration” (Quadric-modal acculturation model; Berry, 1980; 1984)

The third factor is integration. In this model, integration occurs in immigrants when they maintain their original cultural identity while also safely interacting with people from different cultures. Example: Participation in different cultural events, adoption of the host country language, healthy interaction between people of the same ethnicity etc.

3.3.1 “Marginalisation” (Quadric-modal acculturation model; Berry, 1980; 1984)

Marginalisation can occur in immigrants when; people do not maintain their own cultural identity while also not seeking healthy interaction between people from different cultures. Example: not learning host country language, isolation from both own and other cultural participation, refusal to vote or to be associated with any political group etc.

4 Immigration in Finland

A quote from the OECD- International Migration Division (2017), explains the history of Finland’s immigration history quite well: “Finland does not have a long history of hosting international migrants. Indeed, for much of its recent history, the country has been characterized by large-scale, economically-motivated emigration and, prior to the early 1990s, migrants in Finland were largely made up of return migrants and their family”.

As of 2015, In Finland 6% of the population is made up of immigrants, these numbers are low when compared to Sweden, Norway and other EU countries. Foreign-born in Sweden and Norway make up about 16.5% and 15.2% of the population respectively (OECD: A Discussing of the Finnish Immigrant Integration System, p4)

4.1 Immigrant Integration in Finland

While number of Immigrants in Finland remains small, the short history of Finland's immigration could lead to many integration problems. On the other hand, Finland in 2015 received around 32,000 asylum seekers (OECD: A Discussing of the Finnish Immigrant Integration System, 2017 p4). Finland is struggling with implications of initial housing and long-term integration of those immigrants into the labour market.

According to the UN, Finland is the happiest nation in the world (The guardian: Finland is the happiest country in the world, says UN report, 2018). The Guardian reports "For the first time, the UN also examined the happiness levels of immigrants in each country, and found Finland also scored highest". From this we can draw the conclusion that Finland has a very nurturing environment for both its citizens and immigrants as well.

Although immigrants' happiness level is high in Finland, there has been reports of Finland being not so welcoming in other ways. To quote Yle (2018); "Finland among most racist countries in EU, study says, compared to 11 other European countries". Yle further elaborates that Finnish residents with African backgrounds experience the most racism. According to a study, "Being Black in EU", two of the ways that immigrants experience racism in EU is, it being hard for them to find a place to live or get a decent job. If immigrants experience these types of discrimination, it will only set back their integration process.

4.2 Sri Lankan Immigrants in Finland

As of 2017, there are 1,306 Sri Lankans immigrants living here in Finland (UN: International migrant stock: The 2017 revision). As opposed, in 1990, there were only 107 Sri Lankans living in Finland. There has not been a large amount of Sri Lankan living in Finland when compared to immigrants from other nations. Although this is not a fair comparison, as of 2017 there are around 10,000 Vietnamese citizens living in Finland and there were around 1,841 Vietnamese citizens living in Finland in the 90s (UN: International migrant stock: The 2017 revision).

The number of immigrants in Finland has increased by 10-fold since the 90s according to "Statistics Finland (2017, Immigrants in the population)" indicating that immigration will continue to rise.

5 Purpose of the study

In this study I aim to explore the integration processes of Sri Lankan adults and other Sri Lankan young adults in Finland; I aim to explore if it affects their wellbeing, the state on overall acceptance of Sri Lankan Tamils from the host country as seen by Sri Lankans. The roles Sri Lankan Tamil community plays in the integration process and the role that government services like Kela plays in the integration process.

5.1 Other Aims

The “Finnish Tamil “organisation values the integration process of all Tamils and are aware of problems that would rise through lack of integration, i.e. depression, radicalisation etc. The organisation would also like to preserve the Tamil culture; but sometimes integration can be misunderstood as adopting the host country culture whilst leaving their own. We aim to look at those factors and analyse if accepting the host country culture to better integrate into the host country’s society would mean leaving out their own.

In most cases, integration into the Finnish society is perceived as learning the language, going into the working life, adopting its culture and norms etc. But there are fears that Sri Lankan Tamils face when integration is concerned; that too much integration into the Finnish society would change their cultural beliefs. They might be afraid to integrate well into the society due to the differences in cultural aspects. It also brings out the fear from the Sri Lankan Tamils' parents that their children would follow the Finnish culture instead of their own. Instances like these can cause voluntary segregation, we also aim explore these questions.

Children who are born in Finland and those who have arrived in Finland at a young age, are also facing challenges related to integration, for example: Demands of parents while aged young, cultural challenges between youngsters and peers, as well as fears of cultural diversity from their parents. In this study, we will look at from the perspective from the parents and their opinion regarding their children’s integration process.

Entering the work life is one the strongest indicator of integration into the host country. In this study we will look at the factors limiting Sri Lankan Tamils from entering work life as well as the integration process before and after entering the work life.

One of the other factors related to integration is acceptance of host country's culture, in this study we will delve into factors relating to culture as well as integration topics related to it. We will also look at other processes of integration and find out if the integration processes were difficult, for example: Language courses, work placement internships etc. We also aim to look at overall happiness of Sri Lankan Tamils living in Finland and if that affects the integration process.

Other factors like "racism" and other unwelcoming acts by the host country citizens could also be a detriment to the integration process of any immigrant. We will also be looking at the topic "racism" and other subjects related to racism determine if those played a role in Sri Lankan Tamil's integration process.

6 Research method

6.1 Qualitative approach

The research method I will be using for this research is qualitative research method. The research will be conducted using interviews and be analysed and interpreted. The research method used will not follow a set structure, e.g. different follow up questions for each interviewee according to their answers.

The interviews will be conducted 1-on-1 and will be analysed in depth. The interview questions will consist of open-ended questions, so that interviewees can express their experiences in their own words. The interview will also aim to interpret the target group interviewees' motivations, feelings, attitudes, preferences and behaviours exactly as they choose to express them. We will also focus on getting detailed information on their experiences from the target group during the interviews.

By using qualitative research method to conduct this research, we will be asking questions on the lines of who, what, how, when, why etc to draw our conclusion rather than for the questions to be numerical based. For example: we will ask the target group questions comparable to "how happy are you in Finland?"

6.2 Participants in this study.

There are six people who will be interviewed. The interviews will be conducted in a manner where the interviewees can freely express their feelings and experiences related to a question. The interviewees will not be forced answer a certain question and only be asked to share what they are comfortable with.

The interview's target are people of all ages from under the category "Sri Lankan Tamils". The interview will also be focused on those immigrated to Finland for reasons related to asylum as well as employment. The interview will focus on few members of different age groups; e.g. 18-25, 45-60, etc.

6.3 Data collection

The data collection method for this research will be Depth Interview; the interview will be focused on listening to the people being interviewed rather than to talk and it will also prioritise comfort of the interviewees to get genuine answers. The interviews will be conducted to develop insight on how the target group think and feel as people have different experiences and opinions.

The data collected will be verbal and be expressed through words. The approach used in this qualitative research will be subjective to some extent. The research will be used to develop an initial understanding of problems at hand.

The interviews will also be recorded for further analysis with the consent of the participants.

6.4 Data analysis

The data analysis methods will include exploratory options. The interview will be an individual to individual data collection method and be focused on quality and interpretations of said qualitative data gathered. It will deal with feelings, attitudes, opinions and thoughts to determine the reason behind those behaviours. We will not draw conclusion through quantifying the interview data as no two experiences of the interviewees can be the same.

6.5 Owen's thematic analysis.

Owen's (1984) thematic analysis method will be used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis by Owen also puts an equal emphasis on implicit data analysis as much as it does explicit. Thematic analysis relies on pinpointing, examining and recording patterns of meaning within data (Braun, Virginia; Victoria Clarke).

We will be applying Owen's (1984) thematic analysis to analyse our interview data. According to Owen (1984) there are 3 parts in analysing data using thematic method: recurrence, repetition and forcefulness. Recurrence in data can be identified when two different phrases mean the same thing even when different words are used. Repetition can be identified when there are use of the same word(s) or sentence(s). Forcefulness, in recordings (which we will be using to analyse the data) can be identified when there are abnormal vocal indicators signalling importance of certain words or phrases.

7 Interviews and Finding

There are few themes that can be identified when considering proper acculturation into the Finnish society. Language, Employment, Cultural Involvement, Overall satisfaction, Motivation, weather and Social Support are identified as the main themes.

7.1 Language

Majority of the interviewees mentioned that being able to speak Finnish indicated proper integration. The reason behind it seems to be that there are more options regarding employment. As one interviewee (interviewee A) noted that "the hardest thing I encountered in Finland is the language". She further elaborated that "it was easy to do well in school but when confronted with speaking in public, it was hard to understand and speak [Finnish] as the spoken language had its differences". Even though spoken language can be learnt through practices such as conversations or television, it can become a barrier to the integration process as it adds an extra factor to the process.

Having a job, having good social support, having an own home and children doing well in school [if the correspondents had a child] seemed to be the main factors indicating overall happiness of the interviewees.

The overall satisfaction of one of the correspondent was very high, when asked about her self-satisfaction in Finland, she (interviewee A) mentioned that “everything is well, I wanted to get a job, now I have one, I wanted to buy my own house; I was able to, I was able to fulfil my expectations”. However, the correspondent mentioned “I am interested in moving to a new country as there are so few relatives living here in Finland”. The correspondent expressed that she mostly mingles with Tamil people and have few Finnish friends. She further elaborated “I go to all Tamil related events such as weddings and festival celebrations but have hobbies outside them as I go to the gym regularly.”

The reason she (interviewee A) does not pursue Finnish culture seems to stem from the fact that during her early years in Finland, she lived in “Savonlinna” where there were few immigrants. In her words; “I was new here, I lived in Savonlinna where there were no immigrants, I used to work as a home service person and the vibes I got from the clients were that I was an outsider.”

7.2 Early experiences

Early experiences of immigrants who have moved to Finland seems to be a big factor in deciding how well they perceive the Finnish society. Interviewees who arrived in Finland during winter seem to repeatedly mention how harsh the winter is in Finland and why it is a reason they consider moving outside. Those who experienced some sort of racism during their arrival in Finland also emphasized more on that racist experience as opposed to those who experience racism later in their stay.

One other interviewee (interviewee B) shared that their Finnish language accusation was quick as compared to other Tamils; she stated that she was fluent in English already and that helped her learn Finnish much quicker, which in-turn helped her get a job much faster. She stated (interviewee B) I was motivated and keen on learning Finnish and I was mentioned in a lecture elsewhere by the teacher on how good a student I was, which in turn made me even more motivated.

It is apparent that motivation and ease of access to resources play a big part in the integration process. Interviewee B was already very accustomed to the English alphabet, which is very similar to Finnish, making it easier for her to learn Finnish. Also, positive reinforcement events by the host country members could trigger positive feedback loop where an immigrant is rewarded for learning Finnish by being able to obtain a job, which further incentivises the immigrant to integrate into the Finnish society.

The Interviewee (interviewee B) also mentioned that “at first it was difficult in Finland at first, I had finished my studies in Sri Lanka and would have gotten a stable job, but I had to move to Finland for safety related reasons. Once I was able to obtain a job here, it became easier and I am 100% satisfied with my life in Finland as of now. The correspondent also shared that she has good Finnish friends and she maintains contact with them and shares time with them whenever possible. The correspondent wanted to add that “Finland is a great place, because it is safe, there is little to no corruption and the living condition [in-terms of food and shelter] is better when compared to Sri Lanka.”

7.3 Overall Happiness

Although the Sri Lankans interviewed had very different first-hand experiences in Finland both ranging from positive to negative, their overall happiness level seems to be satisfactory for all of them. One of the reasons for it could be the direct support they get from the government services like “Kela”, where Kela offers a 3-year period where the immigrants are able to get income support to learn the language and acquire the necessary skills to start off at a ‘work life’. Other factors might include the education opportunities that the country provides as higher education in Finland is free of charge, which in-turn gives the immigrants lots of freedom on how they decide to pursue their career. The living conditions being better from where an immigrant comes from can further incentivise the experiences in Finland to be perceived better, which in-turn can increase overall happiness and satisfaction level of an immigrant.

One of the other common themes that came up regarding the interviewees’ view in integration is, being able to purchase a home. Many of the Sri Lankan interviewed seem to hint that owning a house gives them a sense of belonging to the country as it gives them a personal physical connection to the country.

The next interviewee (interviewee C) stressed that the language acquisition process is hard, he mentioned “Finnish is hard to learn, I know little Finnish but somehow I manage to do okay at work”. This response seems to indicate that you do not need fluent Finnish skills to be integrated into the work life. The barrier to entry into the work life also seem to be low in Finland, because he mentioned that he only had to study Finnish for six months before he was able to obtain a job in Finland. He also mentioned that he obtained his job through his school.

People being able to move to Finland, study Finnish and being able to obtain a job through their work placements seems to be a common theme in almost all the people interviewed. This indicates that Finland’s integration process is well developed. People interviewed were able to obtain different types of jobs including (interviewee B) teaching, (interviewee C) bus driving, indicating there are also diversity in the work life integration process.

He further commented (interviewee C)” I came as one here, I had no family or friends here, but I was able to get some friends later, which made it easier for me. Now I am satisfied with life, I got married and have children which is enough for me.” Later when asked about cultural preferences, he mentioned “I like my country’s culture better as we value friends and family more, but there are problems in Sri Lanka like the civil war, but I like Finland just as much as Sri Lanka.”

Overall satisfaction of an immigrant in the host country is a good indicator of proper integration. Overall satisfaction in Finland with the people interviewed seem to be positive, none of the people interviewed were dissatisfied in Finland, they had different preferences, likes and dislikes but all indicated to be satisfied. This tells us that integration status for Sri Lankan Tamils in Finland is positive as there seems to be no indicator of marginalization by the Country.

The interviewee (interviewee C) commented when asked about his goals, “I am in a good place, I have a house, what is left is to pursue my career, better pay and all.” Statements indicating satisfaction and future goals are a good indicator of proper integration and these sorts of statements are a common theme in almost all the people interviewed.

However, the interviewee (interviewee C) mentioned that he disliked the cultural norm of the country somewhat as people in Finland seemed not as friendly. He also shared that

the first few years in Finland was rough and thought about leaving Finland in his early years because of the winter.

7.4 Winter and Early Years

The next interviewee (interviewee D), also stated as winter being a problem to deal with his initial arrival in Finland, stating “It was nice at first when I arrived in Finland, but quickly it started to get cold and problematic”. He further continued “I had no visa when I got to Finland, I was seeking asylum and visa was the only thing on my mind. I was not focused on learning the language, but now I worry that I should have focussed on learning Finnish during my 10 months stay at the reception centre. I would not have had to study the language later if I had learnt Finnish earlier, I would have just moved to the vocational courses instead of the language courses. I was given the opportunity to learn but I couldn’t as I was worried if I would be sent back home.”

Sri Lankans coming to Finland to seek asylum due to the civil war in Sri Lanka is not too uncommon. Their state of mind is different from those who come here with work related visa. Interviewee D mentioned that visa was the only thing on his mind, and he couldn’t focus on anything more. Initially, the integration process for asylum seeking immigrants and those who come here with visa are different. The stress that comes along while waiting for visa is accountable and it affects the mindset of the asylum seeker and their integration process. Asylum seekers are put in a reception centre before they are given a visa, which makes them non-interactive with Finnish citizens and the outside norm (Finnish culture, language, etc), in-turn delaying their integration processes.

Finnish winter is mentioned quite often in the interviews as a cause of discomfort. Sri Lanka has no winter and is heavily tropical. Finnish winter being very harsh is a cause for concern to the integration process; it requires appropriate lifestyle changes, example: appropriate clothing, adjustment to the little sunlight in the winter, etc. Although many of the people interviewed mentioned the winter weather as being unwelcoming, many mentioned that they have gotten used to it overtime. But nonetheless winter can be identified as a factor against the integration process of a Sri Lankan immigrant in their early years in Finland as it takes time getting used to.

7.5 Racism and Prejudice and Culture

Interviewee D mentioned that “there is no racism in Finland that is explicitly shown, there are instances where people can be racist. When I wanted to study bus driving, I was told by Finnish colleagues that my Finnish skills are bad, and I should study the language first and that I should act more like a Finnish person.”

From interviewee D’s experience we could imply that people can be unintentionally racist due to there being less awareness for what an immigrant goes through during their days in Finland. There could be misunderstandings between the immigrants and the host country population that arises with lack of knowledge about the immigrants. For example: immigrants arriving to Finland seeking asylum have had bad experiences in their country and could be stressed out due to culture shock. There are other problems to consider including, separation from their friends and family, needing to learn a new language, weather changes etc.

In interviewee D’s case, the host country citizens could expect certain things from the immigrant, for example: to be able to speak Finnish fluently and to follow the cultural norms of the host country. But these sorts of expectations could be taxing on the immigrant and could lead to the immigrant being “separated” (Berry 1980) from the host country culture, due to there being too many demands for the immigrant to keep up with.

Proper integration can only occur when the immigrant identifies well with their own heritage culture and the culture of the host country. Proper integration can only occur with acceptance from the host country citizens and factors like racism can cause “marginalisation”.

There are other factors to consider related to the integration process of immigrants, including “assimilation” (Berry 1980) from Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants’ own culture. However, “assimilation” (Berry 1980) from their own culture was not prevalent within the people interviewed as all of the people interviewed admitted to regularly take part in cultural events organised by the “Finnish Tamil Organisation” and expressed as also having close relationship with the Tamil community. Same cannot be said for “separation” (Berry 1980) however, as some of the people interviewed admitted as having few Finnish friends. Regarding “separation”, interviewee B, shared that “Finnish culture is Finnish culture and it is up to me to raise them to follow my own culture”. These

types of comments indicating disapproval of Finnish culture was prevalent amongst most of the interviewees, many of them admittedly acknowledging that Finnish culture as foreign.

Most of the stigma against Finnish culture from Sri Lankan Tamils seem to stem from the fact that alcohol consumption is widely accepted in Finland or even encouraged as a pass time activity. "In Sri Lankan culture alcohol consumption is frowned upon and it can be addictive and dangerous" states interviewee D. Other factors contributing to the stigma against Finnish culture includes Sex before marriage and revealing clothing. As interviewee D puts it "I do not hate Finnish culture, but I do not like the idea of sex before marriage and most of us do not like the idea of people wearing revealing clothes either". This type of sentiment is widely shared amongst older Sri Lankan Tamil interviewees and many of them commented that they do not wish their children to associate with the Finnish culture for those reasons.

Regarding vocational school opportunities, interviewee D did not share the same opinion with most interviewees, he stated "it was hard to find vocational course for the job I wanted, and I wasted some time looking for one." He also shared that "there is huge incentive to work in our culture and not being in school or working is also frowned upon and most people are pressured to work, which is a good thing."

7.6 Work life

Being pressured to work or study could help with the "integration" processes of Sri Lankan Tamils into the Finnish society. For example: even though there are cultural differences between Fins and Sri Lankan Tamils, there are other sentiments both Fins and Sri Lankan Tamils follow that could bridge the gap, including compulsion to enter the work life, compulsion to learn Finnish, celebrations of Finnish related festivals like Christmas, etc.

Interviewee D shared his issues after entering the work life. Saying "even though I am working now, I feel marginalised, Fins I work with have their own group they interact with and sometimes I worry they might be talking about me behind my back."

Worries that they might be “separated” (Berry 1980) from the Finnish culture was somewhat common with the Sri Lankan Tamils interviewed. Two of the interviewees shared that, even though they are working now, they feel out of place. Cultural differences could play a part in the feeling of marginalisation felt by the Sri Lankan Tamils, as interviewee D already shared his disapproval with Finnish culture.

Disapproval with the Finnish culture doesn’t always seem to mean “separation” (Berry 1980) [from Finnish culture] by the Sri Lankan Tamils in all cases. Interviewee B had shared that she does not want her children to follow the Finnish culture and has shown her disapproval with the culture. However, she shared that “we have our cultural differences [Fins and us] but I respect their culture, they have their own culture and they follow it, we have our own and I hope my children will follow it.” From this we can draw the conclusion that even though disapproval and conservatism towards the Finnish culture could mean “separation”, it is not always the case as interviewee B, showed proper integration into the Finnish society, example: having a work life, expression of having good colleagues and friends, desired to participate in Finnish cultural events, acknowledgement of Finnish culture [even though she does not wish to follow them], etc.

Interviewee D shared even more frustrations with his work colleagues as he stated “my colleagues refuse to speak English with me, they know that I don’t understand Finnish, but they keep talking to me in Finnish. I know for a fact, that they can speak English. My colleagues also use Finnish words that are harder to understand, and they speak faster than normal when they are required to communicate with me.”

These types of experiences like the one interviewee D had where an immigrant could feel unwelcome in a country can only be a detriment to the integration experience. He had expressed that he has thought about leaving the country. He shared that “there are few Sri Lankan Tamils here, and even fewer in my age group, it makes me feel like I don’t belong here in Finland and sometimes I think about moving back to Sri Lanka.”

7.7 Other factors and Social Support

There are many different factors contributing to an immigrant’s integration process. Interviewee D’s case, he felt that he was marginalised through his first experiences in Finland. Example: He felt he was unwelcomed by his classmates as he was asked to

study more Finnish while he was doing his vocational training. He shared that he feels unwelcomed in his workplace and shared that he thinks his colleagues talk behind his back. He also shared that he has few friends here in Finland as well. For proper integration to occur, the experiences that an immigrant experiences should also be positive. Even though there are proper laws and regulations (example: income support) in place for integration; the experiences an immigrant can have can vary and having a negative experience can mean negative consequences to the integration process, like in interviewee D's case.

There was a common theme that was present about the people interviewed missing their family and friends living in Sri Lanka. Interviewee E, had recently moved to Finland and shared her concerns that "even though, material wise Finland has no problems, when concerned with family and friends, there are worries." She added "culturally speaking, it feels hard to preserve our culture, there are no religious temples and etc here."

Most of the interviewees seemed to share the same sentiment with interviewee E, as another interviewee (interviewee F) shared that "I have been here for more than 10 years and as more time passes, more I miss my family who are in Sri Lanka."

8 Conclusion

In this study I aimed to evaluate the overall integration of Sri Lankan Tamils into the Finnish society. There were few factors identified as main themes concerning integration. In the early years of Sri Lankan Tamils stay in Finland, language and the Finnish weather played a big role in their core experiences. Many of the people interviewed stressed that weather and language were the main stressors in their early years in Finland. However, even though they shared that the Finnish winter is a little inconvenient, people interviewed mentioned they got used to the weather over time.

Language acquisition experience was unique for each individual. The main factor deciding how long it took for each individual to learn the Finnish language was the familiarity with the English language and the more familiar each individual was English, the faster the language acquisition was.

Racism and prejudice were also present in some cases. The main issue that an individual interviewed was presented with was the lack of language skills. The individual was harassed for not being able to speak the language properly by his colleagues. He also shared that he felt out of place in his workplace due to the fear that his colleagues might be talking behind his back. The same was true for another individual that was interviewed, where she felt out of place in her workplace, where she felt she was not welcome at the workplace and felt like an outsider, although no explicit racism was not present in this case.

The support the Sri Lankan immigrants got from “Kela”, where “Kela” pays a small sum of money to each individual for three years to study Finnish and other work-life related skills were significant. All of them felt that the 3-year financial support they got from “Kela” period was sufficient and admitted it as taking away some of the stress during their initial years in Finland.

Employment was identified as one of the main factors deciding proper integration into the Finnish society. Not being employed or being in a school was identifiable as being frowned upon by the Tamil community. Unemployment did not only mark improper integration also caused a poor socio-economic status in the Tamil culture.

Of all the individuals interviewed “marginalisation” and “assimilation” acculturation strategies (Berry 1980) were not present. All of the individuals interviewed showed great sense of belonging in their own culture. None of them showed a disconnect from their own culture and all of them were admitted as taking regular part in Tamil cultural events and festivals.

“Separation” (Berry 1980) from the Finnish culture was somewhat hinted by few of the interviewees. Many of the interviewees shared that the Finnish culture seemed “foreign” and interviewee B can be quoted as saying “Finnish culture is Finnish culture; we have our own and it is up to us to grow our children to follow our culture”.

Proper “integration” according to Berry’s theory of acculturation was present in some of the individuals interviewed. One of the interviewees shared that they have an own house; a permanent job; close Finnish friends; and they take part in both Finnish and Tamil social events. They also admitted to identifying well within both Finnish and Tamil culture.

Individuals interviewed all had different experiences, fit in different category of the acculturation strategy in Berry's theory. However, "assimilation" and "marginalisation" from the Tamil culture was not common amongst any of them.

9 Discussions

In this study I aimed to explore the overall integration of Sri Lankan Tamils into the Finnish society. It was difficult to rate their overall integration as a whole but I was able to find out about their integration processes on a personal level.

There were ethical factors to consider related to the interviews, but I was able to get all the permissions needed to record the interviews from all of the individuals interviewed. I was also given permission to publish basic personal information regarding each individual.

The individuals interviewed varied by age, gender and the amount of time they have spent in Finland. Thus, I was able to get a broader perspective on Sri Lankan Tamils living in Finland. Each individual interviewed had different personal experiences and fitted into different parts in Berry's acculturation strategy, but one of the factors they had in common was; strong identification within their own culture.

There was a common theme within the Sri Lankan Tamils as identifying Finnish culture as being foreign, and the individuals interviewed showed concerns regarding their children following the Finnish culture. One of the reasons the Finnish and the Tamil culture has its differences could be, because Sri Lanka and Finland are situated far apart geographically.

As already referenced before, there have been concerns about Sri Lankan parents wanting their children to follow only the Sri Lankan culture and it raises some ethical concerns. These concerns could be investigated in a further study.

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Appendix 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What are your expectations in Finland?
- Have you experienced any form of racism in Finland?
- How satisfied are you with things so far in Finland?
- Have you had good study opportunities?
- Were the language courses you took easy or were they difficult?
- If you are employed was entering working life hard?
- Share your experiences after entering work life.
- Did you reach your goals or dreams that you have?
- Are you happy with the state things are?
- Do you have any permanently living targets?
- Do you have any cultural differences you do not like about Finland.
- Do you have any concerns about your children?
- What are your hobbies in Finland?
- Do you attend any social events?
- How do you see Finnish culture?
- Have you thought about wanting to leave Finland?
- Comment on your likes and dislikes about Finland
- Do you have any other comments or experiences you would like to share?

Appendix 2: DISCRPTION OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Interviewee A: 39-year-old women from Sri Lanka, she had lived in Thailand prior to her arrival in Finland. She first moved to a city in Finland called Savonlinna and studied Finnish and did her vocational training there. She now lives in Helsinki and has 2 children.

Interviewee B: A 44-year-old women from Sri Lankan, she moved to Finland in 2007, she studied teaching in Sri Lanka and is fluent in English, Tamil and Finnish.

Interviewee C: 35-year-old Man. He came to Finland with work related visa. He had studied bus driving and is working as a bus driver. He has lived in Finland for 5 years.

Interviewee D: 23-year-old man from Sri Lanka. He came to Finland to seek asylum. He has lived in Finland for 2 years and 6 months. He stayed in a reception centre for 10 months while seeking asylum. He is studying bus driving and is working as a part time waiter in a restaurant.

Interviewee E: 28-year-old women from Sri Lanka. She has been living in Finland for 2 years now. She has 1 child; she is on maternal leave.

Interviewee F: 38-Year-old women from Sri Lanka. She has been living in Finland for 12 years and she has 2 children.