EXPRESSİONS OF TAMIŁ IDENTITY:
A FLUID FRAMEWORK OF SOUND AND VISUALS

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Christabel Devadoss

May 9, 2014, Kent, OH
DEDICATION

In memory of my grandparents, Sundaram and Hannah Christabel Devdas.
*All photos, audio, and video in this document were taken by the author unless otherwise specified.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Vanakkam! Epatti Irrukke?” “Nalla Irrukke, Nandri.”

“Hello. How are you?” “I’m fine, thank you.” I cannot understand the remainder of the conversation except for a few scattered words. As a 2.5 generation\(^1\) child from a Tamilian father and an American mother, I know that it is Tamil – through the inflections, tonality, and the way it is carried through retroflex consonants.

Tamil continues to echo throughout the atmosphere while a stream of brightly-colored saris stained with rich pastels and deep hues, along with dhotis stream into the Waetjen auditorium of Cleveland State University. As the door opens, the muffles of the pancharathna krithis – beloved Karnatak composer Thyagaraja’s five greatest compositions – flow throughout the hallway. The mridangam, ghatam, kanjira, violin, as well as a variety of other Karnatak instruments establish the arena as a South Indian classical music venue. I may not “belong” to this group of people, but I know that I recognize something transformative about this particular space and cultural practice.

\(^1\) King and Christou (2010) define a 2.5 generation as children with dual backgrounds and nationalities.
Academic Notions of Cultural Identity

In an increasingly interconnected world, we see a rise in exchange and transmission of culture and community across global spaces. Not only does this exchange provide a way to observe elements of other cultures, but it also allows an understanding of ties to cultural identity. How does a culture transmit and maintain ties to a cultural home? Many cultures are not only relocating, but after time, exhibit a type of reverse migration (Chacko, 2007). Groups such as diasporas, offer ways in which to view the process of identity transmission through regional levels. The concept of state-based identity advances methods of interpretation and analysis when studying the post-colonial transmission of culture.

Massey (1994) argues that globalization creates a sense of “mobilization” of culture; a spread and mixing of cultures that “stretches out.” While this indicates the span of culture across global boundaries, does it also indicate the spread of the local identity? It questions our notions of diaspora and cultural communities and how they fit into our understanding of the cultural transmission process.

This thesis examines the Tamil diaspora, rather than “Asian Indian,” in Northeast Ohio to understand the vitality of cultural preservation but also to identify and solidify soundscape in the role of landscape.
**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 that I highlight (through the Tamil) in Chapters 3-6.

**‘Asian-Indian’**

In order to understand transmission of the Tamil culture, the 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 regional and state-based identity.
A distinction exists between the ‘Aryan’ and ‘Dravidian’ cultural streams (Stein, 1977). Much like the North Indian “Bharat” view of India, South India, particularly Tamil Nadu emphasizes the concept of Chola mandalam, further described in Chapter 3 (Coedès, 1996; Miller, 1998; Stein, 1977).

Said (1994) noted in the late 70s that ideas of the “Orient” permeate academia. The idea that the Eurocentric “Western” civilization sets itself apart from the idea of the Easternized “Asia” continues to permeate academia (Said, 1994; Klein, 2003).

In addition, the accepted view of India tends to invoke an image of North India while ignoring the South Indian cultures altogether. Because current census data do not account for the varying degrees of state-based distinction, it is necessary to take a qualitative approach to uncover the intricacies of the group “Asian Indian.” Even Said falls victim to the façade of Westernized “Indianess.” While his point is to unveil this notion, he still constructs the idea of a “Hindustan” and a Sanskrit-based unified culture.

In terms of country-specific migration, India comprises the largest group of incoming migrants to the United States (Skop, 2012). Indians are often grouped into a category of “model minority” based on success measures of US standards (Frazier, 2013; Skop, 2012). However, while academics and other sources attribute this success to “cultural” or “upbringing,” I shed light on the complexity of migration through my fieldwork in India in Chapter 5.
Tamil Identity

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. Its ancient traditions, colorful décor, and vast soundscape - encompassing 22 official languages, 100 non-official but widely used languages, multiple religious identities, and entirely separate musical traditions - provide reason to examine it through a regional level (Census of India, 2011; Rangaswamy, 1994, Viswanathan & Allen, 2004).

Geographers and academics such as Skop (2012), Rangaswamy (1994), and Bhardwaj and Rao, (1990) identify an incredibly diverse 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).

Because, the Tamil people foster a strong “Dravidian” identity that supersedes that of the pan-Indian the Tamil culture offers an insight into the regional identities (Jacob, 2009). However, even while examining a regional identity, it is important to note that the complexities of the Tamil identity, as with
many identities runs deep. I speculate that many of the notions of religion and caste cease to have the same divisive nature in the landscape as they do in the cultural home of Tamil Nadu. To fully understand the process of transmission, it is important to also note that transmission depends on religion as well as caste in promoting the spread of the cultural home.

**Diaspora vs. Ethnicity**

Barth (1969) places the concept of ethnicity as dating back to Ancient Greece. Barth (1969) set in motion a way of viewing ethnicity in the social sciences; however, these views have served a replacement for race (Nagel, 1994). In order to conceptualize a concept as vague as ethnicity, it is important to remember that it is not only “situational” but also “changeable” (Nagel, 1994).

Ethnicity is not only socially constructed, but based on the experience of being an “other” (Berry & Henderson, 2002).

Ethnicity is ambiguous and contested as a term as well as a concept. Often it is used to refer to “minority groups” when the majority is the standard white (Zelinsky, 2001). In addition, constructions of ethnicity and race can be used interchangeably and are often ambiguous. For example, “Caucasian” is used interchangeably with “Italian” (Johnston, 2000).

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2 However, perhaps these definitions are constructed differently.
Instead of focusing on ethnicity, I will utilize the concept of diaspora to view and contextualize identity. Because part of my focus is on the United States and many members of the Tamil community return home, it is important to use this term, which I further solidify in Chapter 2. Academics often associate diaspora as an exile group or a larger dispersed community. 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).

While diaspora originated from the notion of Jewish exile, it is a widely used term today (Braziel, 2008). 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, in this thesis, as Brubaker (2005) and Dufoix (2008) have stressed, I will consider it not a method of classification, but rather as a process of dispersion. It is important to understand this view of diaspora when identifying elements of cultural transmission. It is not necessarily a single group that transfers elements from one place to another, but rather the journey of collective identity (Mohann, 2002).
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 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).

Visual

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). While acknowledging that visual representations contribute to the way in which we view the world, Rose (2012) proposes a distinction between vision and visuality.

Vision is the biological response of seeing while visuality is the cultural construction of how and what is seen (Rose, 2012). In a visual culture, dominated by images as Rose (2012) describes, the importance of understanding the visual landscape should be the first method of analysis. The visual nature of culture gives insight into the many cultural practices and constructions of the reproduced culture (Jain 2008; Groth & Bressi, 1997). The redefining of an already existing
space through changes in spatial organization or added elements identifies the culture that inhabits that space (Groth & Bressi, 1997; Rose, 2012).

**Soundscape**

In understanding practiced environments, 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). If we examine a recreation of Lawson’s diagram (see below), we can see the various ways in which we become intimate with space.

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3 Jain (2008) indicates that static landscapes need to be thought of as practiced environments – not just visually defined, but rather through action and “practice.”
Fig. 1, Lawson’s (2001) description of the four of five senses in proximity of intimacy to the viewer adapted to fit the description above. Sight is indicative of first experience and touch is indicative of most intimate experience.

In religious texts such as the Bible (John 1:1, King James Version)\(^4\) and the Bhagavad-Gita, the word (also known as AUM)\(^5\) is first experience that sets the world in motion (Swahananda, 1983). 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).

\(^4\) “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God” (John 1:1, King James Version). Genesis describes the creation of the world, but John describes the essence of the creation through the word.

\(^5\) Swahananda (1983, 12) describes om (Aum) as “The vibration of Om is of the sound-Brahman or the first manifestation of the primordial Person. Om is the ground sound and ground movement of nature. Out of Om everything else has evolved.”
As the visuals define the internal space in a tangible way, the language and sounds reinforce the structure. (Jenkins, 2011) The integration of language into the cultural landscape is an important to recognize the diasporic landscape.

In separating many of the regional Indian identities, we must examine the language and sound structure that create unique, distinct associations (Rangaswamy, 1994; Bate, 2009). Understanding the role of soundscape in the Tamil diaspora, isolates the differences in regional identity.

**Landscape Fluidity**

The home state of Tamil Nadu as well as its language and Dravidian past, serve as a guiding factors for the Tamil landscape. These factors, however, must interact with an already established structural space. According to Groth and Bressi (1997), in order to understand landscapes, we must understand the concept of fluidity – that structures and concepts do not compete, but rather reinforce one another.

The Tamil landscape does not simply exist as a solid, non-malleable phenomenon; it incorporates landscape fluidity. In fact, most of the pan-Indian cultural landscapes in the United States exist under already constructed internal foundations. While the outward reveals American architecture, the inside transforms to the reflected culture. (Groth & Bressi, 1997)
For example, a Tamil wedding can take place in a venue that is externally American, but internally, embodies elements of Tamil culture. While its elements incorporate the external space of the American structure, they utilize the space to create a unique and specifically Tamil sense of landscape using color, spatial arrangement, décor, dress, language visuals, and composition. While these spaces reflect the visuals and sounds of specific culture, they also indicate the presence of a fluid, blended culture.

**Bridgespace**

I will revisit the term “bridgespace” in Chapter 2. While I do not emphasize throughout the thesis, it is important to identify for contextualization. To further the definition of a cultural landscape, it is important to recognize the use of “bridgespace.” While the redefining of an exterior space allows for a particular type of interior landscape, the use of the internet in what Skop and Li (2009) refer to as a “bridgespace,” complements the landscape in a subtle, but effective way. Diasporas separated by distance to the cultural home, bridge the gap of each temporal landscape through “bridgespace.”

“Bridgespace” allows the landscape to exist continually, even when the temporal interior landscape diminishes or disappears. Websites, for example, set by organizations for particular events, keep the landscape alive and thriving even if it no longer exists in a physical space. Preservation of images and information
online in a website, or a particular space that can still be visited, warrants the validity of a “bridgespace” as an extension of the cultural landscape. It also allows for the visual narrative of a language to spread in a new space.

**Plan of Thesis**

The research question that I ask is, “How does a culture transmit and maintain ties to a cultural home?” Throughout the process, I hope to accomplish four things:

1) observe the cultural transmission process
2) deconstruct fixed, broad categories – especially that of “Asian Indian”
3) uncover the complexity behind the types of migration patterns of the Tamil people
4) visualize how soundscapes fits into the landscape of the built environment and how both contribute to transmission

I chose this group, not only because of its strong ties to its regional culture, but also because of my 2.5 generation predicament – I am outside the culture, but also inside as a result of my father’s Tamilian background. With an inside and outside perspective – a hybrid perspective – I can hopefully gain a unique perspective on the culture.
I will employ the methods such as participant observation through ethnography and landscape evaluation. Although there is a sense of contradiction to using the Euro-centric methods, they are useful to prove a point. While there may be a sense of “Indian” broadly (depending upon the group), there is no fixed “Asian Indian.” In addition to the above, I will also use autoethnographic methods. This situates the research into a less Euro-centric view as well as keeps the research process transparent (Besio, 2003; Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Tedlock, 2000).

With a visual evaluation alone, to outsiders (as most of the authorities who designate “ethnic” categories are), Indians may appear as an all-encompassing group. It is this notion that keeps us from having a clear understanding of cultural transmission. When sound is introduced, the specifics of the regional landscape become known, especially in the case of the Tamil people. The South Indian identity reflects ancient rituals and landscape, creating a unique means of transmission (Narayanan, 1992).

The celebration in Cleveland, just as those now taking place in many cities around the world with a sizeable South Indian population, brings elders thoughts of home while educating young South Indians growing up in the diaspora about their ancestral heritage… (it) is a good example of how immigrants to the United States transplant and adapt cultural forms from
their homelands to a new environment (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004, p. 2, p. 9)

While New Jersey claims to hold the biggest Tamil population in the US, the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana (CTA) is the reason that I have chosen Cleveland, OH. It hosts the largest festival of South Indian classical music in the world second to India (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004, CTA, 2013). This festival creates one of the most prevalent concentrations of the South Indian population in one venue in the United States (Hansen, 1999). More importantly, it visibly showcases the dialectic relationship of the Northeast Ohio Tamil community and Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Employing ethnography as well as autoethnography as well as other methods, helps to not only understand the culture through immersion, but also reflect on it in a transparent way.

Traditional evaluation of a community landscape is conducted through the largest “gateways,” such as New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, that accentuate the clustering of a specific group, but this does not aid in recognizing the majority of cultural landscapes in the United States that rely on scattered settlement patterns (Skop, 2012). Skop (2012) and Elliot (2004) emphasize that assessing a cultural landscape in emerging cities or “emerging gateways” that host an increasing number of foreign-born residents, gives a clearer depiction not just of that city, but also the country. Indians, more than other migrant groups, tend to settle close to their place of work or in a community that is upper middle class and
not necessarily adjacent to where they hold cultural practice (Skop, 2012). Gateway communities provide an insightful look at a community with an “invisible” imprint (Skop 2012; Elliot, 2004; Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008). Observing sound as well as visual elements, identifies language, sound, atmosphere, and other characteristics that reproduce the culture.

**Structure of Thesis**

This thesis has six parts. Chapter 2 outlines concepts of diaspora to situate identity rather than ethnicity, ideas of cultural landscape that include visual and soundscape and how these manifestations lead to understanding a culture’s transmission process. Chapter 3 highlights Tamil history, language, literature, cultural constructions as well as some communities in the United States. Chapter 4 outlines the data and methods used in both Tamil Nadu and the Northeast Ohio community. Chapter 5 analyzes environments of Tamil Nadu. Chapter 6 provides a framework for the experience with the community of Cleveland, OH in comparison that of Tamil Nadu. Lastly, Chapter 7 concludes with findings on ‘Tamil Identity’ and how they influence our current constructions of “Asian Indian” as well as facets of transmission.
Before outlining the history and facets of the Tamil culture, this chapter discusses diaspora as a concept and why it is a better framework for the Tamil population than ethnicity. It also looks at elements of landscape, including visuals and sound to solidify their use in the later sections. Diasporic migration and circumstances behind the migration can alter landscape as well as the way a culture or identity transmits. Chapter 2 connects concepts of diaspora with landscape and how both are effective tools for understanding transmission.

**Diaspora and Global Dispersion – An Introduction**

In the age of globalization, beginning in the early 1990s, connections between individuals and societies have grown exponentially (Rafael et al., 2006). Dispersion as well the augmented presence of the global labor market are direct outcomes of global capitalism (Braziel, 2008). The advent of the Internet, information communication technologies (ICTs), and decreasing costs of travel extend physical boundaries of identity and culture across global spaces (Funk, 2012; Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005). Harvey’s (1990) *time-space compressions*
as well as Massey’s (1994) spread and mobilization indicate that culture and people are neither fixed nor stationary. In a globalized world, people migrate and continue to disperse internationally. Beyond a connected world economy and the increase of international migration in a global sense, globalization echoes the local through the rise of hybrid identities (Cohen, 1997).

Because academic focus on globalization’s spread of identity is thorough, I aim to uncover the complexities behind identity transmission in this thesis. Diaspora provides a mechanism to thoroughly understand identity in a global setting. Categorizing a group of people as ethnic, diasporic, transnational, or even cultural is much more difficult than it was before globalization, especially with vague, overlapping boundaries in definitions (Rozen, 2008; Braziel, 2008).

Without solid classification systems to establish defining characteristics, the transmission process as a whole remains enigmatic. Transmission, not as a static process, but rather changing in light of second-generation immigrants, religious, cultural, class, and historical connotations creates a labyrinth of complexity. Through recognizing the changing meaning of diaspora and the qualities that it exudes, transmission, as well as cultural ties that will shape the future of global society, takes a more solid definition.
A Multilayered Definition

Globalization has not created diaspora, but rather augmented its presence as a “form of social organization” (Cohen, 1997). Brubaker (2005) identifies it as a “way of formulating the identities and loyalties of a population.” Diaspora, originating from the idea of exile, exhibits a variety of qualities beyond exile in post 1990s academics (Esman, 1996). Diaspora is currently defined beyond biological to integrate historical, cultural, and institutional (Braziel, 2008). It exists as a social form that manifests on Kalra, Haur, and Hutnyk’s (2005) three stages: the global, the local state (where the diaspora has settled), and the homeland state (where the diaspora have originated).

Brubaker (2005) describes three traditional criteria for diaspora as the following: dispersion, homeland-orientation, and boundary-maintenance. Dispersion is a key concept of “diaspora,” derived from the Greek word “diaspeiro” meaning “to distribute” (Vertovec, 2002; Rozen, 2008). Distribution spans global spaces creating the crux of the diasporic landscape. Dispersed from the “cultural home,” - drawn from Hardwick’s (2010) idea of the space the group considers the cultural origin - the diaspora does not fully acclimate to the host culture (Tolland, 2007). Its relationship to the cultural home as well as the host culture become more convoluted and blurred over time (Cohen, 1997).
Origins and Evolution

The Jewish people hold the closest ties to diaspora through a long history of dispersion beginning 586 BCE through the Babylonian exile from Judea until the 1948 reclaiming of the home (Rozen, 2008; Braziel, 2008). The Jewish population in the United States, as the initial holders of the title, maintains a connection to Israel, but must reconcile identity in terms of hybridity (Rozen, 2008). The push to conform or assimilate in the host society disrupts the notion of purist identity (Rozen, 2008). The complex nature of the Jewish identity and its dispersion throughout many countries changes the original notion of diaspora.

Increasingly, with ready access to the cultural home through the Internet, ICTs, and “bridgespace,” the integration process incorporates more of the cultural home (Rafael et al., 2006). The migrating population can uphold its language and culture with greater ease in the global era. Over time, insertion becomes more heterogeneous and enhances the original cultural, increasing the hybridity of the original identity (Rafael et al., 2006; Rozen, 2008; Tölölyan, 2007).

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6 “Bridgespace” defined in Chapter 1, page 7.
Hybridity, Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and Translocalism

Hybridity is a key concept to the diaspora for it cannot exist merely as a method of classification, but in the form of a non-static process or condition (Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005). Those inside of the group as well as those outside of it, renegotiate meanings of identity through language, religion, and customs (Mohann, 2002). A constant mixing of culture between the diaspora and the host culture dismantles the notion of purity in the host culture and the diasporic community (Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005).

Ethnicity

Hybridity is important in differentiating some of the overlapping conditions of ethnicity and diaspora – the diaspora continues a dialogue between two places while ethnicity simply preserves the nation-state in a non-dialectic form (Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005). Ethnicity implies a shared culture as well as a shared history, but does not always adhere to those principles (Barth, 1969). Wallach (2005) defines culture as “fundamental values guiding human behavior.”

Because it is not possible to specify precise boundaries on culture, it is often difficult to determine where ethnicity and culture traverse (Barth, 1969). This might imply that ethnicity is a biological occurrence; however, Barth’s (1969) notion of ethnicity is somewhat outdated. In light of globalization, ethnicity is a somewhat limiting and disappearing term because it uses difference
to construct an ‘other’ (Brown, 2006; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996). In addition to
the above, ethnicity, used in the United States, implies not only ‘otherness,’ but
also ‘non-whiteness’ (Berg, 2012; Berry & Henderson, 2002; Braziel, 2008;

“In searching for a rigorous definition of the ethnic group we have seen
that the externally imposed official criteria – often quite artificial, arbitrary, or
politically motivated – are of limited value” (Zelinsky, 2001, 20). Diaspora is the
most non-limiting way in which these elements can be incorporated beyond the
biological and cultural to a continued dialogue with a cultural home (Braziel,
2008.)

Transnationalism

Diaspora also intersects with transnationalism because it is transnational
community, but remains separate as a social construct; it is geographically and
spatially dispersed with the notion of collective identity rather than moving across
borders (Dufoix, 2008; Faist, 2010; Mohann 2002). Unlike transnationalism,
which deals with recent migrant flows and can span different nationalities as well
as cultural origins, diasporas cling to a specific belonging over a long period of
time (Dufoix, 2008; Faist, 2010).
Fig. 2. If we are to view Cultural Origins, Transnationalism, and Diaspora as conditions, we can see overlapping definitions such as in this diagram. These overlapping spaces represent relationships with which, a group of people might choose to identify. For example, the center space might represent a community in the United States such as the Tamil community that draws from each area (Data gathered from King & Christou, 2010; Dufoix, 2008; Faist, 2010; Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005).

However, it is important to understand the direct links of transnationalism as well as cultural origins and their part in the diasporic condition and connections to the homeland (King & Christou, 2010). Increasingly, ethnicity, transnationalism, and diaspora intersect and derive some meaning from one another. (See Figure 2).
Translocalism

It is difficult to reconcile a common history in many cases where the history is entirely separate. Brubaker (2005) concludes that diasporas are often thought of as single entities, but how much of the common history must the diaspora share in order to become a single entity? This is where thinking of diaspora in terms of practice – non-static and ever changing – becomes beneficial.

In addition, the emergence of translocalism, a by-product of expanding transnationalism, reduces the importance the overall nation-state to highlight the importance of local identity (Yanacopulos, 2002). Nation-states are often too large to create intimacy with the dispersed community (Cohen, 1997). A new way of thinking of diaspora as practice or a state rather than a static entity, allows a reshaping of the concept to fit in ideas of translocalism. If we revisit the Venn diagram (Figure 2) drawn from King (2010), Dufoix (2008), Faist (2010), and Kalra, Haur, and Hutnyk (2005), we can fit Yanacopulos’ (2002) concept in as a product of at least one, if not all three concepts. (See Figure 3)
While it is heavily a byproduct of transnationalism, translocalism is also a product of the interaction of transnationalism, cultural origins, and diaspora; occurs through separate identities and histories; and is helpful when observing state-based identities. (Yanacopoulos, 2002).

*Migration*

Diaspora (each group differing within based on motivational factors and varying reasons for displacement), mandates a form of “diasporic journey,” or migration to settle in the new home of host culture (Mohann, 2002). Migration,
once defined as the movement of people from one culture to another, is no longer inactive upon settling, but rather exists as a type of “global nomadism” caused by global economic “push” and “pull” factors (Jordan & Düvell, 2003). A continued dialogue surfaces from the hostland to the culture home (Jordan & Düvell, 2003).

While the diaspora may relocate to as host culture for economic reasons, it continues to invest in localities of the cultural home (Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005). These economic factors create an extended definition of diaspora to include components outlined by Braziel (2008) from “political asylees,” “exiles,” “post-colonial emigrés,” and “refugees” to “economic migrants” as well. Cohen (1997) further expands diaspora types to incorporate refugee, colonial, labor, business-professional cultural, and/or hybrid.

Because diaspora now integrates migrants from various backgrounds including economic, the current term has an inherently different meaning than its predecessor (Boyarin & Boyarin, 2002). When Jonathan and David Boyarin (2002) define diaspora in designating the Jewish identity, they indicate that it is a resource in “rethinking the model nation-state system” as indicative of normalcy rather than a state of disorder – in essence, diaspora is inevitable, unavoidable, and increasing. Diasporas confront traditional hegemonic power structures and expand the concept of nation-states because they begin to question the notion of single origin or identity (Braziel, 2008).
Tolland (2007) classifies diaspora as a collective identity beyond the cultural home that sustains “language, religious, social and cultural practice.” This can exist close to the homeland identity or as a mixed multicultural form of two or more cultures (Tölölyan, 2007; Gellner, 1983). The diaspora holds the cultural home as the first home that dictates what should take place in the new home (Safran, 1991; Safran, 2008).

Collective Identity, Development, and Phases

The connection to the cultural home varies through development as well as phases of occurrence. Mohann (2002) addresses that diasporic development can happen in place, through space and across space.

In place, deals with the clustering and development within the host culture. It incorporates “social capital” defined by Putnam (1993, p. 36) as “features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.” These can surface in cultural gatherings within diasporic communities.

Through space, incorporates co-ethnic members of other countries to benefit economically from global connections, while across space, develops the cultural home through politics, economics, or other methods. For example, in India (as a country), the Hindu Nationalist movement is greatly influenced by
both those in India as well as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) (Mohann, 2002). These developments create a dialectic relationship with the cultural home, while adjusting to, as well as implanting traditions in, the host culture.

The development of the diasporic identity surfaces in a more observable way through Rafael et al.’s (2006) three phases: construction of institutions, crystallization of collective identity, and public discourse of members and leaders. Institutions and institutional leaders serve to nourish the identity as well as encourage the individuals to uphold the identity while giving the diaspora a chance to participate in social functions and structured gatherings (Rafael et al., 2006). The institutions can carry the community through reference to music, literature, and film (Rafael et al., 2006; Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005).

Collective identity allows the group to share characteristics that distinguish them from those outside of the group (Rafael et al., 2006). The characteristics of diaspora that had original connotations of victim-oriented and isolationistic expand the collective identity to incorporate those from the same cultural home in other countries (Cohen, 2001). This pan-national group identity is not only an aspect of the diaspora, but it also exists as a way to maintain the cultural home through transmitted elements (Vertovec, 2002).

Public discourse of leaders in the community serves as an authority on the replication of the culture (Rafael et al., 2006). Diasporas ‘formalize’
organizations and create authority through bureaucratic bodies (Sheffer, 2003). This leadership does not have to be limited to leaders within the host culture’s diasporic community, but can also incorporate authorities from the home as well as authorities in other communities abroad.

**Practice vs. Category**

Dufoix (2008) argues that diaspora goes beyond collective identity in the form of categorization to exist as practice. Dufoix’s (2008) four modes of diasporic practice occur through national community organizations, local organizations, in a “transstate” mode with no physical home, or as a state of exile. Dufoix (2008) stresses that these modes do not exist in pure static form and must be looked at as practiced states, capable of shifting from one to another. Relationships with the cultural home evolve over time, as do states in which the diaspora exists. Concepts of “here” and “there” in the relationship of host culture to the cultural home can lose their meaning to the diasporic community (Dufoix, 2008). For example, the ‘Indian’ diaspora of indentured servants created by British Colonial rule do not remember the same India that diaspora of state-specific members post-independence remember (Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005). In addition, many of the diasporic communities preserve the “old ways” with ferocity while the cultural home changes with modernization (Dufoix, 2008).
Reconciling these differences creates problems with defining diaspora not only in the sense of historical change, but also in reference to region, religion, caste, race, and state-based divisions. Those outside of the culture may categorize a diasporic group (or redefine it as an “ethnic group”) as a single homogenous entity, when, in reality, it is quite culturally and historically complex (Mohann, 2002). A subdivision of a larger diaspora creates a smaller diaspora within itself (Dufoix, 2008). Regional difference in China – Teochiu or Catonese, etc. – or India – Punjabi, Tamil, or Bengali, etc. – create various divisions within the larger “national” diaspora (Dufoix, 2008). Even the initial notion of the Jewish diaspora integrated both Ashkenazim – from Northern Europe – as well as Sephardim – from the Iberian Peninsula (Cohen, 1997).

Number six of Cohen’s (1997) nine conditions for diaspora creates contention in grouping diasporas from different backgrounds together stating that the grouping that creates separation should be based on “a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, and the belief in a common fate.” Without the common history, it becomes difficult to maintain.

Problems with Diaspora and Cultural Landscape Fusion

While distinct histories and issues of non-homogeneous identity create the need to view diaspora as practice, so does the need for resolving the time factor. How much time must pass before a diaspora is considered a diaspora? Initially,
the diaspora, occurs as a migrant community, but over time acclimates itself to the diasporic status making boundaries difficult to pinpoint (King & Christou, 2010).

Additionally, beyond the time factor, is in the relationship to the second-generation, especially one that occupies dual backgrounds and nationalities (King & Christou, 2010). Ethnicity and cultural background reproduces necessary parts of identity through various modes of practice, but with reproductions of multiple cultures, it is difficult to pinpoint in which diaspora the second-generation children fit (King & Christou, 2010).

While these issues are ongoing in academia, they are important to establish literature for understanding the process of transmission as well as deconstruction of overly broad ethnic categories. It is through adapting and reconsidering the way we look at the term, that we can progress beyond its definitional barriers. As Brubaker (2005) states, diaspora must evolve from the concept of “entity” to a type of “destiny” – a process by which a group of people change or rearrange relationships to identity as well as cultural home.

Diasporic practice is best understood through uses of spaces as well as sounds. Practice through fluidity allows us to see beyond fixed categories in terms of a more practical evaluation. A cultural landscape can reveal much about a diaspora, its cultural background, and integration methods.
Cultural Landscape – A more comprehensive definition

*Diasporic Visibility*

A working definition of diaspora as a non-static process or practice identifies how it manifests in terms of visibility. Diasporas conglomerate in a “set of micro-places,” creating a sense of “community” through “iconography” (Bruneau, 2010). This iconography and visual landscape delineates key features that recreate the cultural home for the diaspora and its community. Rottle (2008) evaluates rural cultural landscapes through the breakdown of *processes* and *components*. The *components* include the physical parts that create the processes, while the *processes* capture cultural traditions, the use of both natural and built landscape as well as the organization of a space (Rottle, 2008).

The diasporic practice is best be observed through its imprint in the cultural landscape. From an anthropological sense, diffusion and spread are key components of the landscape idea as they are diaspora (Brubaker, 2005; Wallach, 2005). Diaspora and landscape are best observed together as diaspora is crucial to grasping changing landscapes because it integrates the sense of spread and diffusion. In addition, the diaspora/landscape integration is useful to comment on the fixed, standardized academic categories that limit understanding of a culture.
Cultural Landscape – key components

The concept of space creates landscape, whether it is physical in the form of movement or social (Ross, 2008). In order to understand landscape, we must first visit the notion of space. Space includes locations in which to perform rituals, everyday activities, and biological or cultural habits that reinforce identity (Lawson, 2001).

Space, in geographical terms, is looked at through the lens of a cultural landscape, which contributes much to an academic understanding of various cultures (Arreola, 1995; Cosgrove, 1985; Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Growth, 1997; Frazier 2011; Lawson, 2001). The driving force behind the cultural landscape is technological as well as economic (Wallach, 2005). The spread of culture nurtures a romanticized impression of home that brings to light art, aesthetics, heritage, and shared identity (Fint, 2008; Lowenthal, 1997; Wallach, 2005). Not only do cultural landscapes have the potential to reveal intricacies of a culture, but they also change and evolve continuously. For instance, 500 years ago, the landscape of North America reflected that of the indigenous people; a direct contrast to the redefined space of European descendants that we see today (Wallach, 2005; Zelinsky, 1997).

The term “landscape” itself has an assortment of meanings depending on the discipline, but in the geographical sense, it surpasses scenery alone (Muir, 1999). “Reading the landscape” helps us understand ways in which to view the
world outside of our own perspective (Mason, 2008). It reflects not only the human relationship to nature, but also the human relationship to other humans and other cultural landscapes as well (Melnick, 2008). While landscape is indicative of a physical space, it is important to note that it is not interchangeable with region (Muir, 1999). Landscapes denote a specific area of cultural assertion and they can manifest a region, but are not bound by its borders – much like a diaspora. However, they can create new borders in which to reflect a distinct culture (Muir, 1999).

Culture landscapes symbolize the relationship between the people and the environment or the relationship of the culture to a physical place (Coones, 1985; Muir, 1999). They can also serve as “commentaries” on political beliefs, class, and religious affiliations (Muir, 1999).

Interaction in social groups and their contact with specific spaces reinforces a shared identity. Spaces create meaning through reproducing social life and social relations in an everyday, banal experience (Groth & Bressi, 1997; Hayden, 1997; Fint, 2008). A “humanized” or cultural landscape contains human elements revealed through uses of the space (Muir, 1999). It incorporates the interaction of people with a specific place or under the guidance of a specific place (Hardwick, 2012).

A place is not necessarily bound, but rather can be reproduced in any space, redefining its inherent meaning (Hayden, 1997). A “sense of place”
develops from connection to ancestors or belonging to the cultural home (Muir, 1999). A difference between “real” and “perceived” landscape indicates that the space that the group remembers may or may not directly reflect the cultural home (Muir, 1999). Even within observing a landscape, cultural factors can sway the perception of its meaning. What might appear hostile to one group can prove overwhelmingly inviting to another (Muir, 1999).

Muir (1999) describes two sources from which to assess landscapes: *The object* – its qualities and aesthetic relationship to the other objects and *the observer* – relationships between the observer and the object and the relationship of the observer to the societies or culture. It is important to utilize a mixed qualitative methods approach when evaluating a landscape or using ethnographic techniques because the insider/outsider perspective changes the nature and meaning of a landscape (Besio, 2003; Skop, 2012).

A landscape can also serve as a symbol that varies from culture to culture in the reflection of Earth’s physical attributes (Muir, 1999). Ideas of the sun, moon, water, mountains, stars, etc. all connote different meanings depending on the origin. Commonalities in language, signs, music, dance, and events between the cultural home and the cultural landscape, show what evokes a sense of belonging through audio and visual cues.

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7 The example on page 10 of the memories of separate Indias observed by Indian diaspora of indentured servants from British Colonial India and the post-independent/post-colonial diaspora (Kalra, Haur, & Hutnyk, 2005) demonstrates this concept.
Origins

The term *cultural landscape* originated from Sauer in 1925 and has evolved to incorporate a number of approaches (Riesenweber, 2008). As Sauer indicates, “geography is the science of observation” and the cultural landscape embodies everything that a group exhibits in practice and structure (Riesenweber, 2008). Landscapes not only mimic the home, but also shape the way in which a group interacts (Riesenweber, 2008). Cultural landscapes exist as a type of *cultural resource*, much like the natural landscape act as a natural resource (Boyle 2008; Longstreth, 2008).

Landscapes as well as places are not fixed, but rather fluid (Massey, 1994; Reisenweber, 2008; Mason, 2008). Global dispersion drives specific cultures or diasporas to hold onto the cultural home, while fluidity provides researchers a way to see the material attributes that survive from both the past and present cultural home (Massey, 1994; Reisenweber, 2008).

Drawing from an outsider’s perspective, buildings house cultural centers showing that these spaces are not competing, but rather reinforcing one another (Groth & Bressi, 1997). Groups, migrants or diasporas that relocate must utilize to the existing architecture on the landscape (Groth & Bressi, 1997; Zelinsky, 1997).
Fig. 4, Fig. 5 and Fig. 6, Structural exterior of Landerhaven Executive Caterers located in Beachwood, OH. (All photos in this document were taken by the author unless otherwise specified.)
Fig. 7, Fig. 8 and Fig. 9, The Landerhaven space in Beachwood, OH is utilized for a Gujarati wedding on August 14, 2010. (Above Left) Ceremony reconstruction in garden space, non-occupied. (Above Right) Exterior parking lot (Bharat ceremony). (Above) Ceremony reconstruction, occupied. (Images courtesy of New Image Photography).

The reproduction process shows similarities between landscape elements of the cultural home and landscape elements of the host culture. Diasporas reproduce culture using elements of the cultural home as well as the host culture (Duncan, 1990; Vertovec, 2002). They evolve and serve not only as a way to preserve the past, but also the present and the future as a shared experience (Jenks, 2008). Integration of experience shows more than a simple reflection – it
shows a process of experience. The landscape reflects experience as well as history and can be utilized to understand as well as approach the past, present, and future of a group.

*Symbols beyond transmission*

Landscapes can be more than pure representation of a culture, they can be used as a means of differentiation or commentary on prejudice or past histories (Jenks, 2008; Bate, 2009; Ravi, 2008). Landscapes can be used as *symbolic capital* as well as to denote power to a group of people (Alderman, 2008; Jenks, 2008).

Jenks (2008) describes the evolutionary process of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles as a revealed experience and a symbol of “injustice.” After many Japanese were forced from their homes during World War II, they returned with new residential patterns leaving Little Tokyo as an emblematic home. Its meaning today integrates the discriminations, prejudices and crimes felt by the Japanese Americans with the idea of recovery and rebuilding a future, to its new formation of cultural tourism (Jenks, 2008).

*Visual Landscape*

The notion of landscape relies on visual and spatial information (Groth &
Bressi, 1997). Aesthetics, often referred to as “the science of sensory knowledge,” evolves through the human interaction with culture while meaning of a place is derived from imagery (Howett, 1997; Cosgrove, 1997). Principles of visual methodologies such as composition, color, light, spatial organization, and content can be applied in understanding and evaluating a culture’s physical manifestation (Rose, 2012). The landscape exudes the same principles used in recognizing key elements of a photograph or other type of visual reproduction.

Languages of space shape experience and interaction through related features that build relationship between the space itself and the objects within that space (Gatrell, 1991). Architecture and placement solidifies the relationships between space and the objects through many of Lawson’s (2001) mechanisms (Jackson, 1997).

Lawson (2001) identifies space through mechanisms that he refers to as the “languages” of space that include Scale of movement – the viewer’s movement in relation to the space; foreground and background – foreground indicative of the subject or the focal point of the space; meaning – intended or perceived; and context – in the situation or landscape as a whole.

Landscape is not limited to the perceiver and the objects of perception alone, but also incorporates practice as well as participation (Howett, 1997). It exists as a cause and effect relationship that drives supply and demand for a particular space (Holdsworth, 1997). It is important to observe where and why a
landscape surfaces and view spaces in terms of practice and activity (Cresswell, 2003).

To interpret a landscape, Riley (1997) outlines three methods that he calls, the visible, the visual and the vicarious. The first portrays origins and meanings of a cultural landscape, while the second surpasses visuals to integrate evaluation, meaning, and aesthetic experience. The final method is the internal, personal narrative and experience. All, not just one, of these methods must be used to fully evaluate the research at hand (Riley, 1997).

Using these methods, spaces can also reveal hidden or even blatant power relationships – not only in the landscape, but also the way of viewing the landscape (Alderman, 2008; Jenks, 2008; Mitchell, 2003). Fusco (2005) uses the landscape of US and Canadian sport spaces to construct a framework for white hegemony and normalcy. It is the comparison to these normal or standard spaces, the “ethnic” or diasporic space reveals difference (Fusco, 2005; Zelinsky, 2001).

**Soundscape’s role in landscape**

Geographers often portray cultural landscapes as existing in a visual nature alone through optical means, including semiotics, toponyms, and the study of graphical elements. However, a true experience of place occurs through a variety of sense (Hayden, 1997). Sight is only one of the many senses used to
perceive the world and is often coupled with sound in assessment (Holdsworth, 1997; Pijanowski et al., 2011; Zhang & Kang, 2007).

Geographers have not identified the soundscape as an intricate part of the landscape nor examined its effects on cultural landscape perception. Scholars have criticized traditional landscape analysis for creating a static interpretation through a visuals-alone approach and emphasize that landscapes to be reframed in terms of “practiced environments” (Holdsworth, 1997; Cresswell, 2003; Jain, 2008). In order to observe environments, I propose that practice is best understood through the amalgamation of both sound and visuals. Holdsworth (1997) presents five frames for understanding landscapes that include, globalization, locality, historical, symbolism and landscape evolution. I propose not only the amalgamation of sound and visuals, but also that sound or soundscape should exist as a sixth frame of analysis.

Sound amplifies and solidifies the already existing visuals in the landscape (Pijanowski et al., 2011). Southworth (1969) was the first to identify soundscapes as an important part of the urban landscape. What he refers to as a sonic sign, communicates the information of an item better than the visual itself (Southworth, 1969). Sonic signs create images in the viewers mind in conjunction with visual stimuli to reinforce the concept of what they are referencing (Southworth, 1969). In the case of the diasporic landscape, sounds reinforces cultural home.
While this thesis uses an overall concept of soundscape, the particulars of sound are important to theorize the overall concept. Hartmann (1998) outlines key components of sound that include pure tones – the most basic sound signal identified by timbre – the “tone color”\(^8\); loudness; periodic complex tones – often musical or even speech tones; and harmonics – objects produce their own natural frequency. In music, harmonics are a pleasing sound.\(^9\)

In terms of transmitted culture, the loudness or complex tones identify language, while harmonics identify music. The terminology is not as essential as the concepts to situating the notion of soundscape into the realm of diasporic transmission. It is through language, music and verbal cultural practices that a diaspora reveals the complexities of identity. I would also argue for the inclusion of what I call environmental tones – the naturally occurring soundscape that permeates the environment at hand (Miller, 2007). For example, the chirping of birds or the sound of cars would constitute environmental tones.

**Soundscape in everyday environments**

The US National Park Service in Miller’s (2007) study of park soundscapes, recognizes that sound remains an integral part of both resources and

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8 Highness or lowness of a frequency.

9 The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “harmonic” as an adjective as “pleasing to the ear” or “of an integrated nature.” Secondly, it is defined as a noun as “a component frequency of a complex wave (as of electromagnetic energy) that is an integral multiple of the fundamental frequency.” (Merriam-Webster definition)
landscapes. Htouris (2001) argues that sound is not given enough emphasis in the study of cultural identity, yet contributes to everyday representation. Every scene needs analysis of its soundscape in order to evaluate descriptions (Raimbault, Lavandier & Berengier, 2003).

Sound integrated with the visual solidifies and strengthens ties to the cultural home (Shafer, 1994). Audio signals convey “power, energy, and ultimately information” while Signal Detection Theory (TSD) highlights how an audio signal is recognized through any tone that an individual is familiar with (Hartman, 1998, 24). In a cultural landscape, the familiarity would be the cultural home.

As the visuals define the internal space in a tangible way, the language and sounds reinforce the structure (Jenkins, 2011; Schafer, 1994). Aesthetics in written script and spoken language of a culture contribute to the presence of language in the cultural landscape, especially in the case of the Tamil people where the language is an intricate part of reflection (Bate, 2009). Language alone exists as a spatial concept (Ross, 2008). It creates a relationship between the *signifier*, the sound produced and the *signified*, what the sound evokes (Ross, 2008). Ross (2008) uses the word “tree“ to show that the word itself evokes a concept of a tree. The space through familiarity is conceptualized in the form of language (Ross, 2008). A more concrete definition enacts sound acts as a way
where objects are equivalent to resonators, meaning they produce and respond more to particular frequencies (Hartmann, 1998).

Additionally, the representation of sound in the photojournalistic field validates the argument that the soundscape plays an important role in visuals (Jenkins, 2011). In today’s journalistic standards, it is not only important to convey the visual information of a particular scene, but also the vocal audio and environmental sounds to give the most accurate depiction of an event (Jenkins, 2011). Even if it is not in the form of an audio recording, it appears in the form of a caption (Jenkins, 2011; Kobre & Brill, 2004).

*The Vicarious Landscape*

It is not enough to simply understand the landscape, but also to incorporate the personal experience of the researcher (Anderson, 2006; Antonsich, 2010; Riley, 1997). As the insider/outsider perspective changes the way in which the researcher views the landscape, it ultimately affects the experience and thus, interpretation (Muir, 1999). Social constructions of gender and background change not only the way that the landscape affects the researcher, but also the interactions of the researcher with the people creating the landscape (Anderson, 2006; Besio, 2003; Denzen, 2006; Jones, 2013) The researcher is essentially part of the process as well as the landscape (Anderson, 2006).
Autoethnographic techniques to understand landscape and transmission are useful as long as they are restricted to understanding the research at hand (Atkinson, 2006). They provide context behind the research process, but also keep the intentions of the researcher transparent (Anderson, 2006; Jones, 2013). This is important, especially when looking at a landscape, to refrain from reinforcing the normalcy of “whiteness” or construction of an “other” (Zelinsky, 2001).

Migration and Experience Intertwined

To have a complete understanding of the transmission process through a cultural landscape, we must understand its complexity through visuals, sound, and practiced environments. The definition of diaspora as a non-static process helps us understand relationships to space as well as relationships to culture. It also decomposes fixed categories and identities as people use space in varying ways (Lawson, 2001).

To evaluate an imprint of a culture, a diaspora, or a set of people, we must take into account the varying definitions of space, landscape, and soundscape as we take the definition of diaspora – a non-static process. It is also important to stray from solid, fixed or “other” categories that “normalize” whiteness as a basis of analysis in the United States (Zelinsky, 2001). Space continues to evolve, the movement of people continues to evolve, and the idea of landscape as a reflection of culture continues to expand notions of identity as a fluid process. Participant
observation and auto/ethnographic methods can help to expand and understand space as well as culture.

Diasporas and landscapes work well together. They symbolize hybridity or blending of cultures as well as reveal intricacies that keep the culture heterogeneous. As concepts are best understood through fluidity, approaches should be amalgamations of various techniques and methods.

Language is an integral part of the overall cultural landscape. Language is not just visual in terms of semiotics, nor auditory in terms of soundscape, it is also a reflection of space and how we use space – it is a way of seeing, acting, and interacting with space in relation to the cultural landscape (Lawson, 2001).

The next chapter will outline diaspora and cultural landscape: addressing both “pan-Indian” identity as a construct and the state-based “Tamil” identity. More importantly, it will outline Tamil notions of landscape, space, ideology, and soundscape through literature and visuals. Once these concepts are understood in terms of fluid modes of practice, we can begin to see where the Tamil identity fits in terms of transmission to the United States. It is also through ethnographic and autoethnographic methods that we can situate notions of insider versus outsider.
CHAPTER 3

TAMIL IDENTITY

While the previous chapter defines diaspora and frames it within cultural landscape concepts, Chapter 3 addresses the Tamil identity through histories and cultural nuances. India, as a group is interesting not only because its diaspora is one of the largest growing minorities in the United States, but also because it demonstrates the prevalence of regional identity (Skop, 2012). This analysis, though focused on India, is useful for other cultural groups in the United States as well as dispersed populations throughout the world. In addition, India’s model through the Tamil people – who share many commonalities to a pan-Indian people, yet demonstrate an entirely separate connection to history, literature, and cultural ideals – will provide a way to observe other regional identities of India as well as regional identities across the globe.

In this Chapter, I outline the importance of the Tamil people as a diasporic culture in the US and as an equal subset of the pan-Indian identity, the importance of soundscape in distinguishing the regional culture and the unity and interconnectedness of sound, visuals, music, dance, architecture, and other elements. I then briefly discuss the Indian diaspora as viewed by the Indian government as well as its approaches to Non-Resident Indians (NRI)s and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO)s. Finally, I discuss the Tamil community as it exists.
abroad and specifically in Northeast Ohio. To address the latter points, I outline the difference of regional identities, a chronological timeline of Tamil history, specific historical elements that shape the culture and importance of literary texts and soundscape.

**Regional and Tamil Identities**

Differences in sounds and culture based on language help distinguish many of the regional identities of India. (Rangaswamy, 1994; Sahoo, 2006) Skop (2009, 2012) and Rangaswamy (1994) identify a pan-Indian landscape but attribute the regional landscapes and state boundaries as a source of primary identity for Indians. Skop (2009, 2012) further classifies the Indian landscape as “invisible”- unseen by those from outside the culture because of the group’s scattered settlement patterns - highlighting “transitory” vs. “permanent” spaces.
Fig. 10, Language diversity in India. The Dravidian languages are concentrated in the South with the Tamil language having the most Dravidic influence (Shown in dark red). (Steve Huffman maps).

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).
The Southern states have longer and deeper ties to the culture because of the age of the language. 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). Purely Tamil language, Tamil script, and Tamil visuals dominate the movie industry of the South, serving to “dismantle” the colonial “North Indian majoritarian” views and visuals established in Bollywood. (Ravi, 2008)

There is thus a bewildering variety of languages spoken among Indians, but what makes the issue even more intriguing is the fact that language is not merely a medium of communication. It is an entire culture, a way of life, with its own tradition of music, dance, theater, literature, and even cuisine. (Rangaswamy, 1994, 446)

The Tamil people hold their language - both aesthetics in written script and spoken Tamil – as an intricate part of the geography, visuals, and interaction in the culture (Bate, 2009; Stein, 1977). Without the added element of sound, this regional landscape might be overlooked, in favor of a pan-Indian identity.
The Tamil Culture

“Tamil Nadu is the most representative state of South India and its Dravidian cultural stream” (Raghavan, 1973, 2). “Dravidian” as an adaption of “Tiru (v) idam,” meaning “Land of Shrines” (Panneerselvam, 2008). Tamil Nadu is known as the “Land of Temples” and encourages many of the fine arts such as dance, music, and other forms of cultural expression (Balasubramanian, 2008; Raghavan, 1973).

Fig. 11, Tamil Nadu highlighted within the state of India.
Shielded from many of invading influences of the North, Tamil Nadu holds the oldest ties to language; classical music and dance; and other classical art forms (Raghavan, 1973; Schwartzberg & Bajpai, 1992). The pre-Aryan language of Tamil, even adopted by linguistic minorities, serves as a method of maintaining state-based identity (Panneerselvam, 2008; Raghavan, 1973).

The History of South India and Tamil Nadu

It is necessary to construct a frame of analysis before identifying the complexities of the Tamil identity. As many with many cultures, history molds and creates the culture that survives. As Barnett (1976) notes, much of the Tamil identity is drawn from some of the earliest Dravidian ways of the past. Regional identity, though it may encompass various religions and castes, shares a common history, unlike the pan-Indian identity. 10

From North to South

India as a country has a complex history. The North Indian history is different than the South in many ways (Sastri, 2009). Natural geographical isolation from the North, including landmarks such as the Western Ghats and Coorg Hills, establishes a specific history for the Southern part of India and Tamil

10 It is important to understand the role of history in cultural transmission and identity. Not only of India, but of any other culture as well.
While aspects of Aryan culture spread to the South, the cultural exchange allowed for a Southern-specific development (Kulke & Rothermund, 1986). The South did not partake in the pan-Indian power, but rather remained a ‘supra-regional’ power from the earliest definitive records in 560 BCE to India’s independence in 1947 (Schwartzberg & Bajpai, 1992).

South Indian history can be traced back about 300,000 years; however, the history, particularly in Tamil Nadu, is vague and scattered (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009). While historians have not solidified specific dates for all periods of Tamil Nadu due to lack of source material, there are a few periods provide extensive detail and historical accounts (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Subrahmanian, 1972). Approximate dates serve as a guideline for many events and eras that shape the Tamilian identity. The territory of Tamil Nadu today is smaller than what it once was known as Tamilaham or Tamilnad\textsuperscript{11} (Kalidos, 1976; Selby & Peterson, 2008; Stein, 1977; Subrahmanian, 1972). This chapter focuses on the main historical events and timeline that helped to shape and structure Tamil identity of today.

\textit{The Sangam Age}

As the Vedic Age defines North India, so the Sangam Age defines the South (Kalidos, 1976). Tamilaham was broken into the territories and lines of the

\textsuperscript{11} For the remainder of this section, I will use Tamiliham.
Cheras, the Pandyas, and the Cholas (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Subrahmanian, 1972). The Sangam culture in these territories idealized the trinity of *iyal* (poetry), *isai* (music), and *natakam* (dance) (Kalidos, 1976). The social philosophy the Sangam Age followed “*yadum ure yavarum kelir,*” which translated means “all our lands, all our kinsman” (Kalidos, 1976).

The Sangam Age is crucial to the Tamil history and Tamil identity. The food, diet, dress, family structure, and values are all similar to those found today (Chattopadhyaya, 2008). The Sangam Age also established much of the Tamil literature\(^\text{12}\) and classics used in today’s Tamil Sangam instruction for future generations, including Tamil communities in the United States.

The *Tolkappiyam*, one of the great literary grammatical works in Tamil history, outlines *tinai*, the association of geographical lands and features with specific behaviors; *akam*, the interior themes, often love; and *puram*, the exterior themes of non-love (Ramanujan, 1967; Rathinasabapathy, 2008; Selby & Peterson, 2008; Sivathamby, 1974; Stein, 1977). Tinai embodies five geographical regions as well as the literary landscapes (Ramanujan, 1967; Pandian, 2011).

The land was divided into five regions of *Kurinji* (hill country), *Mullai* (forest country), *Marudam* (plains and fields), *Neydal* (states near bodies of water), and *Palai* (arid country) (Kalidos, 1976; Kulke and Rothermund, 1986;)

\(^{12}\) For other works, see the Tirukkural (Balasubramaniam, 1962).
Manuel, 1997; Pandian, 2011; Ramanujan, 1967; Selby & Peterson, 2008; Stein, 1977; Subrahmanian, 1972). Each of the five lands had its own form of *svarams* (musical notes) as well as instruments.

The literature from the Sangam (also known as Caṅkam) period defines much of the geographic aesthetics and “grammar” of space (Selby & Peterson, 2008). The Tolkappiyam is one of the first works to outline and define grammatical structure of Tamil literature (Manuel, 1997; Ramanujan, 1967; Selby & Peterson, 2008). Though the exact date of publication is unknown, historians place it around the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century CE (Manuel, 1997; Ramanujan, 1967; Selby & Peterson, 2008). Much of the Sangam and post-Sangam literature outlines a moral code that focuses on a deeper, inherent meaning, rather than the action alone (Manuel, 1997).

Poetry, according to the Manuel’s (1997) interpretation of the Tolkappiyam, is outlined as structure, marapu (tradition), valakku (content), implication and medium (language emphasis) – one of the most important of the five. These five components create the Tamil notion of poetry – complex with many meanings and relationships (Manuel, 1997). Many references to sound and soundscape appear integrated even in the poetry of the Sangam Age.
Table 1, Manuel (1997, 37) identifies the 12 elements set by the Tolkappiyam, many containing allusions to soundscape and sound quality.

While these elements are not necessarily an intricate part of the literature’s message, they place importance on sound and its qualities. Manuel (1997, 81) stresses the importance of the sound in literature, highlighting some of the components such as cerivu/cilttam – density of words and similar sounds; olukicai – harsh, sweet, or soft sounds; and camanilai – mixing of sounds.

The Tolkappiyam outlines the importance of the literary structure in reference to sound and the way in which it is delivered. Ramanujan (1967) divides the Tolkappiyam into three sections of language including sounds, words, and meaning. The language employs not only the written and spoken Tamil tongue,
but also the five geographical landscapes of *tinaĩ* (Ramanujan, 1967; Sivathamby, 1974; Selby & Peterson, 2008). The *Tolkappiyam* is not the only present day Sangam text that highlights sound. Another Tamil literary work, the *Silappadikaram* also know as *The Anklet Story*, describes many intricacies of not only the sound, but also the dance and culture (Atikal, 1977; Atikal, 1993; Nandakumar, 2008; Ravindranathan, 2008).

**The Decline of the Sangam Age and the Rise of the Pallavas**

While scholars and historians cannot place an exact date for the Sangam period, they estimate its decline around 250 CE (Kalidos, 1976; Subrahmanian, 1972). After the Sangam Age, the invasion of the Kalabhras pushed Tamilaham into what mimicked the European Dark Ages. Further attempts at Aryanization from invaders and rival attempts at Dravidianizing the Aryan invaders created an exchange of culture and language (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Subrahmanian, 1972). Sanskrit made its way to the Southern reaches of the subcontinent while Dravidian “loan” words appeared in Sanskrit (Kalidos, 1976; Subrahmanian, 1972).

Almost 400 years later around 600 CE, the Pallavas set the foundations for the Age of Empires. The Pallavas set in motion a society that would later furnish the Cholas and Pandyas. The Pallavas brought administration to Tamil society as well as rule by royalty that furthered the divisions of class that continue in Tamil
Fig. 12, The Kamakshi Amman Temple in Kanchipuram\textsuperscript{13}, Tamil Nadu provides an example of the work of the Pallavas (though modified in the 14-16 centuries) whose capital city was located in Kanchipuram.

Nadu today (Kalidos, 1976; Subrahmanian, 1972). In a cultural sense, they introduced \textit{bhakti} (devotion) as a form of worship and built temples for \textit{isai} (music) and \textit{natakam} (dance) (Kalidos, 1976; Subrahmanian, 1972).

\textit{The Cholas}

The Chola reign, also known as the “Golden Age” of Tamil society, solidified the Pallava’s contribution and expanded other concepts of Tamil culture today beyond the immediate Tamil region (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Stein, 1977; Subrahmanian, 1972). The Cholas introduced the rule of local government,

\textsuperscript{13} Also spelled Kancheepuram.
maintained historical records, organized a system of medicine, and used agriculture and industry (especially in jewelry-making) as the backbone of the economy, which is symbolized in much of the literature of the period (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Subrahmanian, 1972). It was also during this period that 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 “circulatory flow” of the Tamil state was expressed as the Tamil word nadu or the Sanskrit word mandala (Stein, 1977). The territories that became a part of the Chola empire were referred to as mandalam. The Tamil word periyanadu (great Nadu) also described the vast area of Chola expansion (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).

In terms of culture, one of the most important things that the Cholas brought to Tamil society was in the art of sculpture and the temple. They redefined architecture as it existed under the Pallavas and established it as an

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14 The “Indianization” of Southeast Asia (under the expansion of Chola mandalam) began following its prehistoric period. Mainland Southeast Asia, also known as “farther India,” began to see a huge impact of Indic influence on its cultures (Coedès, 1996; Miller, 1998). Historical experts speculate that “Indianization” began to happen after the 2nd century, but was not prevalent until the 4th or 5th centuries B.C.E. (Coedès, 1996; Miller, 1998). Much of the Cholas ‘mandalam’ expansion is also estimated from the 12th to the 15th centuries (Stein, 1977).
emblem of Dravidian heritage. Much of the temple architecture under the Cholas remains intact today in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. Temples, built in geographical areas that denoted beauty, served as symbols for complexity and a sense of place in the universe (Kalidos, 1976).

Much of the musical tradition of the time (and today) is mimicked in the architectural style. Rhythm and tala form spaces in which those inside of the temple can experience vibrations in a musically structured form (Sthapati, 2008). The architecture is meant to mimic the human body as well as musical structure (Sthapati, 2008). While some of these techniques appear in previous years under the Pallavas, the Cholas broadened their influence.
One of the final contributions of the Cholas was in the art of sculpture. The Nataraja figure is found all over Tamil Nadu today as well as inside Tamil homes. It represents Siva’s dance of Lord Nataraja signifying vyuga – creation, maintenance, and ultimately destruction (Kalidos, 1976; “Nataraja,” n.d.).

The upper right hand is holding udukkai (drum) in reference to natham (sound) symbolic of creation; the reverse left hand holds fire symbolic of destruction; the front left hand points to asura (demon) of forgetfulness beneath the foot; the front right hand creates the abhaya mudra (showing courage); the five steps characterize the mantra of Na, Ma, Si, Va, Ya.

Tamil an important language in the culture, but the use of Sanskrit as in the above example throughout the years adds to the complexity of the culture. Dance and music throughout the eras, culminate at musical festivals such as the Thyagaraja Aradhana, concerts during the Chennai Music Season and home rituals. Understanding aesthetics set down by the Cholas, contextualizes the use of space today that stems from these origins.

**The Pandyas to the Nayaks**

Following the Chola reign, the Pandyas regained power. The Pandyas, throughout the reign of both the Cholas and Pallavas, continued to control the region of Madurai, placing them as one of the longest ruling families in the world.
It was during the Pandya reign that prevalence of *devdasis* (servants of the gods) surfaced, beginning Bharatnatyam\(^\text{15}\) (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Subrahmanian, 1972).

The end of the Pandyas concluded the Age of Empires. The mid-13\(^{\text{th}}\) century came with Muslim rule. The Vijayanagara period began around 1370 C.E. contributing to the building of temples; however, it was not until the Nayak rule in the mid-14\(^{\text{th}}\) century that the traditional arts in dance and music were revived including Thyagaraja’s Telugu krittanas (Kalidos, 1976; Sastri, 2009; Subrahmanian, 1972). The Nayaks of Madurai succeeded the Vijayanagar rulers, but the Nayaks of Senji were Telugu-speaking people who came from Andhra during the Muslim invasions from the North; thus, many Karnatak classical compositions are composed in Telugu (Arnold, 2000; Kalidos, 1976; Schwartzberg & Bajpai, 1992).

\(^{15}\) The origins of Bharatanatyam date almost 2000 years (Arnold, 2000). The dance was originally performed by *Devadasis* and restricted to the temples (Arnold, 2000). It was strictly devoted to the worship of the many manifestations of Hindu deities. However, as time progressed, it expanded to the courts of the Kings. Many children in the diasporic Sangam cultures learn Bharatanatyam as a way to preserve the Tamil heritage (Ramachandran, 2012).
The British settled as early as 1591 with Dutch and French settlements in 1610 and 1739 respectively (Kalidos, 1976). Imperial power disagreements led to the Carnatic Wars, leaving the British in control of the South. Literature during this period reflected Christianity and Islam creating an anti-caste movement; however, the continued rule of the British solidified the caste system (Kalidos, 1976; Price 1993). The British used the caste system to exert control and maintain uniformity, but regional views on property and ownership produced variations in economic prosperity throughout India (Price 1993; Banerjee & Iyer, 2002). Struggle against Colonial rule originated in 1801 with the South Indian Rebellion and continued throughout independence. Eventually, Gandhi’s non-violence
movement spread to the South merging with Annie Besant’s “Home-Rule Movement” (Kalidos, 1976). Without the British, the various regions within India, might not have had a source of unification. The North and South were united in an uprising against Colonial power (Price, 1993).

India’s “Industrial Revolution,” current administrative laws, technology, railroads, and other technological features that shape Modern India arrived through the British (Kalidos, 1976). However, the British Rule reinforced divisions of caste and religion, creating many of the cultural divisions today (Bate, 2009; Price, 1993; Ravi, 2008; Kalidos, 1976). The British emphasized the ethnic classifications and in turn, mobilized the both the North Indian domination as well as the Dravidian response (Price, 1993). India’s independence in 1947 led it to the era of Modern India.

**Modern Tamil Nadu**

After India’s independence, members of the Indian National Congress party governed the region of Tamil Nadu then known as “Madras State,”; however, a rise in regional parties soon surfaced. The Tamil political party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) formed as a backlash against what was seen as Hindi, North Indian domination (Chidambaram, 1987; Pinto, 1999). In 1969, C.N. Annadurai, leader of the DMK, renamed “Madras State” to “Tamil Nadu” and became its first official chief minister (Pinto, 1999). The DMK party
promoted Tamil history and Sangam period literature, fighting for separatism from North India (Chidambaram, 1987). Eventually, complete separatism ceased and the DMK promoted Tamil language and culture under the Tamil Nadu state structure as part of an Indian whole (Chidambaram, 1987; Pinto, 1999).

After Annadurai’s death, Muthuvel Karunanidhi became second chief minister (Mohan, 2009). Annadurai and Karunanidhi were both previously screenwriters with significant power in the Tamil film industry and used their power to influence politics through film (Jacob, 2009) Much of Tamil Nadu’s political leadership has been connected to the film industry (Jacob, 2009; Price, 1993).

In 1971, the DMK spilt and M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) formed the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) (Jacob, 2009; Price, 1993). As with many of the DMK and AIADMK leaders, M.G. Ramachandran began his
career in film. The former actor was elected as Chief Minister in 1977 and maintained his position until his death in 1988 (Jacob, 2009; Price, 1993). Because of his stance on caste and poverty, he had a large following from the economically challenged regions of Tamil Nadu (Price, 1993).

He was an avid supporter of the Tamils during the conflict in Sri Lanka and many Tamil refugees fled to Tamil Nadu during the conflict (Keethaponcalan, 1998). The Tamil government supported the Tamil Sri Lankans until 1991, when the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) assassinated India’s prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, just outside of Chennai, because of India’s lack of support (BBC, 2006; Keethaponcalan, 1998).

Fig. 15, Statue of MGR at the MGR Memorial on Marina Beach in Chennai City.
Tamil Nadu has changed leaders, but only has two active parties, the DMK and the AIADMK (Jacob, 2009). As of 2014, Jayalalithaa Jayaram, known as Jayalaithaa or “Amma,” who was MGR’s co-star and supporter in many films, is chief minister of Tamil Nadu (Jacob, 2009; Tamil Nadu Government Portal, n.d.). Her presence is visually augmented throughout Chennai city (Jacob, 2009).

Tamil Nadu today, sees a higher literacy rate than the overall India average in both male and female populations. Tamil Nadu’s population density per square mile is higher than the national average, and makes up the seventh largest state in population (Census of India 2011).

Fig. 16 and 17, Jayalalithaa or “Amma” on calendars and billboards throughout Chennai city.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{16}\) Previous Chief Ministers are also feature on the calendar, including MGR.
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<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>72,138,958</td>
<td>555/sq. km</td>
<td>65.46</td>
<td>73.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2, (Source: Census of India 2011 – Tamil Nadu) *Male literacy rate, *Female literacy rate.

While Tamil Nadu has remained separate in internal affairs, the Indian government places it as part of a larger whole.

**The Indian Diaspora and World Migration**

The Indian diaspora first emerged from the colonial system of indentured labor in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries - from Calcutta to Mauritius and soon to Fiji, Guyana, and other ‘sugar colonies.’ (Ray, 2009). This forced migration pattern changed after independence in 1947 and became voluntary, creating two waves of migration (Ray, 2009).

The Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora (2001), commissioned by the government of India, recognizes both waves as a single, unified diaspora and estimates that there are more than 20 million Indians dispersed worldwide with North America holding the fastest-growing population. Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) contribute a great deal to Indian society – economically as well as socially (Lessinger, 1999). Because many come to the US
with an economic advantage, they can afford to return to the cultural home often and maintain a dialectic relationship (Petievich, 1999). Through sponsorship of relatives to come to the United States for work, education, and higher functioning positions, it is easier for them to influence change in society upon their return home. (Lessinger, 1999).

The Indian government models the treatment of the Indian diaspora after Israel and the Jewish diaspora (RHLCID, 2001). The Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora (2001) seeks to reconcile ties to the diaspora in terms of returning home through specifically mimicking the Birthright Israel program. Unlike Israel, however, the Citizenship Act of 1955 prohibits Indians from holding dual citizenship (RHLCID, 2001). The PIO (Person of Indian Origin) initiative began in March 1999 to draw Indians to their cultural home by allowing some citizenship privileges; however, according to the report (2001), the $1000 charge was unrealistic and not received well. Since 2001, the government has changed the price of an adult PIO to $365.
It also introduced the OCI (Overseas Citizenship of Indian) in 2005, which grants lifetime privileges rather than the 15-year renewable PIO and eventually intends to merge the two programs to make it easier for its diaspora to return home (Duttagupta, 2012). Efforts of the government to mimic Israel in bringing the Indian population to the cultural home not only affirm the notion of the Indian diaspora, but also further dialogue regarding state-based distinction within the diaspora.

Tamil Communities Abroad

While much literature has been written on Sri Lankan exile communities abroad, it is much harder to find research on the specifically Indian Tamil community (Cochrane, Baser & Swain, 2009; Fair, 2005 Sriskandarajah, 2005; Vidanage, H.2004; Wayland, 2004). There are approximately 70 million Tamil speakers in 50 countries throughout the world with local Sangams for united
communities (Bhat & Narayan 2010; Raj 2013). During the Sangam Age, poets and scholars gathered under what is now referred to as a Sangam (Kalidos, 1976). Today, many of these organizations have the name of the location (country or city) followed by “Sangam.”

Other official Tamil organizations include The World Tamil Conferences, started by Annadurai, began in 1967 in Kuala Lumpur and continue today with the most recent in Coimbatore in 2010; and The World Tamil Federation (WTF) initiated in Chennai in 2002 (Bhat & Narayan 2010). The Tamil organizations promote a Tamil anthem, attire, and flag for the once existing Tamil nation (Bhat & Narayan 2010).

**Indian Migration to the United States**

The Indian diaspora and more broadly, South Asian diaspora, surfaces all over the world, shaping difference as well as unity (Shukla, 2001; Strizhak, 1999). However, North America holds the fastest growing Indian population and Indian migration to the United States has skyrocketed since the 1965 (Bhardwaj & Rao, 1990; Skop, 2012; RHLCID, 2001). The 1965 U.S. immigration laws increased migration of people from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Frazier, 2013; Ong & Liu, 1994; Skop & Adams, 2009, Skop & Li, 2005). Until 1980, Indian migrants to the United States were initially grouped with the original Punjabi settlers who arrived as early as 1820, but then differentiated into an “Asian Indian” category.
Table 3, Population Data from the U.S. 2010 Census on Asian Immigration separating Asian alone and Asian multi-racial.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Details</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population born outside of the U.S.</td>
<td>1,718,778</td>
<td>2,918,807</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Entry</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After 2000</td>
<td>180,821</td>
<td>264,256</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4, Population Data from the U.S. Census on Asian Indian entry. Most immigrants came prior to 2000. (Bhardwaj & Rao, 1990). The total Asian Indian population (See Table 9 for breakdown) increased from 1,899,599 in 2000 to 3,183,063 in 2010 and had the largest detailed group in 23 states, most within the Midwestern, Southern and Eastern regions of the United States (US Census 2010).

Regionalism surfaces in the wave of Indian migration with the 1965 United States migration laws (Lessinger, 2003; Bhardwaj & Rao, 1990). The majority of Indian immigrants are considered first generation ‘foreign-born’ and maintain formal and non-formal ties through cultural societies such as the Tamil Sangam, Bengali Association, Gujarati Association, etc. directly to the state of origin (Lessinger, 2003; US 2010 Census).

The diaspora is also divided among regional, ethnic, class, and religious ties that dismantle the homogeneity of the idealized “pan-cultural” identity.
(Jacobsen & Kumar, 2004). In addition, focusing in the Tamil community, many of the Sangams in the United States also incorporate Tamils from Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan population from the 2010 census puts the numbers at 41,456. However, no distinction is made between Sinhalese and Tamil, therefore it is difficult to gather exact numbers for Tamil populations.

While both the U.S. and Indian governments seem to treat the population as a dispersed single entity, “persistent localism” found throughout the Indian diaspora allude to the existence of a diaspora within a diaspora (Singh, 2003; Bhardwaj & Rao, 1990). Many South Indians feel that the government takes a North Indian totalitarian view of India, especially in adopting Hindi as the official language (Bate, 2009; Ravi, 2008). Regionalism plays a large role in separation, but religion divides in almost the same manner. Even within the 85 percent Hindu majority, each region practices Hinduism in a different way, highlighting specific gods (Skop, 2012). However, much of the diaspora practices other religions such as Christianity, Sikism or Islam (Bhardwaj & Rao, 1990).

Hinduism plays a major role in the cultural background of Indian society. The key concept of diaspora lies in the preservation of ties, whether real or symbolic, to the physical or spiritual home (Rozen, 2008). While Indians as a diaspora are religiously diverse, cultural, and spiritual ties contain some elements of Hinduism in a cultural context (Singh, 2003).
In addition, its influence vastly differs based on regionality. In order to even begin understand divisions within the diaspora, a starting point is necessary. Because Hinduism is one of the oldest and longest surviving religions on the Indian subcontinent, it manifests in several ways, especially in regionalism (Flood, 1996). Instead of viewing regional identities based on religion, it is beneficial to understand them via cultural influences that may include religious background, but are not bound by it.

**Tamil Sangams in the United States**

As throughout the world, there are many Tamil organizations in the United States. The sheer number of Tamil Sangams in the United States demonstrates the attempt at differentiation through Tamil identity. This distinction is important enough to create a Sangam (and sometimes multiple) for every state in the United States. It is difficult to collect an exact number, but there appears to be at least one in every state. Often states such as Texas or South Carolina will have three or four. Two of the larger organizations include The New Jersey Tamil Sangam and the Chicago Tamil Sangam.

Many of the Asian Indian immigrants in the United States are highly skilled and migrate through securing jobs, educational opportunities or family sponsorship (Skop, 2012). According to the U.S. 2010 Census, the Asian Indian subgroup has rates of 91.1% for high school completion and 70.7% for Bachelor’s
degree or higher education (US Census 2010). Most of the Sangam members migrate from cities in Tamil Nadu. The literacy rate is higher in urban areas at 82.53 percent than rural areas at 73.8 percent.

The socioeconomic status of the Tamil population appears to be upper middle class. For members and non-members to attend Sangam events and eat food, the Sangam charges a fee – roughly $12 for members and $15 for non-members per event. This fee provides the funds for the association, but also provides funds for events. A majority of events include performances by children of Sangam members. These performances are structured through dance lessons, language lessons, and sometimes singing lessons. A fee is required for children to receive these various lessons. Also, the locations and the spaces that are redefined are spread out and do not take place in local areas, due to “diverse settlements patterns” as articulated by Skop (2012).

Members can afford all of the lessons, admission charges and have transportation to and from events. In addition, many of the members (and non-members) travel back and forth to India as well as New Jersey. New Jersey Tamil Sangam members have a connection to Cleveland because of the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana Festival (CTA) (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004; CTA, 2013).

However, if compared to other community associations, the NEOTS events usually take place in schools and informal settings. Recently, I attended a festival (as a photographer) of the Northeast Ohio Lebanese American
Association (and have photographed many in the past). The event took place at La Center – a large banquet hall – and included an open bar as well as appetizers, cocktail hour, dancing, speeches, guest speakers of importance from Lebanon and a full, served meal. The event price ranged from $50-$100.

It is reasonable to deduct from the comparison that the Sangam members, though many seem to be of upper middle class, still make the event accessible to people of any socioeconomic status. While lessons and performances are extra, the basic gathering space is accessible to all.

**The Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam**

The total Asian Indian population in Ohio is estimated at 64,339 with 16,039 concentrated in prominent counties (with an Asian Indian population greater than 500) of Northeast Ohio including Cuyahoga, Summit, Portage, Lake, Lorain and Medina (U.S. Census Bureau. 2012 American Community Survey).

As introduced in Chapter 1, Skop (2012) and Elliot (2004) emphasize that assessing a culture landscape in emerging cities gives a clearer depiction not just of that city, but also rather throughout the country. Traditional evaluation of a community landscape is conducted through the largest “gateways” that accentuate the clustering of a specific group, but this does not aid in recognizing the majority of cultural landscapes in the United States that rely on scattered settlement
patterns (Skop, 2012). Gateway communities provide an insightful look at a community with an “invisible” imprint (Skop 2012; Elliot, 2004; Singer, Hardwick & Brettell, 2008).

The Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam provides a representation of the Tamil population in Northeast Ohio. It represents Rafael et al.’s (2006) diasporic “crystallization of collective identity.” It serves as the only “culturally Tamil” and nonreligious association, organized through Rafael et al.’s (2006) “public discourse of members and leaders.” According to the NEOTS website, “NEOTS represents highly skilled professionals in various areas including Medical, Engineering and IT sectors hailing mainly from Tamil Nadu - India and Tamil Speaking expats from other parts of the world.”

The Tamil Sangam represents approximately 110 “official” families and 25-35 non-member families who come from varying religious backgrounds, though the majority are Hindu (Raj, 2013). Often, members purchase one membership for the family or attend events without a membership (Raj, 2013). According to the Sangam president, members come from Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatur, Karaikudi, Nagercoil, Tiruchirapalli; other states of India such as Maharashtra, West Bengal or Karnataka; and other countries such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

The original name for NEOTS was the Bharathi Cultural Society (Bharathi was a Tamil freedom fighter during India’s independence movement), but was
revamped and renamed in 2010 for a more representative and non-profit organization (Raj, 2014). The original founding members came to the US in the late 60s and early 70s during the overhaul of the U.S. immigration laws.

Members come from all areas of Northeast Ohio – Strongsville, Kent, Aurora, Solon, Avon, Avon Lake, Cuyahoga Falls, Akron and others. These settlement patterns are reflective of the entire “Asian Indian” population of Northeast Ohio (estimated at around 40,000 for the 2010 census). However, the specific Tamil gatherings that occur in any of the earlier listed prominent suburbs, usually attract a strictly Tamil or more broadly South Indian audience. This makes exact numbers hard to obtain. In addition, while the overall numbers in the organization are growing, many members come on temporary work visas for Information Technology (Raj, 2014).

**Characteristics**

While I use this Chapter to discuss the particulars of the “Tamil” identity, I also want to address some of the “characteristics” that are attributed to the “Asian Indian.” As Chapter 5 will address, there exists a sense of “Tamilness,” but this lifestyle differs depending upon the economic opportunities available. Many of the immigrants from the Sangam have had access to an English education, thus they can work their way to survive in the United States. In addition, they have the opportunity to offer “highly-skilled” labor, serving under
Cohen’s (1997) “trader, business, professional” class of diaspora, which allows them easier migration. People in village and rural areas would not have the same opportunities or education to be successful in the United States, thus, these areas would not contribute to the Tamil identity that we see in the U.S. communities.

During the course of my participation and observation, I listened to at least 10 members discuss how they arrived in the United States. I directly asked 5 of them. All of them had come (either alone or through a spouse) because of a work visa or advanced degree opportunities. Jyothi and Geeta told me that many also come from family sponsorship, but it is incredibly difficult now and is only feasible with a family member that has U.S. citizenship. According to the women, green card sponsorship is not common anymore.

Poorani came to the US in the 1970s because her husband came as a doctor on a work visa. Jyothi came because her husband was offered a position as a PhD student. Geeta came for a postdoctoral research position in 1991. Prabhu, who is Jyothi’s husband, came as a PhD student and now works for NASA.

Recognizing the Tamil Landscape in the United States

While background is important, art in structure and performance are integral parts of the Tamil culture (Raghavan, 1973). To recognize this identity
and regional identities of other cultures, we must identify how a cultural home carries across global boundaries (Bisin & Verdier, 2000).

Architecture, art, music, medicine, and dance are all intertwined in some way (Sthapati, 2008). Though “Western” traditions continue to surface in Tamil culture, the old ways still hold prevalence. The secular but non-Western sciences of Ayur-veda (medicine), Natya-veda (dance), Gandharva-veda (music), and Vastu-veda (designing buildings/spaces), all draw roots from ancient spiritualism, but are celebrated by multiple religions (Sthapati, 2008). Space and connection to spirituality are mimicked in all of the disciplines (Sthapati, 2008). It is important to understand that these traditions are connected in some way. I will highlight music, dance, and space and how they shape the “Tamil” identity and in turn, surface in the United States.

**Understanding the Karnatak Tradition**

The Karnatak music tradition is one of the oldest forms of classical music.\(^{17}\) While its roots are embedded in Hinduism, it has become a cultural

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\(^{17}\) Karnatak music remains separate from the Hindustani tradition in the North. While both styles have similarity in some elements including raga and instrumental patterns, they differ substantially in elements, origins, and influences (Arnold, 200).
assertion of South Indian identity beyond religious affiliation (Arnold, 2000). The
Karnatak tradition of South India or ‘Dravidia,’ encompassing the states of
Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, can be traced as far back as
the 14th century and is speculated to exist before that date as notated compositions
were found as early as the 7th century in Tamil Nadu (Arnold, 2000).

The Karnatak tradition has its own rules and structures that differ from
Western musical traditions. While some elements are similar to the Hindustani
tradition of the North, the Karnatak tradition emphasizes vocals and distinct
structures (Arnold, 2000).

Fig. 19, The four South Indian States that make up the area known as ‘Dravidia.’
Structure

Ragam, or melodic mode, lays the foundation for all of Karnatak music (Arnold, 2000). There are 72 basic Janaka, meaning root, ragams for Karnatak Music, that include the seven notes of Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Da, Ne, and Sa. This set is then divided into 36 ragams (Arnold, 2000; Carnatic Music, 2012). Alapana serves to introduce the raga, working as a prelude to develop the raga and surrounding the tone of Sa. Tanam uses short traces of melody and repeated single notes and viruttam or padyam incorporate poetic text (Arnold, 2000; Carnatic Music, 2012).

Instruments

Voice serves as the main performance instrument and can be accompanied by a Western style South Indian violin or South Indian style Veena, Sarod (drone), Tambura (string), Sruthi (bellowed), Harmonium (bellowed), Gottu Vadyam (string), flute, Nagaswaram (wind), Mridangam (percussion), Kanjira (percussion), Ghatam (percussion), or Thavil (percussion) (Arnold, 2000). In instrumental performance, the vocal melody is mimicked on the instrument.
Performance

Performance can happen in four ways: at the temple, in the home, at a public concert, or during the Thyagaraja Festival (Arnold, 2000). The Thyagaraja Festival is one of the biggest performances of the Karnatak tradition that showcases the work of the beloved composer, Thyagaraja. Although improvisation occurs, Karnatak composers are important in the tradition, because most of the music is based on these pre-composed pieces. Improvisation follows the same theory that the composers have set for the music. The three most important composers often referred to as the Karnatak Trinity, include Thyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Syama Sastri. Festivals are held in honor of these composers as well as in honor the ‘father’ of Karnatak music, Purandara Dasa. These festivals are an essential part of the tradition.²

Fig. 20, The Karnatak trinity featured on the walls of the Sathguru Music Hall in Mylapore, Chennai, Tamil Nadu. From left to right, Thyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Syama Sastri.
While the festivals exemplify the history of the Karnataka tradition, temple performance and home performance symbolize the religious, devotional aspect of the Hindu incarnation (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004). One of the important aspects of music in the temple is to make the space pure with processions using the nāgasvaram and thavil (Arnold, 2000). The temple is used not only for Hindu festivals and holidays, but also to honor specific composers (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004).

In the past, most of the Karnataka concerts were performed in the Sanskrit or Telugu languages, but the majority of classical composers came from Tamil origins. After the 1920s, the Tamilian language finally gained a place in the Karnataka concert, contributing much to its manifestation in the visual landscape (Viswanathan & Allen, 2004). This press for the Tamil language further solidifies the “Dravidian” movement and the notion that the Tamil people create their own,
Fig. 22. The stage décor of the Sathguru Music Hall in Mylapore, Chennai showcases Tamil and English script.

separate landscape (Jacob, 2009). While the language in the concert shifts between Sanskrit, Telugus and Tamil, the majority of the conversational language is spoken in Tamil. Hindi or any other North Indian language rarely surface at these events and widen the gap between the Aryan North Indian and Dravidian South Indian landscapes.

The Tamil landscape and people establish visual and sound space through various events, festivals, and home settings in the surrounding area. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the struggle for power or voice surfaces in the state-based landscape. With blurred lines between categories, it is important to understand Tamil identity in terms of a spectrum. Groth and Bressi’s (1997) concept of fluidity is essential to understand the “pan-Indian landscape” (which I argue exists on a superficial
level), the overarching South Indian, “Dravidian” landscape and the Tamil-specific landscape.
CHAPTER 4

DATA AND METHODS

This chapter covers the data and methods that I utilized while conducting fieldwork in both the United States and India, following similar procedures and data collection in each place. Throughout my fieldwork in India as well as the United States, I used a mixed qualitative methods approach that included: observational research through ethnographic and autoethnographic techniques such as participant observation, unstructured interviews as well as daily journaling; and landscape analysis through visual and aural methods.
Sites

The data that I collected in India included photographs of various environments such as temples, houses, performances, gatherings, surrounding physical landscape, built environment structures within large cities, small cities, and villages. I relied on my own equipment to photograph these places, but my
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Four Tamil Nadu Districts in Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chennai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kancheepuram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vellore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvallur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5, (Source: Census of India 2011 – Tamil Nadu)

contacts in India guided me to them. I also collected observations of accompanying sounds through a logbook, video recorder and audio recorder. I made note of the native wildlife – plants and animals – that populated the landscapes of Tamil Nadu. I visited the areas with the greatest population.

The data collected in the United States was similar and included photographs of the houses, performances, gatherings, surrounding physical landscape, and internal environments redefined by the Tamil community. I also photographed these places, guided by contacts within the Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam. As above, I collected observations of accompanying sounds through a logbook, video recorder, and audio recorder. Instead of native wildlife, I carefully observed the physical elements in Northeast Ohio that do not exist in Tamil Nadu (such as heavy snowfall) and the effects on the structure of gatherings.
**Homes**

I visited nine homes in India and about four homes in the United States (See Chapter 6 for details). In India, two were located outside of Tamil Nadu in Kamanahalli and Lingarajapuram in Bangalore of Karnataka state; three were located in the Thiruvallur district villages of Sundarnagar (Thirupassure) and Siruwanur; two in Chennai city districts of Anna Nagar and Mylapore; one in Vellore and one outside of the Thiruvallur district in Vasantham Nagar (See Figure 24). The religious background of the individuals included Christians and Hindus. The homes that I visited in the United States included three Hindu homes in the Cleveland area – Westlake, Strongsville and Kent – and one Christian home in Chicago, IL.

It was more difficult to visit homes in the United States than it was in India. In the U.S., there are many people willing to allow visitation; however, varying schedules seem to inhibit the flexibility that I experienced in India. Individuals seemed to be more concerned about the state of the houses (cleanliness, etc.) and are often engaged in various activities that prevent free time. In addition, many times, gatherings would occur at one particular person’s house.
Analysis

I analyzed the visual elements through Lawson’s (2001) languages of space, defined in Chapter 2, that include foreground and background, meaning, scale of movement, and context to pull themes of Tamil identity through visual representations. In terms of sound, I identified sounds through harmonics, periodic complex tones, pure tones, and environmental tones, also defined in Chapter 2, to extract themes of Tamil Identity through soundscape elements (Hartmann, 1998; Miller, 2007).

Interviews

I interviewed nine people in Tamil Nadu, two from Bangalore, and 11 in the United States using unstructured interviews. The nature of the questions was informal and conversation guided topics. I recorded the responses in a logbook and drew from common themes\(^{18}\) of Tamil identity, what it means to be Tamil, the importance of cultivating a Tamil identity and feelings about North India. I also recorded the interviewees responses to me as a half Tamil, half American. Furthermore, I allowed the conversations to guide follow-up questions that further investigated previous themes. The only formal question I asked was: ‘‘How does one become Tamil? NRIs, people who have never been to Tamil Nadu before or people from other parts of India?’’

\(^{18}\)Outlined by Cope (2000).
**The Autoethnographic Approach**

I had initially intended to use semi-structured interviews, but found that unstructured best fit the situation at hand. Unstructured conversation allows not only for a wide range of responses, but also a comfortable environment for the interviewee (Valentine, 2005). Lindsay (1997) notes that the opportunity to “interpret” a culture or landscape occurs most frequently on a less formal level of interviewing. 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 (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).
Katheryn Besio (2003) uses both ethnographic and autoethnographic to explore postcoloniality in Northern Pakistan. She addresses the issues of her own position as a researcher, how that might affect the interviews and the experience of participant observation (Besio, 2003). Rajkumar, Premkumar, and Tharyan (2008) use ethnographic methods in costal villages of Tamil Nadu to evaluate coping mechanisms following the 2004 Tsunami.

In addition to the methods above, many principles of visual methodologies such as composition, color, light spatial organization, and content can be applied in understanding and evaluating a physical manifestation of a culture (Hedgecoe, 2004; Rose, 2012). My data collection follows a photojournalistic approach outlined by Kobre and Brill (2004) and visual analysis articulated by Rose (2012). The landscape, even existing as a temporal space, exudes the same principles used in recognizing key elements of a photograph or other type of visual reproduction.

As noted in Chapter 2, language of space builds relationships between the space itself and the objects within that space (Gatrell, 1991). Rose’s (2012) distinctions between vision and visuality emphasize the importance of cultural construction in how and what is seen (Rose, 2012).

Multiple fields utilize photographs and collection of visual data to evaluate content in the social sciences (Emmel & Clark, 2011; Harper, 1988; Ray & Smith, 2011; Ray & Smith, 2012; Reavey, 2011; Richards, 2011; Rose, 2012; Wang & Burris, 1997). These methods can be applied to the cultural landscape with a
geographical approach. Skop (2012) uses visual methods to define the pan-Indian landscape with photographs, event participation, visual documentation, observation of flyers and printed materials. Hardwick (2010) and Ryden (1993) also use photographs to identify visual cues of specific cultures. In addition, the use of photographs works well with both ethnography and autoethnography because it utilizes the intertwined experience through the image, revealing not only aspects of a place, but also the photographer’s (researcher’s) vision of a place (Harper, 2000).

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. 24, The highlighted areas indicate the districts that I visited in Tamil Nadu. I also have Puducherry (also known as Pondicherry) 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.

I had initially intended to conduct semi-structured interviews as I had intended in India. However, I found that I could gain a greater understanding of the Tamil culture in Northeast Ohio by getting to know the members and community participants by spending time with them. This did not give me a large number of interviewees, but it gave me a more direct and open experience. The
first few months that I was in contact with the various individuals, I did not gain much information. After time passed, however, I was invited to their houses and participated in many activities. I used more autoethnographic approaches during my time in Cleveland, because it directly affected my interviews and interactions with individuals. I engaged in a dual role as a researcher, but also as a subject. The members were curious about my Tamil background and my interest in my father’s culture. I entered the following into my field notes during one of the informal gatherings at a member’s house:

10/03/13 Prabhu interviewed me and asked me questions as to why was I was interested in this project. He asked me if being half-and-half was a struggle and wanted to know if I felt stronger toward my Indian identity than I did my American. He said some individuals with two Indian parents only want to be American and don’t care about the Indian (Tamil) side. He had quite a few questions and wanted me to elaborate further. He found this to be a fascinating topic. I was alternatively fascinated by the observation that he made. I think that my dual identity allows me to partake in these gatherings more openly then if I were only American.

It is important to address my position regarding the research. Depending upon with whom a person is interacting with, the interviewee’s answers and demeanor may change. In order move beyond surface interactions and perhaps

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19 I have used pseudonyms for all the names in this study.
even recited answers, it required me to actively engage in the community as well as share my background and history, placing me in a much more vulnerable role.

**Data and Methods Summary**

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 (as mentioned in Chapter 1) to the data. Given the amount of time that I had to complete the Thesis, many of my sites were suggested to me by contacts and/or Tamil Sangam members. The following chapters will highlight the fieldwork and sites in both Tamil Nadu as well as Cleveland, Ohio.
CHAPTER 5

ENVIRONMENTS OF TAMIL NADU

In order to understand the roots of the diasporic Tamil community in Northeast Ohio, it is important to understand environments of the cultural home. This material serves as a foundation for comparison between the two areas, reveals the cultural home of the community in the United States, and contextualizes Chapter 3’s focus on Tamil history and identity. While many members of the community may have actively experienced a Tamil Nadu of the past before coming to the U.S., they often visit and keep in contact with its customs and culture.

However, Tamil Nadu is not a homogeneous place and as this Chapter shows, many of the customs and lifestyles differ between villages and cities. In addition, the interviews of the individuals in Chennai city, Vellore city, Bangalore and rural villages, indicate a slightly attitude of “being Tamil” than the interviews in the United States. As mentioned in the Chapter 1, ‘Asian Indians’ are often referred to as the “model minority,” ranking highly in education, income and overall ‘American’ indicators for success (Frazier, 2013; Kao, 1995; Shaefer,
2004; Skop, 2012; Taylor, Landreth & Bang, 2005). However, this characterization only includes a certain class of people who have the resources to pursue this lifestyle. Chapter 6 underlines the demographics of the Cleveland Tamil population, while Chapter 5 provides a more comprehensive look at the different facets of Tamil identity within specific areas of Tamil Nadu.

**Class, Religion, and Gender**

There are many factors to transmission of a culture and it is not the goal of this project to break down an entire state of people into non-fluid, stationary elements. However, it important to recognize that an environment that reinforces identity pervades from the largest cities to the smallest villages; this environment is fluid and changing. Class, religion, gender, and other factors can change the context or experience of a particular space/environment.

Class seems to have the most weight in dictating the environment and the place in which one lives and operates. Religion dictates (to a small degree) the physical places of the landscape that are most visited as well as the elements that surface in the home (or car) as well as practices that are followed. Gender seems to dictate the performative roles that one takes on, e.g. when guests enter the home. It is not my goal to analyze of these three roles, but rather touch on how they fit into and create certain environments.
Rural vs. Urban

While class, religion, and gender affect the interaction with environments, differences rural and urban settings affect the structure of the environments. Rural Tamil Nadu differs vastly from Chennai city. Many of the people who live in rural Tamil Nadu do not have the same luxuries as those who live in Chennai city. One of the definitive markers that I observed on the Chennai city landscape (areas such as Anna Nagar and Mylapore) was the lack of garbage. There is a greater effort to keep the visible landscape clean, unlike what might be found in the smaller city of Thiruvallur, for example, which is approximately one hour from Chennai city.

Fig. 25, A streets scene in Thiruvallur, Tamil Nadu.

20 Similar areas of poverty do exist in Chennai city and have the same amount of poverty that is visible in the rural areas.
As visible from these photographs, there is a significant difference in the efforts to keep the city clean. While I am assuming this is due to the amount of money in each area, my purpose is to point out that the landscape changes depending upon the area visited. As displayed in the photographs above, landscapes within the Tamil Nadu state are fluid and differ from one another. One representation of the environment does not exist.

Looking for a direct comparison, I spent about one week and 3 days in the rural Thiruvallur district. Alternatively, I spent one week in Chennai city. I spent about 4-5 inside of as well as traveling to and from Karnataka from both the rural area of Thiruvallur district and the Chennai district.

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21 It is not my purpose to investigate government allocation of funds.
Rural Environments

Cities and rural areas have differing sounds and visuals. Rural Tamil Nadu has a distinct soundscape and visual elements. The sounds of my first morning at the Ashirvadh Ashram in Thiruvallur Tamil Nadu, which was by far the most impressionable, included: Sweeping bristles across concrete, birds chirping, dogs panting, children singing and whispering in Tamil. Inside the Ashram I saw soft light leaking through muted windows, illuminating multi-colored curtains, deeply saturated pigments in the architecture of what resembled baked clay and doors open to the outside allowing a fresh breeze to circulate the interior. As I stepped outside, coconut trees and rice fields emerged on the right while endless, green flora dusted with pastel-hued flowers in monochromatic pinks surrounded the gate on the left. The sun was shining warmly and I could hear drums beating in the distance as the village awakened.
As noted in my observations, the area is surrounded by “humanized” cultural elements such as rice fields and coconut trees. They are natural in the sense that occur in nature, but structured and planted with precision to reflect the agricultural environment of Tamil Nadu. The soundscape 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.
The visual markers of rural Tamil Nadu incorporate natural elements (trees or plants), the lack of commercial districts and the scarcity of built environments. Outside of Thiruvalur city, most of the signage and script is Tamil and is not always accompanied by English subscript. Also visible on the rural landscape in greater numbers are cows, goats, chickens, stray dogs and various birds. Small temples and churches are scattered throughout the villages. Rural activities such as fishing, herding of water buffalo and/or cows are also visible.

Fig. 28, Near the Thiruvalur district, outside of the main city, almost all of the signs are in Tamil, whereas, Thiruvalur city has some English elements.

22 While these are visible in Chennai, they are not nearly as prevalent as they are in the rural areas. One might see a single dog or cow in Chennai compared to diversity and numbers on the rural landscape.
Fig. 29, One of many temples that populate the landscape of the Thiruvallur district.

Fig. 30, Fishing in rural Tamil Nadu.
Fig. 31, Cows on the roads near Poondi Dam.

Fig. 32, Dress is different in rural Tamil Nadu as well. More often than in the city, men can be found wearing a dhoti (left) or lungi (right). While this attire is not specific to Tamil Nadu, only men wear the garment in Tamil Nadu. In addition, the Tamilian knot is always on the left side.
Furthermore, dress and lifestyle vary as well. Lungis are common in the villages, but in Chennai city (Mylapore, Royapettah, or Anna Nagar), they are not as common and the dress reflects a more cosmopolitan feel. The local meal preparation is also different. There are no grocery stores per se, but rather markets. For example, if one wanted to prepare fish for the evening, the fish would be purchased the same day from a local fisherman’s catch. Alternatively, if one wanted to prepare chicken, the chicken could be purchased and killed the same day from the village or Thiruvallur market. Many of the vegetables or ingredients for vegetarian dishes can be found at local markets as well.

Chennai also has markets, but in areas such as Mylapore or Royapettah, ‘Western’-style grocery stores are appearing the landscape.
Fig. 33, A grocery store in Royapettah, Chennai.

Figure 34, A market in Thiruvallur city.

As far as restaurants, the style and arrangement is much the same in the rural areas as it is in Chennai city. The only difference is in the smaller cities of
rural areas one might find non-Western style restrooms located outside of the restaurant without soap at hand-washing stations. Additionally, these restaurants will sometimes serve food on a banana leaf, which is difficult to find in Chennai city.

**Urban Centers**

While language seems to hold all of Tamil Nadu together, the reflections of region (rural vs. urban) are similar to the reflections found in the United States. For example, Cleveland, OH as an urban center has more amenities and dress reflects a more cosmopolitan feel than rural areas. Meanwhile, a rural area such as Dorset, OH in Ashtabula County may have a single convenient store or gas station with many people dressed in hunting or fishing gear during hunting seasons.

In the same way, Chennai city has a larger built environment than Thiruvallur city. The structures and the buildings are larger and exhibit a greater fusion of language (e.g. English and Tamil). There is also a wider selection of vendors and amenities as any large city would offer. Activities such as fishing might be more popular in a rural setting as opposed to an urban one in Tamil Nadu.

In addition, much of the store signage and advertising in Tamil Nadu varies upon region and area. For instance, Chennai city has visibly more English
signs than Thiruvallur. Reflecting on Figure 28 and then observing the figures below, the prevalence of English is increasingly apparent in the urban centers as opposed to more rural settings.

Fig. 35, Shopping district in Thiruvallur. Many of the signs reflect Tamil first.
Fig. 36, Stores in Mylapore, Chennai. This type of signage is common. Tamil is still prevalent, but not to the extent that it is in Thiruvallur.

Chennai city lacks the abundance of wild animals that can be seen on the landscape of Thiruvallur. Chennai city is also increasing its Western architectural elements. The building of malls is becoming popular in some of the wealthier districts of the city.
Fig. 37, The new Express Avenue mall in Royapettah, Chennai. The internal elements mirror that of a U.S. mall.

The only distinguishing Tamil element of the Express Avenue Mall is the Tamil script found next to the English store names. In many cases, the script is smaller or equivalent to its English counterpart.
While fragments of Chennai display English-dominant, Tamil-secondary script, this is not true for all of Chennai. Much of the city has Tamil script equivalent to or larger than the English script. One element that is not present in Tamil Nadu or Chennai city is Hindi script. Other than Bharat Petroleum (an Indian oil station), the national bank, or the train station, Hindi script does not surface. This is also true in Pondicherry, a former French colony, though many Western elements are visible. French is more often visible than Hindi.
The soundscape of Chennai also differs from Thiruvallur. Instead of wildlife or musical elements (though these can sometimes be heard, just not as often), the sound of mufflers and horns permeate the soundscape. Because Chennai’s traffic problem is augmented during rush hour, it is often not easy to distinguish other sounds.

I was in Chennai during the Music season, where the city is filled with numerous Karnatak performances. The local stations (such as Jaya TV, one of the largest television broadcasts in Chennai), play many of the concerts during this period. I attended one of the Karnatak events at the Sathguru Music Hall.
The interior landscapes also reflect a sense of Tamilness. The interior venue of the Sathguru Music Hall exposed the Karnatak arena. The soundscape and landscape of Southern Karnatak music were highlighted in the interior of the space (See also Chapter 3, Figures 21 and 23). From the outside of the building, small fragments of the music could be heard, but one had to enter the building to fully experience the soundscape.

Fig. 40, A typical stop in Chennai city.
While a number of Karnataka performances take place indoors, the musical soundscape is not limited to interior spaces. In addition to the interior performances, temples have processions outside on the street areas where musicians play. These musical displays are not limited to the December music season and occur at throughout the year.
Fig. 42, A man plays a nāgasvaram as described in Chapter 3. It is played during religious ceremonies on the streets of Mylapore outside of the temple.

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 city soundscape from December 17, 2013 can be found here: http://youtu.be/iJ49NK7rL5A.

Despite some of the differences between rural and urban soundscapes, the importance of sound and semiotics in Tamil Nadu, though implemented in different ways, cannot be ignored. Examining Figures 25 through 42 closely, Tamil identity 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.

**Tamil Regionalism**

As environment is important to soundscape, so are linguistic elements found in regionalism. One thing that unites the residents of the state is the language. Both spoken and written language are markers of regionalism. As explored in the previous section, the importance of Tamil script surfaces on the visual landscape. In terms of sound, there are more English speakers in Tamil Nadu than Hindi (Schwartzberg & Bajpai, 1992).

As a point of comparison, I also visited the cities of Mysore and Bangalore in Karnataka state. While Kannada (the official language of Karnataka) is visible, it does not demonstrate the same ‘regionalism’ as Chennai. Many of the signs display Kannada and English, but the Kannada is smaller in comparison to English while the Tamil script is larger than or equivalent to English. If comparing both city centers – Chennai and Bangalore – Tamil script is much more prevalent in size in Chennai than Kannada script is in Bangalore.

The expression of Tamil script is intentional and a conscious effort to highlight identity. Most displays of Kannada script seem to be smaller than the English counterpart. In revisiting Figure 38, the Tamil script is shown as
equivalent to English within the Western-style mall. In Figures 25, 35, and 39, the Tamil script is much larger and more prominent in the rural areas. Figure 28 shows Tamil as the only language displayed in rural areas.\footnote{This could be true of rural areas of Karnataka. Though I only drove through these areas and from my vantage point, I saw English along the roadways.}

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 43, Kannada script in Kamanahalli, Bangalore.
I observed many of the local TV stations. Much of India’s televised connection occurs via satellite dishes (found even in some of the informal settlements), but the local news stations seemed to cover only Tamil events. The Tamil language was spoken in the majority of commercials. The actors, the movie industry – everything was centered around Tamil. The only Bollywood (Mumbai-based cinema) actor that I saw was Amitabh Bachchan. He was on a commercial for jewelry, but he was speaking Tamil instead of Hindi.

This sparked my curiosity so I visited movie theaters in both Bangalore and Chennai. Bangalore had a significantly larger selection of Hindi movies. The

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24 I stayed in a hospital room where there was no satellite and only local channels.
Bangalore theater\textsuperscript{25} also showed one or two Tamil films, a few Kannada films and a few English films. The Chennai theater only showed Tamil and English films. One Hindi film, Dhoom \textsuperscript{26}, was showing.

![Fig. 45, English and Tamil films at the theater at Chennai Sathyam theater in Royapettah, Chennai.](image)

When observing the previous figures, it is possible to draw a theme of Tamil identity expressed through various modes of practice. These modes can include semiotics, spoken language, and visible markers such as Tamil figures such as ‘Amma’ (Selvi Jayalaithaa, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu) or ‘MGR’ (See Figures 16 and 17). All of the figures show the importance of Tamil script

\textsuperscript{25} The theater was called Fun Cinemas and was located near Vasanth Nagar.
\textsuperscript{26} Which was one of the biggest Bollywood sequels released. Even in the U.S., I have seen both Dhoom and Dhoom 2.
and identity. The language and semiotics play an essential role in establishing a sense of ‘Tamilness.’ Within the United States, as Chapter 6 will show, Tamil parents heavily expose their children to the Tamil language that is symbolic of culture.

Socioeconomic Status, Living Spaces, and Language

Living Spaces

While language and soundscape are essential, other factors such also shape Tamil identity. Because regional differences are apparent, it becomes easy as an outsider to isolate a few elements and label them as ‘Tamil.’ However, from an insider’s perspective, these elements, depending upon the situation and the scenario may differ. Over the duration of my stay in India, I visited nine Tamil homes as outlined in Chapter 4.27 The religious background of the individuals included Christians and Hindus.28 The houses varied in size and space. One thing that was apparent – most of them had limited decorations – even in the wealthier houses. In all of the houses (except for two – the one in an informal settlement and one in the Siruvanur village), there was a photograph of a deity and multiple

27 For my data collection, I drew sketches of each house because I did not feel that it was appropriate to photograph the various homes.
28 I was not able to visit any Muslim homes during this trip.
Fig. 46, An example of a deity decorated with *malai* (garland).

photographs of family members.\(^2^9\) Even the Christian houses had a decorative photograph of Jesus.

While the city homes had more decorative elements than the village homes, such as calendars from a local shop or nicer furnishings, most of the walls were barren. Two of the Hindu homes designated a prayer room for a specific deity. This was not present in the Christian homes that I visited, but I was told by one of my sources that Christian homes sometimes have this element as well.

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\(^2^9\) The Siruvanur village home had a photo of a deity but not family members.
While the village homes differed from one another in apparent wealth, the smaller homes had almost no decorative elements – only the necessities to live, such as pots, pans or clothes. Outside of the Siruvanur village, the home that I visited had one room and only necessities. It consisted of a dirt floor with a tarp cover and a single pot. Outside, there was a goat. The entire village had two or three cows.

As academics, we can discuss some of these ‘Tamil’ elements, but it is important to note that there are people who do not have a choice in the elements they hold onto. The surrounding environment binds their identity. They do not necessarily have a choice to ‘create’ or establish an identity willingly, but rather cling to what is necessary for preservation of life. Those who have the luxury to

Fig. 47, The area outside of Siruvanur village that I visited.
migrate often have a chance to learn English and/or other languages to create better economic opportunities.

In the previous section, I discussed regionalism. I want to point out that many people in the rural areas do not know English, Hindi (both official languages of India), or any other languages, nor do they have the opportunity to learn. While this may be reflective of ‘regionalism,’ it is also reflective of opportunity and educational background.

I noticed that the families who had more money spoke English (not always Hindi, which could be reflective of regionalism); however, the fewer opportunities a family unit had directly influenced the languages in which they were able to converse. In many of the village areas, many people do not have the luxury of completing high school. Some can only attend up to 4th or 5th standard because they need to work to help support the family. In these areas, regionalism is less of a choice and more of a lack of opportunity. This does not indicate that if given the opportunity, they would not actively choose a ‘Tamil’ identity.

However, it is important to understand that identity and culture are learned. They are not always indicative of active choices, but rather exhibit a sense of Billig’s (1995) nationalistic banality infused in everyday activities. Thus, the overall Tamil-only atmosphere is created not for those who can afford it, but also for those who live within its everyday reach.
Class and Language

While there is a difference in living space, religion and class, two consistencies throughout the state of Tamil Nadu include: festivals, such as Pongal or Deepavali, celebrated by all Tamils from all classes and language. Nevertheless, language differs slightly depending upon the region. Sri Lankan Tamil is entirely different from (and from what I discovered, formal in comparison to) spoken Tamil within Tamil Nadu. Within the various dialects of Indian state of Tamil Nadu, these differences can identify the class of the speaker. For example, tanni is the word for water. Most of the people who spoke to me used this word. High class Brahmins will sometimes use jalum instead of tanni. However, while it sheds light on class, it is still not a definitive marker. Many high class Brahmins can and will use tanni. Complexities arise in defining the Tamil elements, especially in relation to language and living space.

As noted by many scholars including Berry and Henderson (2002), ‘identity’ is not a fixed occurrence, nor should it indefinitely define a set of people. In other words, ‘elements’ are relative, fluid, and can shift meanings over time.
Tamil Identity in Tamil Nadu and NRIs

Tamil Identity

Language and landscape alone did not provide enough information to define Tamil identity. I relied on interviews and conversations as the final segment to a mixed qualitative methods approach. I posed a question both to the occupants of the homes that I visited as well as the friends of these individuals. Some people chose not to answer the question and others assumed that I wanted to move there so they began describing job opportunities that I might enjoy. The only formal question that I asked was:

“How does one become Tamil? NRIs, people who have never been to Tamil Nadu before or people from other parts of India?”

Vimal (who lives in rural Thiruvallur district) says – To be Tamil, you can live here and learn the language. You don’t have to be blood (though it helps with

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30 As defined in Chapter 3 – non-resident Indians.
31 To preserve the privacy of the interviewed individuals, I have used pseudonyms instead of real names.
32 I drew this question based on my experiences in Tamil Nadu and previous conversations with NRIs in Northeast Ohio.
blending in), you just have to understand the culture. North Indians\(^{33}\) don’t always understand this aspect. They are sometimes rude.

**Jaya** (who lives in Mylapore) says – 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) says – 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) says – Learn Tamil and live here for some time.

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

I then asked **Vimal**, “Could I be a light-skinned American and live here for a while, learn Tamil and be Tamil?”

**Vimal** says – yes.

Some of the others did not feel as comfortable answering the question.

\(^{33}\) 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.
Jaya says – Akka’s friend is American and she comes here. She is slowly learning and becoming comfortable.

Though not a part of my direct interview process, I made note of a few interactions. 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 involved my father’s conversation with one of the taxi drivers, Anand, regarding his ‘nationality’ and the experience of being an NRI 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.

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34 Akka is the Tamil word for older sister.
35 My Hindi is not polished and by a Hindi-speaker’s standards, I cannot speak it well. However, in Tamil Nadu, everyone seemed to think that I spoke Hindi well.
36 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.
A second incident with my father in Bangalore demonstrates the above idea. At the church we visited, there was a man of 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.

NRIs

In addition to the interviews, I observed the how the governmental policies in tourist areas. Tamil Nadu has its own government, but in tourist areas, everything becomes officially ‘Indian.’ Many places have three different fees, one for ‘Indians,’ one for ‘NRIs’ and the other for ‘foreigners.’ Visiting Mahabalipuram, the fee for ‘foreigners’ was 250 rupees, the fee for ‘NRIs’ was 100 rupees and the fee for ‘Indians’ was 10 rupees. This was similar in Karnataka state at Mysore palace as well. It seems that ‘NRIs’ are somewhere between ‘foreigners’ and ‘Indians.’ They are not quite ‘foreigners,’ but they don’t fit the profile for ‘Indian’ either.
I also want to make note that during my interviews, the individuals all considered themselves Indian. Although they were Tamil because of culture and language, they were citizens of India and were therefore ‘Indian.’ To many of the interviewees, North Indians are Indians as well, but not Tamil. They are Hindi people. There is a sense of togetherness (with North Indians) as Indians, but distance in terms of language and culture. It seems that language not only denotes a manner of communication, but also an entire way of life. All of these elements and modes of identity via spoken language, written language, and visual aesthetics, represent ways of acquiring culture. Something that is again, not innate and fixed, but rather learned, changeable and reinforced.

This concept of ‘Tamil Regionalism’ surfaces outside of Tamil Nadu in Karnataka state, which is geographically situated in South India. I briefly spoke to a few people regarding their feelings on Tamil Nadu because I had just come from there. Many people indicated that Chennai is so ‘Tamil.’ Prabhakar, who had spent about 15 years in the United States for higher education, said (paraphrased):

I hate Hindi. I won’t speak it. I hate the North Indian domination. I think that Tamil Nadu is so funny. You know, I don’t know if they do it now, but on the All India Radio (AIR) broadcasts, they used to cut out the Hindi language parts.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{37}\) I never verified his statement regarding AIR.
Basanti, from Bangalore, who now lives in the United States and returns frequently, described Tamil Nadu and Chennai in particular as ‘nationalistic.’ She later corrected herself and said, “Oh, did I say nationalistic? I suppose ‘regionalistic’ would be the proper term.”

Final Remarks

If we look at the above evidence, it is possible to see many different ‘Indias’ and beyond that, many different ‘Tamil Nadus.’ To characterize Tamil Identity into specific, fixed elements would not promote a useful understanding of the culture nor cultural transmission in general. As with the theme of this thesis, the purpose is ultimately gain a more thorough understanding of the complexities of identity as well as the problems with overly broad categories. The category ‘South Asian’ does not help us to fully understand transmission nor does the category ‘Asian Indian.’ Thus, the category ‘Tamil’ can fall under the same scrutiny as ‘Asian Indian.’

While making the argument that there is no fixed Tamil identity nor Tamil culture, I acknowledge Anderson’s (2006) observation that there exists something that causes people to cluster together or some ‘other’ that causes them to unite. In the case of Tamil Nadu, it seems (to some) that it is the looming threat of Hindi-speaking people nullifying the Tamil language unites them. There is also a sense
of pride associated with being ‘Tamil.’ I am using these ideas to situate ‘Tamil’ to within its own framework while deconstructing the category of ‘Asian Indian.’

This attitude of ‘Tamilness’ was a product of a dense history that includes legacies and stereotypes reminiscent of colonial times. The “Madras State,” as it once was called, encountered less direct “colonial influence” than the North; however, the attempts to ‘standardize’ the South, gave strength to the Dravidian opposition and reinforced modes of Tamil identity including language (Cody, 2013; Stein, 1977). Tamil nationalism and pride fostered by the notions of the past became a vehicle for the ‘common man’ (Barnett, 1976). What was once known ‘non-Brahmin’ movement during the colonial period evolved to create a Tamil cultural nationalism that is evident in current Tamil Nadu affairs (Barnett, 1976).

Though colonial rule fortified the notion of ‘Tamil’ pride, it was shaped long before colonial times. From the idea of Chola mandalam to the many epics and literature that have been passed down through generations, ‘Tamil’ pride is something that can be found as far back as the Sangam Age. The opposition against the Northern rulers is highlighted in the Silappatikaram (R. Parthasarathy trans, 1993). The book of Vanci describes this attitude in detail. Cenkuttuvan, the commanding Tamil king is referred to as “the great king who had subdued the north” (p. 268, Canto 30). Other instances include:

“Let us see the courage of the southern Tamil kings” (p. 234, canto 26).
“For seven hours he had taken over the task of the god of death, and devoured many Arya kings who had treated the power of the southern kings with scant respect” (p. 238, canto 27).

The sense of being ‘Tamil’ pervades in current culture and affairs. It is represented in the film industry, in film songs playing in the city and outside in the village as well as the banality of everyday life. Yet, there is no single, fixed Tamil identity to unite Tamil Nadu. It exists as a malleable construct that is grounded in a long, historical legacy. Nevertheless, when observing cases of NRIs and the Tamil population in the U.S., Tamil identity becomes more fixed and solid in many ways, while blurred in others. Chapter 6 outlines the complexities of this identity.
CHAPTER 6

TAMIL IDENTITY IN THE U.S.

While the previous chapter focuses on Tamil Nadu, Chapter 6 identifies Tamil elements in the United States. As Chapter 5 reveals how internal variations in the culture create a non-static sense of ‘Tamil,’ Chapter 6 encounters similar circumstances. 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. He states in Provincializing Europe, “I have no exceptionalist or representational claims to make for India, or for that matter Bengal. I cannot even claim to have written the kind of ‘Bengali middle-class’ histories that Subaltern Studies scholars are sometimes accused of doing these days” (Chakrabarty, 2000, 21).

Chakrabarty (2000) illustrates the difficulty in characterizing a culture with subtle nuances that vary not only from state to state, but also from village to city, city to city, and village to village. However, Chakrabarty (2000) does acknowledge a categorical view of a state-based identity, ‘middle-class Bengali,’ as a methodological approach to dissect current thought. In the same manner, I am using the notion of a Tamil identity to highlight the complexity of regional
identities as well as situate types of migration patterns. As illustrated in Chapter 5, many of the interviewees indicate that it is the distinction of being ‘Tamil’ that separates them from the North Indian category. However, ‘Asian Indians’ grouped as a single model minority in the United States homogenizes many separate distinct cultures (Frazier, 2013; Skop, 2012; Rangaswamy, 1994).

This Chapter looks at the context of Tamil through visuals and soundscape in events, homes, gatherings, and day-to-day routines of Tamil community members. Events serve as the most ‘formal’ of the settings while homes serve as the most intimate. I was invited to partake in both settings.

**Tamil Events**

While events are not the most intimate of settings, they show a redefining of space in structured for a performance. Some of the most visible elements of transmission can be seen at these events (Skop, 2012). For the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to analyze three important events that serve as markers of ‘heritage’ (Skop, 2012). I will analyze two events directly organized by the Sangam – Thai Pongal and Deepavali – as well as the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana, not directly organized by the Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam, but of which, members are heavily involved. As noted in Chapter 1, it is one of the most prevalent concentrations of the South Indian population in one area in the United States and the largest classical Karnatak festival outside of India (Hansen, 1999). I
will present the visuals, data, and analysis in chronological order. I begin with Thai Pongal and end with the Deepavali festival – the last Tamil festival of the year.

*Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana*

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.

Though its focus is on musical expression, its purpose serves much more. In the ethnomusicology field, understanding the structured performance in terms of the soundscape helps to recognize the visuals and the identity of the culture itself (Arnold, 2000). It is a guide for the South Indian culture, its roots in ancient Hinduism, and is also a way for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to intermingle with and share a common cultural heritage with Resident Indians (Hansen, 1999).
Fig. 48, The hallway of the Waetjen Auditorium of Cleveland State University redefined to a Tamil landscape. Brightly colored saris and South Indian dress infuse with the American elements. Men can be seen wearing a dhoti (a long skirt-like garment).

Fig. 49, The Waetjen Auditorium shows the space has become South Indian. The gold and red curtains cover up the original backdrop and the stage. South Indian instruments such as the veena, mridangam, tampura, and khanjari are visible in this photograph. The performers are arranged as they would be in Chennai during Karnatak performances.
The audience in the above photograph (bottom third) follows along with the performance. Women dress in silk saris, adorned with jewelry and bindis. Men often wear *tilaka* (red powder) or some sort of South Indian dress shirt. More men wear Western clothing than women. They audience also mimics the talam (rhythm/clap) on their hands. They gesture the following as the performers play:

1. palm down
2. palm up
3. thumb to index, middle, ring, and pink finger (in that order)
4. palm down, palm up (double the speed of the first two steps)

![Image of performers](image1.png)

Fig. 50, While the audience continues the clap pattern, the stage reinforces other elements. Visible in this photograph is the use of the Bharatanatyam dance. In addition, in the background, composer Thyagaraja is visible. St. Thyagaraja was born in Tiruvarur, Tamil Nadu.
While each member follows a slightly different pattern, they repeat the hand rhythm for the duration of the concert.

From Figure 50, a variety of things are visible. The painting with alta, the red liquid, is meant to draw attention to the mudras and movements in Bharatanatyam dance. The image of Thyagaraja as well as the title gives context to the performance situation. The hand gesture and color of the dress denote the image of a deer in this performance. *Kanjivaram*\(^{38}\) silk saris specific to Tamil Nadu are traditionally used in Bharatanatyam performance.\(^{39}\)

Another element to the CTA is the economic link to Tamil Nadu and Chennai city. During this specific event, vendors from Chennai come to the festival to advertise goods or sell products to the Tamil community.

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\(^{38}\) From the region of Kanchipuram (The capital of the Pallavas highlighted in Chapter 3). Can also be “Kanchipuram” silk.

\(^{39}\) Unlike the children during Pongal, these performers are using specific colors to signify deities and religious actions.
Fig. 51, Tamil movies and CDs for sale at the CTA.

The Tamil script as well as the Tamil English script, shows the involvement of the Tamil community. The vendors target the Tamil-speaking audience who participates in the CTA.

*Soundscape*

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/uECnPmbzOif](http://youtu.be/uECnPmbzOif).

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.

**Sathguru Music Hall – Mylapore, Chennai**

This festival in comparison to the festival that I attended in Chennai appears almost the same. A minor difference between the performance at the Sathguru Music Hall and the Waetjen Auditorium at Cleveland State included the presence of mosquitos. Though it was air-conditioned, the Sathguru Music Hall had quite a few mosquitos, which would not be present in April in Cleveland, OH. Otherwise, the auditorium could have easily been in the United States. Even the audience dress was similar to the United States. However, because performances take place throughout the city, the auditorium was not as packed as it was for Cleveland’s main weekend performance, though it maintained similar numbers to the Cleveland performances throughout the work week.

In addition, the movement in Chennai was a bit more restricted. I purchased a seat for 50 rupees in a particular section and had to remain in that assigned section. I was not able to move about the auditorium as I was in the United States. The visuals were similar. There was a photograph of Thyagaraja as
well as other composers decorated with malai. There was a photograph of the specific composer honored on the stage. The arrangement was analogous. The one difference that I noted was the presence of advertisements – the other concerts broadcasted on Jaya TV had a background that featured various advertisements and sponsors as well.

Outside the main auditorium in the hallways there were vendors selling books, movies, and cds much like the U.S. In fact, the prices were comparable, perhaps even to the dollar. I often found things slightly cheaper in Chennai (as long as I avoided the shopping malls), but these prices, though in rupees, were the same as the prices at the US event.

_Soundscape_

As far as the soundscape, the external soundscape in Chennai is not audible within the structures of the music hall, much like it is not audible in Cleveland, OH. The internal soundscape mirrors that (or vice versa) of what I witnessed in the Waetjen auditorium of Cleveland State. However, at the particular performances that I attended, I did not hear Telugu or Malayalam. A recorded clip of the Sathguru Music Hall from December 17, 2013 can be found here: [http://youtu.be/sr8r1Vh9uRs](http://youtu.be/sr8r1Vh9uRs).
Thai Pongal

Thai Pongal marks the ‘Harvest Festival’ (and is often celebrated in the U.S. close to the New Year) where members celebrate rural and tribal aspects of life in Tamil Nadu (Raj, 2013).

The cattle, (*mattu*), is important to the festival. Various videos were shown throughout the performance that included images of cattle and sound effects of cattle bells.

Fig. 52, (Image courtesy of NEOTS) The traditional dress with the cattle in the background. The young girl is offering to the cattle for the harvest.

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40 Because this was my initial visit as a member of NEOTS, I was greeted with some skepticism when I brought my camera. In addition, children were involved in the event, so I was not permitted to take photos during this particular section and had to rely on the “official photographer.”
Fig. 53. (Image courtesy of NEOTS) The children dressed as farmers offering the harvest to the cow.

These images mark some of the visuals specific to the Tamil Pongal festival. However, while it is easy to see the visual clues, without semiotics, it is difficult for an outsider to observe what makes the festival specifically Tamil. The banner below shows how important the semiotics is in the Tamil Thai Pongal.

As Figure 54 shows, the Tamil script is integrated not only into the title of the event, but also the phrase “Let us unite and preserve our heritage!” The sign is the

Fig. 54, Semiotics used at events.
only element on the stage aside from the performers. The remainder of the stage for this performance is dark and does not contain other elements. However, the audience creates its own elements. The women dress in South Indian silk saris, jewelries, and bindis. Men either wear Western-style clothes or South Indian ornamented dress shirts. Men can also be seen wearing dhotis, but it is not as common.

In addition, the performers, children of the Sangam members, create the other elements of the landscape again, on stage. The dynamic performance through dance highlights Bharatanatyam, a specifically South Indian dance of Tamil origin. From Figure 50, the color of the toes and fingertips – painted red – and the garland in the hair are the visual indicators of a Bharatanatyam performance. They also wear the colors of the festival – bright hues and colors with patterns that reinforce the idea of the harvest.
Fig. 55, Bharatanatyam dance of Sangam children and color are indicators of the harvest. While Bharatanatyam colors usually signify specific deities or denote religious actions, this particular act reflects the children’s preference for harvest color (Ramachandran, 2012).\footnote{This particular dance segment was directed by Hema Ramachandran as cited above. She spoke to me about the festival in advance.}

The final element to the Pongal festival, similar other Tamil festivals, is the food. Specific Tamil dishes are served before the series of performances to evoke a sense of Tamil Nadu through other sense such as taste and smell.
I attended Pongal again for a second year. This time, I was permitted to take photos without question. I found that there was an increase in adult participation as well as variety of events. Pongal of 2014, did not focus as heavily on the rural elements of Tamil Nadu. Instead, it provided a creative outlet for adults and children alike. It was also held at Parma City Hall in Parma, OH, which is a favorite venue for participants. Last year, they were not able to reserve the hall for Pongal. I noted that this year’s Pongal was not held in an auditorium and created much more chaos than the previous year.
Tamil Nadu was fresh in my mind since returning the previous week, but I did not feel like I was in Tamil Nadu at the Pongal event, though I could see sarees and dhotis. The language is much smoother than what I heard in rural Tamil Nadu. It sounded more earthy than the village, not as high-pitched and was much slower. My father brought the same observations to my attention. The entire structure of the event was complete and utter chaos. The speaker asked everyone to quiet and sit down, but no one listened and the program continued. It reminded me of traffic in Chennai city.

The chaos that I encountered at Pongal (I encountered this same chaos at the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana), was not apparent in the internal events that I attended in Tamil Nadu. I visited both the Sathguru Music Hall as well, three church services, and two services in various temples. Everything was structured in the church services as well as the Music Hall. There was no talking during the
performance. Sometimes there was movement, but not much. During the temple services, it was order within chaos. There were many people waiting for the service, but those who participating sat still and silent. However, much of the surroundings including outside of the church, temple, and music halls, were engulfed in pandemonium – traffic jams, people, and animals crossing with no traffic rules, beeping, random noises, etc. I saw this reflected internally in the U.S. events.

Soundscape

The entire program is conducted in Tamil. Occasionally, English slips in, but most of the environment including conversation is Tamil. Tamil music surfaces throughout the event. The last Pongal I attended, however, included what initially sounded like Barso Re, a song from the Hindi movie Guru. As the song continued, I realized that all of the lyrics were changed to Tamil.

Both Pongal festivals opened 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.
I spoke to both Vimal (in Tamil Nadu) and Jyothi (in the US) about Pongal in Tamil Nadu. The festival lasts four days, as opposed to one evening. The first day is Bhogi, where people throw away old clothes and get new ones to symbolize a new life. The second day is Pongal, which includes boiling fresh milk. The third days is Mattu Pongal (Cow Pongal), celebrates the cow. This includes washing the cow, decorating the cow and even cow races (bull races). Vimal informed me that he was disqualified for the Siruvallur village race, because he has a female cow and only bulls can run. The last day is Kanum Pongal, where people spend time together. They go to movies or go out to a picnic and decorate the house with Kolam (a type of painting that is from rice powder or chalk).

Fig. 58 and Fig. 59, (Above Left) Vimal’s mattu (cow) decorated for Pongal in the Siruvanur village. (Above Right) Kolam during Pongal at the Ashirvadh Ashram. (Images courtesy of Kristen Kepnick).
Deepavali

While ‘Diwali,’ as it is called in North India, is a Hindu festival celebrated throughout India, ‘Deepavali’ is the name specific to South India. The Deepavali event that I attended was much different than previous years. According to the Sangam president, the event attracted 200 less people than previous years because the rescheduled date of November 23rd conflicted with a major dance competition in New Jersey (Raj, 2013). This festival served food similar to Thai Pongal.

Again, Tamil script is visible from the screen displayed at the Deepavali festival. It is also called “Deepavali Kondattam” which means “Deepavali Festival (or Celebration)” in Tamil.

Fig. 60, Signage at the Deepavali Festival.
Fig. 61, Children of Sangam members display a fusion dance of Bharatanatyam and Kollywood (Tamil film industry) dance at the Deepavali festival. They are dressed in traditional South Indian outfits.

The Sangam hired a “magic act” to entertain the children, because they lost the majority of their performances to New Jersey.

Fig. 62, A fusion of cultures.
As Figure 62 shows, the Sangam ran out of resources so they hired a magician whose act was not really related to Deepavali. This photo shows the juxtaposition of the Tamil elements in stark contrast to the American elements. It also highlights how the Tamil landscape through festivals, varies depending upon the timing of the event.

Deepavali in Tamil Nadu

Between performances, many Sangam members discuss, on stage, the celebration of Deepavali in the US versus India. Various members explained\footnote{All of this was conducted in Tamil. I relied on my father’s translation for the event. The dialogue is also a result of my father’s translation.} that they hold to their tradition through children’s performances, food and the social gathering. However, almost every member indicated, in a similar manner through a special form of dialogue (similar to a talk show between the host and the guest), the following:

a) Deepavali is better in Tamil Nadu – there you have fireworks while here, you are confined to an auditorium.

b) The weather is better in Tamil Nadu - in Ohio, you only have cold and snow and cannot go outside to celebrate properly.

c) The food is better in Tamil Nadu – here, you only have access to things that have to be catered (by Udupi Café) and nothing is fresh.
d) The community is larger in Tamil Nadu – here, you have a festival and it may coincide with another important event (In this case, the New Jersey dance event) and makes the gathering smaller.

Soundscape

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. The Deepavali festival opens as Pongal does – 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. Again, at the end of the program, the audience sings, Jana Gana Mana. From what I have witnessed, many attendees have already left by the end of the programs (both Deepavali and Pongal). This is usually due to bad weather and/or time, because the Deepavali and Pongal events take place in the months of January and November.

Personalized Tamil Identity in the United States

Before delving into the homes, I want to situate Tamil identity within the context of conversation and unstructured interviews. I gleaned much of my information from individuals via conversations. However, there were a few
instances that I asked specific questions in order to get the information that I needed. Throughout my conversations over the year that I spent actively engaging in the Tamil community, I realized that each person had a different, individualized experience – not only with feelings about returning to Tamil Nadu, but also in connection to past experiences. The majority to whom I spoke were women. My position as a woman, made it easier for them to speak to me. In addition, in Tamil culture, often the woman passes on the heritage to the children. These women became my Aunties and guides to establishing my Tamil heritage. Many of the home-based events that I attended were also specific to women, including a baby shower as well as Navaratri Golu.

*Interviews*

I talked with a number of people from both Sangam events and home events. The only formal question that I asked was similar to the one that I asked in Chennai, “*How does one become Tamil? NRIs, people who have never been to Tamil Nadu before or people from other parts of India?*”

Depending upon the conversation that I was engaged in, I changed my wording to fit the situation. As evident from the answers, each person chose to interpret this in a different manner.
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

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43 This was an email interview. I left everything capitalized as it was written.
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 even Tamil. 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. Only the language was the same. Though there are some language differences, especially in delivery and tone, the fundamentals are 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.

Poorani also mentioned that – North Indians who visit Tamil Nadu think they are better than us because they are lighter skinned. I asked her about her friends here. She says – here is different. I have many North Indian friends, though I have many Tamil friends too. Two of her children are also married to North Indians. Others made note that North Indian culture is different than Tamil culture. It is not the same. Otherwise, there was not much commenting on this subject.

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 different experiences and 2) they had different views on India and Tamil Nadu.

Poorani returns to India as often as she can and hopes to move back someday, while Jyothi likes to visit only. 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 up-to-date with affairs back in Chennai. We had a conversation about Amma (Selvi Jayalaithaa, 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 inefficient. She says (paraphrased):

> 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.

I also 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.

She also said:

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, 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.

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 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.”

I interviewed both men and women, but became much closer to the women. Prabhu and I had many conversations because he is the husband of
Jyothi. He also spoke often with my father when I brought him to Sangam events. Otherwise, much of my experience centered on the women. The women invited me to the house and the women organized the household events. Jyothi and Poorani both told me that it is Tamil tradition for the woman to carry the cultural heritage and pass it to the children. If I was interested in my father’s culture, it was their job to help me as much as they were able.

In terms of modes and diasporic practice as mentioned in Chapter 2, Dufoix (2008) 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.

Tamil Homes

As in India, I visited Tamil homes in the United States, though I was not able to visit as many. I was able to visit about three Tamil homes in the Cleveland area and one in Chicago. The three in Ohio were Hindu homes and the one in
Chicago was my great Aunty’s home that is Christian. I found it to be much harder and less common to go from home to home. Often members meet in a singular location – usually at a specific person’s house or within the confines of a program. I noticed that the Tamil homes here varied. Some had a few elements, while others had many. Often, the Hindu homes have a prayer room or a shrine in the basement or entrance of the house.

*Strongsville, OH*

I attended a Navaratri Golu at Jyothi’s house in Strongsville, OH. Navaratri Golu is essentially the festival of dolls. It usually lasts for nine days. While in Tamil Nadu participation often includes other family members for the celebration (depending upon region and tradition), the participants in Northeast Ohio celebrate it as a woman’s function. Dolls are placed on nine steps to represent the nine days of Navaratri.

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44 I have visited other Christian Tamil homes in Chicago for which I am drawing my conclusions, but I was not able to document them, nor do I have sketches. I am relying on memory, which is why I am not including them as “official” homes that I visited.
Fig. 63, Navaratri Dolls.

Fig. 64, Example of the fusion elements between the American home and the Tamil event. The walls are empty, much like the homes in Chennai, but the furniture, carpet, and structure of the house is American. The bookshelf in the corner is something one would see in any American home. Much of this house contained American elements.
All of the women gathered in the basement of the house, while Prabhu and some of the other visiting men gathered upstairs. I was told that in Tamil Nadu, only women would come, but here, because of the driving distance, they bring husbands and leave them in another room. After entering the house, tilaka (red powder) is placed on the forehead and crushed sandalwood scent is placed either on the top of the hands or on the neck.

During my visit, many of the conversations surrounding the idea of God mirrored what I heard and witnessed growing up in Protestant church (A church member seeing an angel or meeting someone through a dream). One conversation featured Krishna, instead of angels. Neesha’s father saw Krishna turn bright blue in the holy cities of Udupi, KN. The other conversation featured Leela’s father and his dream that he met a person whom he had never known in his dream who gave him a gift. This person also had the same dream. They apparently met in real life after having this dream and she did give him the gift (though, it was never revealed what this gift was). I heard similar stories from Americans growing up.

Another topic of conversation between the guests included how many children raised in the United States are more traditional then those back in India. Those in India are trying to be more like those in United States while those in United States are trying to be more like those India.

After the conversations, I asked Jyothi when she began celebrating Navaratri. She told me that it was probably when he children were young, because
she only did the Navaratri rituals so that her children would be exposed to their culture. When they were living in India, she was not religious nor did she or her husband partake in religious activities, only some rituals here and there.

**Jyothi** also spoke with other women about the doll display. She had a Mexican fiesta set showcased and wanted to make sure that this was okay and did not break any codes. She said this under her breath quietly. She had mentioned to me earlier that this was okay to do and that people are breaking from traditional structural norms. I think she wanted to be sure that she was not giving me improper information.

They also served traditional Tamil desserts at the gathering, including *kesari*. Many women sat on the floor, while others sat in reclined poses. It was informal and conversational.

**Soundscape**

While the visuals definitely affected the environment, the soundscape was important to redefining the space. Ambient music was playing in Tamil. The guests spoke Tamil only until Neesha from Bangalore came, then some people spoke in Hindi and others in English. Neesha did not speak Tamil.

The only formal part of the function was the bhajan, and even this was not formal. Tirtha sang a bhajan, a type of devotional song, for the group. Everyone
praised her and encouraged her to keep singing, because they did not like singing. She sang mostly in Sanskrit, but added some Tamil for the end of the performance.

**Westlake, OH**

I also attended a traditional Tamil baby shower in Westlake, OH. The décor was Tamil. The house was decorated for this specific event. However, the internal built structure was again, American. The elements scattered throughout the house were from Indian. The invitation required that all women wear pink sarees. The hostess made note that this was an American tradition infused with the Tamil customs. Many people attended this event. All of the ceremonies were conducted in Sanskrit and the ambient conversation, small performances, and speeches in Tamil. The mother-to-be and father-to-be both dressed in traditional outfits while participating the ceremonies. The mother-to-be and her sister were both born and grew up in the United States, but spoke with Tamil accents.

**Jyothi** told me before attending the event that I would feel like I was in Tamil Nadu with the ceremonies and decorations. I would agree with her except that it took place in the middle of a snowstorm. I could not escape from the reality that I was in Northeast Ohio.
Fig. 65, Much like in Strongsville at the Navaratri, I was greeted with tilaka, but also with a flower. It is traditional for Tamil women to wear poo (flowers), especially for functions.

Fig. 66, The mother and father-to-be, partake in ceremonies, while snow falls outside the window. The floor was covered in blankets and the pillars (left) were covered for the decorations. This was to mimic the ceremony in South India, Valaikaapu, during the third trimester of pregnancy. Typically, the groom’s family performs a separate ritual, but the family chose to have both rituals together. The mother-to-be wears a black saree to ward off evil.
Fig. 67 and Fig. 68, Saris and bangles for guests.

Fig. 69, The infusion of American architecture with Tamil elements.
Fig. 70, A Bharatnatyam-inspired dance performance at the baby shower.

**Soundscape**

Tamil conversation and Tamil music were apparent. The ceremonies were conducted in Sanskrit (as most Hindu ceremonies are). There were a few Karnataka songs (by the sister of the mother-to-be) and Bharatnatyam-inspired dance performances.

**Kent, OH**

I visited a particular home in Kent, OH more than once. I will not reveal the name of the interviewee so as not to reveal the identity. This particular house
has more personal elements than the previous. It was decorated as opposed to some of the other homes that I had seen not only in India, but also in the United States. There is a cabinet of ‘Indian’ spices for cooking.

Fig. 71, Decorations within the house.

Fig. 72 and Fig. 73, The prayer room within the house. The decoration is Tamil. The top corner of the photograph showcases a Tamil Aum. The garland around the photographs of deities mimics the
environment of India. The soundscape in the room is apparent. The prayers are played continuously throughout the day. Even when she is not at home, they continue to play.\textsuperscript{45}

![Image of a similar Tamil Om located above a shop in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu.](image)

Fig. 74, A similar Tamil Om located above a shop in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu.

The hostess, from Chennai, told me that she likes to keep more decorations than she would in Chennai. She wants to remind herself of her home through various decorations, even if they are not exact replicas. Some of the decorations come from other parts of India as well. “Here,” she says, “You cannot be picky, you just have to work with what you have.”

\textit{Soundscape}

I visited her house multiple times (before and after India) and the soundscape was consistent each time. The sounds of Tamil TV programs echoed

\textsuperscript{45} She travelled to Chennai for four months. In this event, she asked me to take care of her dog while she was gone for two weeks. The prayers were still echoing through the house, even though no one was there.
throughout the house. In addition, many, if not all (of what I heard), of her phone conversations were conducted in Tamil. Tamil script appeared on many of the items in the house. Her prayer room was continually audible in that particular section of the house. The sounds of cooking mimicked India as well as Indhu Chiti’s\textsuperscript{46} house. It was not Tamil Nadu, because I could not hear the birds outside or the traffic. Otherwise, the interior was similar.

\textit{Chicago, IL}

I am using a home as a point of reference for a Christian home. In addition, as I am using autoethnographic methods, it is also important to reveal a part of my own life. This home is my father’s aunt’s house. It is internally and externally American. However, what changes the dynamic are the functions that take place inside as well as the interactions. Some of the photos on the walls, much like Chennai, are of family members. There is also a photo of Jesus. The wall space is empty, but not as empty as the houses in Chennai. In addition, like the other homes, she has a cabinet full of spices for cooking that one would not find in the United States, arranged in a particular way.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} Chiti is “mother’s younger sister.” In this case, she is my father’s “chiti,” but in my family, we call her the same.

\textsuperscript{47} I have mimicked, out of habit and familiarity (as my dad’s looks the same), this arrangement in my own kitchen.
Fig. 75, Indhu Chiti’s home in Chicago, IL. The elements are American, but when infused with people, the become more Tamil. She also has photographs of family members on the walls, much like in Tamil Nadu. In addition, the walls are barren and empty.

Fig. 76, The furniture and color scheme mimics the houses in Tamil Nadu, but the built environment that it is housed in, does not reflect the structures of Tamil homes.
Soundscape

Depending upon the time one visits the house, the soundscape changes. A function may bring about different varieties of sound. Church groups can sometimes conduct services in Tamil. The conversational element of the home is mostly in Tamil (even spoken to me). English can be heard as well.

In January of 2011, a prayer meeting was held for my great uncle. Many of the visiting extended family members in the Chicago area were Telugu. The service was conducted in Hindi, not Tamil. However, the conversational languages varied from Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, and English. During non-function situations, the sounds of cooking as well as Tamil language news, TV programs, conversation (in person and on the telephone) permeate the atmosphere. The blending of identity is much more apparent in the United States.

Comments on Tamil Homes

The various homes highlight the many facets of Tamil identity as well as the diasporic practice. There are cultural ties to linguistic and historical elements of the cultural home that are evident from the decorations, soundscapes, and structure of gatherings in the homes. The various emotional attachments highlighted in the interviews reflect in the landscape and soundscape of the homes.
On special occasions, the Tamil identity for those in the United States seems to be heightened. They seem to place a more conscious effort on displaying aspects of ‘Tamilness’ on particular days. Special occasions become an outlet for the Tamil identity to flourish out in the open. While those living in Tamil Nadu can experience ‘Tamilness’ with a sense of banality, those in the United States seem to have to make a much more intentional effort.

**Final Remarks on Chapter 6**

As demonstrated in this Chapter, Tamil identity varies and differs depending on the person. Cultural markers intended to denote a specific region of India are blurry. If identity variation exists at a regional level, greater variation exists within the entire ‘Asian Indian’ structure. In the United States, it is more common to see a mixing of people from pan-Indian origins, but this does not substantiate the casual use of an overly broad category. While it is useful in some instances, it does not account for the varying degrees and history to which a people remain faithful.

It is important to look at internal, subtle landscapes because they not only reveal unnoticed landscapes, but they also give further insight into the intricacies of a culture and broaden knowledge of cultural landscapes altogether.
The Tamil landscape, while it is ‘invisible’ to viewers outside of the culture as Skop (2012) indicates, manifests in a visible way. Through the internal redefining of space, the Tamil people create a Tamil imprint on the otherwise ‘American’ landscape.

Using these external elements of American origin, the Tamil community creates ‘symbolic’ links, as articulated by Coones (1985) and Muir (1999), to connect to the cultural home of Tamil Nadu. While untrained eyes may assume that the elements such as dress, color, signage, dance, and festivals are reflective of an all-encompassing Indian landscape, the nuances are actually quite distinct and unique to the South Indian tradition.

The Tamil landscape shows that while people continue to exist in everyday American spaces – at work and school – they find time to (re)create the landscape of the home. Not only do they (re)create the cultural home, they draw elements from Tamil Nadu to their resettled location. In the case of the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana, the event draws many performers, families, and vendors from the Chennai area to Cleveland, OH. During this festival, fashion boutiques such as Utsav – who sell saris and South Indian dress – send representatives to Cleveland in order to draw business back to Chennai. Cleveland, OH and Chennai exhibit a dialectical relationship during this particular festival.

Other festivals, however, rely solely on the Cleveland population for visibility and survival. In addition, the population that creates the events cannot be
small. As the Deepavali festival demonstrated, without the population, the event becomes more American. As the numbers grow, the landscape, once ‘invisible,’ will become more visible. Alternatively, if the numbers diminish, the landscape, once again, becomes ‘invisible.’

The survival of the Tamil landscape becomes increasingly important through maintaining a large population. As mentioned previously, while the Asian Indian population can be counted, data on the Tamil population is sparse. The Sangam does not keep reliable records on members. Furthermore, many Tamilians do not join the Sangam, but rather attend events on family or friend’s membership.

While the effects of the population are visible on the landscape, the exact number remains vague. Because numbers and census data on the Asian Indian category are available, it makes the pan-Indian identity easier for researchers to navigate. Understanding the landscape may not give exact numbers, but it lends itself to creating a more thorough evaluation of the state-based and regional identities of India.

The soundscape is an essential part of recognizing the landscape. It should not be overlooked in favor of visuals alone, because it adds to the environment. Often, the visuals at first glance can reveal a pan-Indian landscape, but through the sound elements, one can decipher what region is represented. For example, it is possible to decipher a non-Tamil speaker in conversation. English or Hindi in
conversation also mark a non-Tamil speaker. Sometimes, people will respond with “Tamizh theriyathu” or “konjum,” which means “I don’t speak Tamil” or “a little.” These people may have connections to Tamil, but are not fully engaged in these connections. The songs, the films, the TV programs inside a house or played at Sangam events, these are all indicative of the Tamil culture.

Much like in Tamil Nadu, the preference is for the Tamil language. However, because the United States differs from India in so many ways (the external environment can never be replicated), it is common to see a ‘fusion’ of a pan-Indian identity. Rao (1988) uses concepts of ‘fission’ and ‘fusion’ to describe the immigration process of Asian Indian in phases. Phases 1-2 describe the first-generation as experiencing ‘fission’ in an augmented sense of identity and regionalism in language and custom (Rao, 1998). Phases 3-4 utilize ‘fusion’ to create a sense of pan-Indianess as shown in Figures 77 and 78.
Fig. 77 and Fig. 78, (Above left): Rice, *arisi* (Tamil), *chaval* (Hindi), is available on Devon Ave in Chicago to many Indians and South Asians. (Above right): Devon Ave also has a variety of clothing stores (juxtaposed against the snow of a cold, Chicago winter) for Indians of all regions and states to shop.

Both South Indians and North Indians shop at the same (Indian) grocery stores, jewelry stores, and clothing stores. Though they might prefer one more than another, they are limited to what is available in the United States. Therefore, the mingling between various parts of India is much more common than what is
visible in Tamil Nadu. However, as many of the interviews show, this does not fully abdicate preference for Tamil culture or even negative feelings toward the overall concept of a Hindi-speaking domination in Tamil Nadu.

The participation, interviews, and autoethnographic elements reveal a deeper understanding of the identity and culture. It is not enough to simply observe for understanding, but it also requires participation, relatable experience, and an in-depth view of the phenomena as it takes place. As a researcher, I wanted to feel what they were feeling in order to evaluate the research that I was doing. I began as an outsider, but soon became accepted (though not entirely an insider). At the last function, a woman, whom I had seen and was new to the Sangam, commented to me, “It is so nice to see familiar faces and see you again. I see you at every function!”

Research of this nature requires years of participation. My thesis research only allowed two years for participation. Within that timeframe, I was able to uncover enough about the elements and transmission to outline the Tamil identity as separate from the pan-Indian identity. More time, however, would be beneficial to establishing a greater understanding of regional identity. Chapter 7 outlines the summary and implications of the research that I was able to accomplish within that timeframe.
CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This thesis utilizes a mixed qualitative methods approach to the research. In addition to sounds and visuals, I incorporate auto and ethnographic procedures and allow the experience of identity to be measured beyond events alone. Position and identity as situational and relational change the nature of interaction with and among a group of people. These interactions reveal the complexity of transmission in four significant findings.

Transmission

The primary finding indicates that although the Tamil identity changes the existing landscape in the United States on a small scale as a product of transmission, it is not a verbatim representation of the entire Tamil culture. Moreover, transmission is case-specific. Each individual has varying levels of attachment to and interaction with a particular place. Elements of transmission serve to build community and bridge a gap to the cultural home, but also to ease integration into a host culture.
The Tamil population exhibits fluctuating connections to the home state. As Raj (2014) indicates, many come on temporary work visas for IT and end up returning to Tamil Nadu. Others, who stay here permanently, also come for jobs or education. They are already in a better position through the educational and economic advantages that they have when coming to the United States. As mentioned in Chapter 6, special occasions heighten a sense of identity. The diasporic practice of maintaining the cultural home becomes much more deliberate during certain festivals. These occasions/festivals activate the Tamil identity.

In terms of transmitted elements, the event structures range from similar to not similar at all. The Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana is similar to the music season events in Chennai. Deepavali and Pongal have elements of Tamil Nadu, but are not celebrated in the same manner. They are restricted to one evening rather than the many days that make up the festivals in Tamil Nadu. The events at the homes are similar in some ways, but also meld with US traditions. The structure of the houses and surrounding natural environments, such as the snow outside the baby shower in Westlake, are reminders of the United States rather than Tamil Nadu. The weather, the structures, and many of the customs are different.

While some things, such as language, food and/or religion are similar (though even these can differ in practice), other elements differ from the home
state. It is because of this that a pan-Indian landscape is not entirely accurate, though it persists. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the only shops reminiscent of the culture are available in a pan-Indian or pan-Asian formant (e.g. grocery stores, clothing stores). The population is smaller in the U.S. and therefore has limited choice creating landmarks.

However, as Chapter 6 also indicates, the Tamil identity and distinction is still strong. That is why a Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam exists, why musicians from Chennai travel to Cleveland, OH every year to perform at the Thyagaraja Aradhana or why musicians travel from Cleveland to Chennai during the December music season. The use of “bridgespace,” defined in Chapter 1, and other cultural “bridges” such as festivals, make connection to Tamil Nadu much easier.

As far as this indicator of success (according to U.S. standards) as solely connected to culture, it seems unlikely. As I discuss in Chapters 5 and 6, many people who migrated to the U.S. have the opportunity to do so. The people in the villages of Tamil Nadu do not even speak English or Hindi, let alone have the monetary funds or educational opportunity to come to the United States.

In addition, the second generation has the opportunity to benefit from the economic advantages set by the first generation. People who come from vulnerable areas with fewer economic opportunities, as addressed in Chapter 5, are not able to make the same leaps.
Cultural Conflation

Secondly, there is conflation in transmission. A single group is not representative of an all-inclusive culture. Asian Indian does not represent all Indians and often takes a North Indian interpretation in the United States. Likewise, Tamil does not represent all Tamils as a homogenous group, but rather incorporates those from differing economic backgrounds as well as multiple countries such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia or Singapore.

Through looking at histories, types of migration in both Tamil Nadu and relocated settlements in the United States, it is possible to move beyond fixed categories of the Tamil population. As geographers, we often grapple with categories. If something is too specific, it loses its relatable properties; however, at the same time, if it is too broad then it loses its unique properties. The importance in analyzing ‘Asian Indian’ is not in alienating the Tamil population as non-Indian, it lies in understanding that ‘Asian Indian’ is a complex term and does not denote a single identity for a group of people. State-based distinctions do exist and do surface in the United States as Chapter 6 shows. However, because these distinctions exist does not mean that there is no sense of pan-Indianess among say Tamils, Gujaratis or Bengalis in the United States. This pan-Indianess is embedded within state-based distinctions.

For example, South Indians and North Indians, do not cook the same dishes nor use all of the same ingredients. This is true of South Indian cultures
such as Tamilian or Keralan as well. However, many of the spices overlap and are similar. Turmeric, *manjal podi* (Tamil), *haldi* (Hindi); tamarind, *puli* (Tamil), *imli* (Hindi); fenugreek, *vendhaiyam* (Tamil), *methi* (Hindi) – to name a few of many, are all common to various Indian dishes. To say that Tamils only make ‘Tamil food’ everyday, is similar to saying that Americans only eat hamburgers and hot dogs. Obviously, people eat a variety of foods, especially in the United States.

While some families may prefer eating *sambhar, dosai,* and *idli,* others may prefer to cook a North Indian dish. In Tamil Nadu, as Chapter 5 covers, the choices are much more limited, especially in the villages. However, with resources in places like Mylapore or Royapettah, it is possible to see Thai food, Chinese food, and even KFC.

The problem with the ‘Asian Indian’ category in terms of census data, is that it deals with many different regions and many different customs. The basis for ‘Asian Indian’ takes on North Indian, Hindi-speaking connotations. For example, in academic literature, ‘Bollywood’ is used to refer to all of Indian cinema (Skop, 2012). This description of a Hindi-language cinema denotes a lack of understanding in the integration of South Indian culture. Tamil Nadu has its own cinema, Kollywood, based in Chennai, with specifically Tamil language films (Bate, 2009; Ravi, 2008). The Southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala have their own cinemas as well. Additionally, notions of the ‘sitar’ and ideas of ‘Patel Hotels’ contribute to the ‘Asian Indian’ landscape. The sitar though it can be used in Karnatak performance, it is specifically linked to
North Indian Hindustani music and ‘Patel’ is traditionally a Gujarat surname. These are all indicators of North Indian elements.

The North-Indian domination of elements (in the United States) fuels the efforts to maintain Tamil regionalism. However, despite efforts to hold onto a sense of ‘Tamil,’ Chapter 6 shows that the future ‘Tamil’ generations may have a different experience in the United States than their parents. Rao’s (1988) concepts of ‘fission’ and ‘fusion’ show that it is possible to examine changes over time. He describes the 1960s South Indian community as enveloped in a four-state organization; however, by 1975, each state had its own organization (Rao, 1988).

The pan-Indian identity, though not important initially, becomes important in the final phases of adjustment to celebrate national holidays and establish greater political power (Rao, 1988). It is worth noting that when an identifying a cultural background to a non-Indian, it seems more likely to identify as Indian. Conversely, when identifying a cultural background to an Indian, it is common to define a regional state.

Moving forward, these generations may begin to draw from other cultures and lose the idea of ‘Tamilness’ as defined by their parents. As Dufoix’s (2008) assertion that practiced ‘states’ of diasporic identity change over time, so it can be assumed that as a culture assimilates, these states could become more American or perhaps even more pan-Indian. Ultimately, the ‘fission’ or ‘fusion’ happens on an individual basis.
In Chapter 5, it is clear that people living in Tamil Nadu feel more Tamil Indian than pan-Indian, and not at all North Indian, unless they have North Indian connections. Again, it is not the goal of this Thesis to generalize about all people in or from the state of Tamil Nadu. Implications come from specific interviews conducted and the experiences of the researcher during this project.

Soundscape

The third finding shows that soundscape plays an important role in highlighting regional identities. The added element of sound differentiates not only language, but also customs and culture from the Hindi-speaking group of India. This is extremely important in India and transfers to the United States as well.

Chapters 5 and 6 show how the integrated soundscape reveals the nature of a particular space. The sounds discussed in Chapter 2 - environmental as well as those found in music and speech – highlight tones specific to regional identities. Karnatak performance and the Tamil language through conversation or ambient sounds on the television, reinforce the Tamil identity.
Blurring of Identity

One of the final observations, although there is a sense of Tamil separatism, is that distinctive lines in India, such as being ‘Tamil’ alone, tend to blur in the United States. The pan-Indian interaction is not as prevalent within Tamil Nadu cities and even less so in the rural areas, but is observed more often in the United States.

While there is evidence of a semi-cohesive Indian community, many Indians spend time in branched segments of regional identity. Places such as the Northeast Ohio Tamil Sangam provide evidence of the choice to conglomerate in region-specific settings. Drawing from NEOTS, variation in loyalty exists among members. Some choose to hold closer ties to Tamil Nadu, while others use the membership as a way to socialize with people of the same language and culture. A few of the women are married to South Indian men, even though they come from other parts of India and share little ties to the language and the culture without their husbands.

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. The reality that I spent more women than I did men in the United States is indicative of a cultural element. As mentioned in Chapter 6, I was told that is the woman’s job to pass on culture; therefore, they felt the need to educate me in the Tamil ways. However, men have generally dominated traditions of the Thyagaraja festival. Cultural
transmission is not limited to women, but rather an all-encompassing enterprise that involves participation from everyone.

Tamil Identity is complex and situational. In the United States, the lines are more blurred than in Tamil Nadu. As the interviews in both Chapters 5 and 6 show, the sense of Tamil is stronger within the state of Tamil Nadu because the mixing of identities and backgrounds is not as common. In the United States, however, the Tamil population is much smaller and often integrates with a larger South Indian community and pan-Indian community. What is most important about this integration is that it will eventually blend into the fabric of the United States and add to complexity and diversity of current cultures.

**Integration**

Often, it is easy to construct difference when discussing an ‘ethnic’ group or a diaspora. In effort to keep this thesis from taking an Anglo-centric view that Zelinsky (2001) criticizes, I want to illuminate the similarities to what I have experienced from growing up in Northeast Ohio. These similarities are also part of the integration process of the diasporic group.

While many elements blend with US culture, such as the idea of wearing pink to a baby shower, it is important to highlight the fundamentals and interactions of the gatherings. While the rituals and customs may differ, the
interaction is the same. The soundscape of the informal environments (instances where a formal performance is not taking place) include laughter, chattering, and similar emotional inflections reflected in the voice. If the murmur is large enough, the distinction of Tamil becomes difficult and the sounds reflect that of any large group of people. The interaction is a fundamental part of not just Tamil identity, but identity anywhere in the world. As illustrated in Chapter 6, the conversations on religion were almost identical to those in Protestant Christian churches in the United States.

Tamil and American Identity

As indicated in the previous chapters, while ethnicity might be a way to look at 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 transmission. Many members of the Tamil population in Cleveland also come on temporary work visas, so they return to the cultural home.

In addition, Chapter 2 indicates that 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.”

Viewing cultural assertion through ethnicity thus begins by recognizes ‘difference’ in the ‘other.’ It is not the goal of this thesis to create an ‘other’ of the Tamil people, only to understand cultural transmission, and more importantly, the complexity of the homogenous pan-Indian identity.

**Contributions to Geography and Beyond Geography**

It is important to conceptualize identity beyond academia. Everyday social interactions create stereotypes, whether they are ‘negative’ or ‘positive.’ People outside of academics may see ‘Asian Indian’ or ‘Hispanic’ because those institutional categories persist. These categories mask and perhaps even 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.48

In geographical terms, it is important to rethink the evaluation of ‘ethnic landscapes.’ As I have highlighted in this thesis, many of the categories that we

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48 If the reader is interested, the American Anthropological Association has a traveling exhibit titled “Race.” Resources can be found at www.understandingrace.org.
place on populations, such as Asian Indian, can be deconstructed beyond broad categories. Instead of evaluating landscapes as ‘markers of heritage’ alone, we should incorporate the idea of the ‘lived’ and fluid experience. As Cresswell (2003) and Jain (2008) point out, the traditional landscape is inert and does not incorporate the importance of a performed environment.

Soundscape is increasingly vital to identifying an overall landscape. In addition, it is the experience as well as the interaction that lends to contextualizing identities. Because identity is complex, using visual evaluation alone from an outsider’s perspective to characterize ‘ethnic landscapes’ does not reveal the lived and practiced experience.
The feelings people have to a cultural home can be strong. As I began the research process, I could only speculate about these feelings. My physical (and cultural) home is the United States; however from the time I was a child, my father ingrained in me cultural aspects of India. I revisited my journal four days after returning from my fieldwork. I had written this before my final interview with Poorani:

January 3, 2014

Every night I dream that I am still in India. Actually, I wake up looking for familiar surroundings and find myself alone – alienated in my own apartment. For a moment, I panic – then realize that I am home, I suppose. I edit the photos and organize my data while listening to the Tamil songs that I heard while I was in Tamil Nadu – pretending that I am still there. As every moment passes, I panic – not because I’m already gone, but because I feel that I am losing the connection with my memories while I was physically in that place. These festivals that I have been attending, though they make attempts, do not feel like Tamil Nadu nor can they fill the void.
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