
Cultural Retention VS Cultural Integration: Socio-Cultural Experiences and Issues of Sri Lankans Living in Tokyo¹

Iresha M. Lakshman

Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Abstract: *This is an exploratory qualitative inquiry into the socio-cultural experiences of two groups of Sri Lankans (Sinhalese and Muslim) living in Tokyo. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with 25 families and observations in an International school largely attended by Muslim children. Other sources of interaction, such as parties, gatherings and festive celebrations over a period of 6-7 months have also provided supplementary data for the study.*

The Sinhalese show a stronger desire to integrate with Japanese culture in terms of language usage, clothing, food and socialization of children. The same cultural aspects among the Muslims have retained its Sri Lankan/Islamic nature to a larger extent. Both groups of Sri Lankans appreciated Japanese culture for its possibilities for earning money and had some common reservations about integration, particularly about raising daughters.

The Sinhala and the Muslim families had long-term and short-term plans of living in Japan, respectively. Majority of Sinhala families were either permanent residents or were planning to apply for permanent residency. Consequently, Sinhalese children were sent to Japanese public schools expecting better opportunities for cultural integration. Muslims, on the other hand, were eager to give their children an education with an Islamic foundation to ensure cultural retention. They have established a school and mosques for this purpose.

The Sinhalese absorbed certain aspects of Japanese culture without major reservations making way for Japanization of their culture. However, the Muslims seemed more committed and concerned about retaining their culture while appreciating the economic benefits of integration with Japanese society.

Keywords: *Sri Lankans in Japan, Japanization, cultural retention, cultural integration*

1. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the study was to explore socio-cultural experiences of a group of Sri Lankans living in Tokyo. The group studied had Sri Lankans representing two ethnic groups, namely Sinhalese and Muslims. In studying their socio-cultural attributes, attention was placed particularly on the extent to which they had adopted Japanese cultural ways and practices, i.e. become Japanized.

Sri Lankans are attracted to Japan for employment as well as education. Many who arrive there for education end up seeking employment and permanent residency thereafter. However, exact numbers of Sri Lankans living in Japan are not available anywhere in Japan or Sri Lanka. Therefore, the present research depends on the only documented source available to gain statistical information on Sri Lankans living in Japan, i.e. a book entitled 'A journey in harmony: Sixty years of Japan-Sri Lanka Relations' edited by H.D. Karunaratne [1]. Similar issues of finding statistical data on Sri Lankans living in Japan have been highlighted by Karunaratne [1].

According to Karunaratne [1], the number of Sri Lankan immigrants in Japan has increased since the mid-1980s due to push factors such as high unemployment rate, low wages, limited entrance for higher education, growing access to information and the improved demand for Japanese vehicles in Sri Lanka. Pull factors include labor shortage, changes in immigration laws and the development of ethnic networks among migrated Sri Lankans in Japan. As a result of the impact of these push and pull factors, "Sri Lankans in Japan increased from 509 persons in 1985 to over 12,000 persons in 2007" [1]. Furthermore, according to a Sri Lankan Muslim who has been living in Tokyo for the past 30 years, a Muslim politician who was appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs under the United National

¹ Paper presented at the 22nd IFSSO (International Federation of Social Science Organizations) General Conference, Tokyo, Japan 29th- 31st May 2015.

Party (UNP) government in early 1980s have supported Muslims from his region, Akurana to travel to Japan for various business purposes (personal communication, 2014). This has laid the foundation for Muslims from the same area to migrate to Japan mostly for work (vehicle business). As a result of ethnic networks between migrated Sri Lankans and their family and friends in Sri Lanka, many Sri Lankan Muslims currently living in Tokyo are either kin or at least residents of Akurana or close by villages/towns.

The study uses the concepts ‘cultural retention’ and ‘cultural integration’ to refer to the extent to which Sri Lankans living in Japan have internalized the cultural patterns and practices of the Japanese, i.e. the extent of Japanization. Cultural retention refers to the immigrants’ desire and/or attempt to retain their original (Sri Lankan) culture. Here, the immigrants show clear signs of reluctance to adopt cultural patterns and practices of the host culture. Cultural integration on the other hand refers to the immigrants’ desire and/or attempt to integrate with the host culture (Japanese culture) by means of adopting certain cultural patterns and/or practices of the host culture. In the case of cultural integration, the immigrants retain some elements of their original (Sri Lankan) culture without being subjected to complete cultural assimilation by the host culture.

In the absence of a proper database of Sri Lankans living in Japan, snowball techniques were used for identifying a suitable sample for study. Few Sri Lankans living in Tokyo were identified through support from the Sri Lankan Embassy in Japan and personal contacts and by sending an e-mail to the membership of the Sri Lanka Students’ Association in Japan (SLSA) and the Sri Lanka Professionals’ Association in Japan (SLPAJ). Some other Sri Lankans were identified by visiting the Sri Lanka New Year Festival of 2014. Altogether 13 Sinhalese and 12 Muslim families were studied. The sample studied has lived in Japan with their families for over 5 years. The families had children from the age of 2 weeks to 14 years. These families were visited in their homes and in-depth interviews were conducted with both parents depending on their availability. Interviews were also conducted with children who could communicate effectively. Interviews were conducted in Japanese, Sinhala or English as requested by the interviewees. The Sinhala families spoke Sinhala as their first language while the Muslims spoke Tamil.

Majority of Sinhala fathers in the sample are company employees while all Muslim fathers are vehicle traders. Except for six Sinhala mothers, all mothers are housewives. Educational levels of Sinhala mothers and fathers are higher than that of the Muslims. Majority of Sinhalese have migrated to Japan for education while majority of Muslims have come either for business or a job under another Muslim friend or relative (See Table 1).

Table 1: The Sample

Ethnicity	Father/ Mother	Occupation				Education						Reason for migration				
		Car business	Company employee	Housewife	Total	Postgraduate	Bachelors	Professional Qualification	GCE (A/L)*	GCE (O/L)**	Grade 6-10 (Below GCE O/L)	Total	Education	Job/Business	Marriage	Total
Sinhala (13 families)	Father	3	10		13	6	6		1			13	6	6	1	13
	Mother		6	7	13	2	4	3	4			13	1		12	13
Total		3	16	7	26	8	10	3	5			26	7	6	13	26
Muslim (12 families)	Father	12			12		1		5	5	1	12	1	11		12
	Mother			12	12				6	6		12			12	12
Total		12		12	24		1		11	11	1	24	1	11	12	24

* General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level)- National examination taken after 13 years of schooling.

** General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level)- National examination taken after 11 years of schooling.

Six of the Sinhala families from Kawasaki city live in the same apartment complex or in very close proximity to each other. The fathers/husbands of these families are all engineers qualified in Sri Lanka and working for the same Japanese company. These families had frequent get-togethers, shared similar views and concerns about many day-to-day issues and similar life styles. They form a collectivity which has very close interactions with each other forming what can be loosely called a community. This group of Sinhala families will be referred to as the “Kawasaki group” hereafter.

2. IMMIGRANTS IN JAPAN: A BRIEF LITERATURE SURVEY

For centuries, Japan has not had a welcoming attitude towards anyone who is not Japanese. The country's immigration and citizenship policies have been based on *jus sanguinis*, i.e. the principle that one's nationality at birth is the same as that of one's biological parents [2]. Many scholars writing about immigrants living in Japan discuss the "myth of ethnic homogeneity". Kashiwazaki [3] writes:

This myth crystallized in the post-world war II period, and the majority population internalized it thanks in good part to the lack of teaching in school about ethnic diversity. This myth was further reinforced through the *Nihonjinron* literature that emphasized the uniqueness and homogeneity of the Japanese people (Yoshino, 1992). Consequently, the majority Japanese have come to assume that ethnic origin (lineage or blood and appearance), cultural attributes (language and behavioural characteristics) and nationality status all go together.

The experiences of and issues faced by immigrants in Japan emerge from this myth as foreigners are unlikely to share ethnic origin, cultural attributes or nationality status with the Japanese. Naturalization of foreigners was also allowed only if the applicant was sufficiently assimilated and would pose no threat to the homogenous Japanese society [3]. Overt and covert government policies have been in place to assimilate anyone who lacked Japanese-ness but wished to stay in Japan for longer periods. Throughout Japanese history, schools have been used as a tool for assimilating minority groups into the mainstream culture [4; 5].

The principle of *jus sanguinis* prevented long-term non-Japanese residents such as the Koreans and the Chinese from obtaining Japanese citizenship. At the same time it opened up an avenue for 'ethnic' migrants or 'returnee' migrants who are related by blood to Japanese individuals who have once left Japan several decades or centuries ago [2]. The possibility of allowing these groups to enter Japan as long-term immigrants was considered for the first time when the government began to experience large labour shortages. However, even under conditions of labour shortages, the Japanese governments of the 1960s and 1970s were against the idea of hiring foreign unskilled labour. They sought more 'internal' solutions such as using underutilized labour of women, the elderly and rural workers. However, by the 1980s they had to give into the pressures of global migration and import large numbers of unskilled foreign workers [6].

The largest and most prominent group of foreign migrants who entered Japan during this time is the *nikkeijin*, i.e. Japanese descendants born and raised outside of Japan, particularly 'return migrants' from South American countries. Policymakers at the time believed that *nikkeijin* would smoothly assimilate to Japanese society as they were expected to be culturally similar to the Japanese unlike other racially and culturally different groups of foreigners. The Japanese-Brazilians who also thought they were more Japanese than Brazilian while in Brazil believed that the transition would not be difficult for them. However, the Japanese people reacted to the Brazilians as they would react to any other foreigner and the Brazilians too were shocked at the realization that they were not adequately Japanese for Japan. As a result, the Brazilian-Japanese are still undergoing various forms of discrimination in their day-to-day activities [7; 6].

In addition to the South Americans, large numbers of immigrants of different nationalities have been permitted to enter Japan largely to solve the labour shortage of the 1980s [8]. Japan had to depend on migrant labour to fulfil the so called 3D (dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs which Japanese nationals refused to do [9; 10]. The arrangement turned out to be more profitable for Japan. For example, Koreans employed in these jobs were paid a third less than their Japanese counterparts and could be pushed to live in fringe-towns under deprived conditions [10]. Furthermore, the then Prime Minister Nakasone proposed a plan to accept 100,000 foreign students into Japan. This decision resulted in a loosening of regulations pertaining to student visas including those for pre-university language courses [11]. These decisions not only helped solve the labour issue in a cost-effective manner but also contributed towards stabilizing population distribution in Japan by becoming a temporary solution to its aging population crisis [12]. However, the influx of immigrants created new concerns for the Japanese government as well as Japanese citizens who have been operating hitherto under the 'myth of homogeneity'.

These concerns persuaded Japan to rethink its approach towards foreigners both at the state and local government levels in order to avoid discriminatory reactions towards foreigners. Consequently, these groups were recognized as worthy of many public services that were once offered only to Japanese nationals. They were given access to

public services such as national health care plan, childcare allowance and public housing on the basis that they too were 'residents' constituting local communities. Ministry of home affairs pushed for internationalization by way of using foreign languages on maps, signs and the like, by publication of guidebooks in foreign languages for community life and by organizing festivals that bring together foreigners and the Japanese. Additionally, the local governments also developed programs and services such as Japanese language classes, publication of multilingual brochures, consultation services and financial support for emergency medical care [3; 9; 13]. These provisions help ensure that foreigners are able to live as ordinary citizens of a given ward/prefecture and thereby not become a burden on the respective municipality [9]. All in all, these policy shifts have undoubtedly contributed towards improving the quality of life for immigrants in Japan.

However, the issue of whether the Japanese people's attitudes towards foreigners have really changed as a result of these policy shifts is still debatable. According to Liu-Farrer [11] Japan is institutionally 'still ill-prepared to become an immigrant society'. Tai [8] claims that xenophobic reactions towards the increasing numbers of foreigners in Japan are an expression of the Japanese ideology of monoethnicity, 'that there should be only Nihonjin in Japan'. "Oldcomer" Koreans and Chinese as well as "newcomer" Brazilians and Peruvians of Japanese descent whose socio-economic and political condition in Japan has vastly improved as compared to several years ago still go through discrimination in certain spheres of social life [14].

Immigrants oppressed by these discriminatory reactions begin to seek social ties with their fellow countrymen in Japan or stronger ties with those back home. Yamanka [14] points out how groups of immigrants from different nationalities have organized themselves as a form of networking and also to actively fight for their rights. Sakurai (2003, cited in 14) talks of a large group of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims who have built several mosques in the northern Kanto region and regularly gather in the mosques to pray and socialize, and to demonstrate their strong will to maintain their religion and culture in an alien environment. Writing about newcomer Chinese immigrants, Liu-Farrer [11] says that they come to Japan with a clear idea about the distinctions made between Japanese and foreigners. They are aware that a 'wall' stands between them and mainstream society, irrespective of whether they have a Japanese citizenship or a permanent residency status. Consequently, the Chinese desire to retain their social ties with home country and culture. They also opt to obtain permanent residency status rather than be naturalized in Japan as this allows them to formally retain their socio-cultural ties with China. Tsuda [6] points out that discriminated immigrants develop "deterritorialized nationalism" as a reaction against the host society. Deterritorialized nationalism is a reaffirming and strengthening of the immigrants' feelings of affiliation to their country of origin and an articulation of national loyalties outside of the nation-state. The actions of the Muslim community discussed by Sakai (see above), can also be interpreted as an expression of deterritorialized nationalism.

3. SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES AND ISSUES

In understanding the socio-cultural experiences of a group of Sri Lankans living in Tokyo, the study pays particular attention to how they educate and socialize their children and their aspirations to stay in or leave Japan. Language, religion, fashion and food are among the cultural attributes discussed.

3.1 Language and Education

The first and most likely the biggest culture shock encountered by any foreigner entering Japan is the issue of language. As described above, the situation has vastly improved compared to the time when all brochures, maps and directions were exclusively in Japanese. However, the fact that very few Japanese people can speak in English or any other international language can be a cause for anxiety among foreigners.

The parents in the sample possess different levels of Japanese competency. Majority of Sinhala parents are very fluent speakers of the language with some of them having very high levels of reading and writing competency. Except for two mothers who had 'picked up' Japanese through their day-to-day encounters, all other Sinhala mothers have studied the Japanese language in specialized language academies. Most Sinhala parents have either passed or plan to take the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JPLT). As a result, their spoken Sinhala has a lot of Japanese words and nuances mixed to it. The only (Sinhala) individuals not interested in taking the JPLT are four

mothers from the Kawasaki group. These mothers were either unemployed or employed in jobs that did not require any proficiency in Japanese. Furthermore, these mothers do not have long-term plans to stay in Japan. They plan to return to Sri Lanka (with or without spouse) when their children reach the school-going age.

All Muslim mothers are unemployed housewives and, unlike their Sinhala counterparts, do not have much of a social life outside of home. They are entirely dependent on their husbands for any social interaction outside of home. Therefore, they do not feel the need to learn Japanese. Similar differences between Muslim and Sinhala women in Sri Lanka have been documented [15]. These authors point out that Sinhala women are freer to move around compared to Muslim women and claim that this has an impact on the language abilities of Muslim women who could communicate only in their mother tongue. Obviously these Muslim mothers did not see the need to learn another language which is not essential for their family and community life in Japan. However, all Muslim fathers can communicate fairly effectively in (spoken) Japanese. They cannot read or write Japanese and did not think these skills were important for their business or social existence in Japan. Consequently, JPLT was not at all a concern for them. One father said:

The Japanese I know is more than enough for my business work. I don't have to worry about learning it any further. And for business, you do not have to be very fluent in it. I know just enough to negotiate a business (Aabid², father of three children).

Type of school attended by children is directly related to the family language policy of the respective families. The Muslim families unanimously desired to teach their children English.

Our language is neither this nor that. We don't fit anywhere. My children know enough Tamil. That's enough. I don't want to teach them any Tamil. I want to teach them English. That is what they will need in the future, whether they live in Japan, Sri Lanka or any other country (Adam, father of two children).

Therefore, these parents along with some other Muslims have set up ABC International School in Tokyo. Founding principal who is still the principal of the school is a Pakistani Muslim. Initially the school board of management has had some Pakistanis in it. Currently, all 18 members of the board of management are Sri Lankan Muslims. The school is funded entirely by the financial contributions of the community. Since the school lacks the facilities and standards specified by the Japanese Ministry of Education to be registered as a school, it is currently registered as a business enterprise. One purpose of setting up ABC International, attended 98% by Muslims and about 95% by Sri Lankan Muslims, has been to educate Muslim children in English at an affordable fee³.

All Muslim families believe in teaching 'enough' Tamil to their children as that is required for continued networking with grandparents and extended family in Sri Lanka. The families' commitment towards this end is visible in that in all families at least one parent (usually the parents who is less competent in English) made sure that he/she always spoke to the children in Tamil. This was reinforced by the fact that teachers at ABC International discouraged parents from speaking to their children in 'broken' English as that makes it difficult for children to learn 'proper' English at school.

All Sinhala children in the sample are studying in Japanese public school. Therefore, parents were naturally anxious about children's competence in Japanese. This is one main reason that encourages the parents to learn Japanese. In all families, except the Kawasaki group, a division between which parent spoke which language with the children exists. Usually the parent who is more fluent in either Japanese or English spoke in the respective language while the other parent spoke in Sinhala. However, parents claim that this policy is never carried out properly as children always, irrespective of language spoken to, responded in Japanese.

The plan is that my husband speaks to them in Japanese and I in English. But it never works out that way. They always reply in Japanese. So we also automatically shift to Japanese as that is convenient for us too (Samanthi, a mother of two children).

The commitment shown by Muslim parents to speak to their children in Tamil is not visible among the Sinhala parents. Sinhala parents were satisfied with the fact that their children somehow manage to communicate with

² All personal and place names (except cities) are fictitious.

³ Though an International school, the fees at ABC International School is not as expensive as the average International school in Japan.

family and friends in Sinhala when they *skype* or visit Sri Lanka during holidays. They do not believe that a special effort was needed to preserve their children's first language competency. Instead, they too, like their Muslim counterparts, are very keen to teach their children English. But unlike the Muslims, they lack a means of doing it. As Samantha noted,

I don't really care whether they know Sinhala or not. English is what's most important. I wish I had some effective way of teaching them English here.

The experiences of these Sinhala families clearly confirm the claims made by Motani [4] and Okano [5] about Japanese public schools being the most effective strategy adopted by the Japanese government to assimilate anyone who lacks 'Japanese-ness'. Similar to Motani's [4] anecdote about an Ainu child who was assimilated through public education to the extent that she did not know she was an Ainu, these Sinhala children did not know that their first language is called 'Sinhalese/Sinhala'. During the interviews, which they all preferred to have in Japanese, they constantly referred to their mother tongue as 'Sri Lankan language' (*surirankago*).

The Kawasaki group of Sinhala parents is unique in their concerns regarding language use at home. As a group they share the same anxiety that their children will be in trouble if they got used to Japanese language only. Their concern was related to two cases of children who have previously lived in their community. These two children, who are now schooling in Sri Lanka, took a long time to start talking and the group is convinced that it was because they were confused about which language to speak. Although parents spoke in Sinhala at home there was a very visible presence of Japanese around them through TV and in day care centers that function entirely in Japanese. The parents therefore have consciously adopted various strategies to avoid the same happening to their children. These strategies include 1) sending the child with his/her mother to Sri Lanka for holidays of few months a year or once they reach schooling age, 2) completely banning Japanese TV at home, 3) showing DVDs in Sinhala and English instead of TV and, 4) bringing grandparents over to baby-sit. Sepalika (mother of one daughter) claims that her daughter could not speak any Sinhala before her three month vacation in Sri Lanka. Likewise, Anush (father of one son) says that having his father-in-law live with them has helped his son to pick up Sinhala words easily. Since all the children in the Kawasaki group are still below the age of four, parents plan to return to Sri Lanka either as a family or send the child with his/her mother to enroll in a school in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the parents' desire to keep the children's first language and/or English competence intact is clearly understood.

3.2 Religion, Japanese culture and its Impact on the Socialization of Children

Throughout the world, the Muslims are very well known for their will and commitment to retain their religious identity by way of continuing their religious practices and rituals. The Sri Lankan Muslims in Tokyo are no exception. Inculcating Islamic values according to the Holy Quran is a focal point in the socialization of their young children. The main purpose of establishing ABC International has been to give Islamic children a religious education. [16] describe a similar situation among the Muslims in six European countries. It is explained that Islamic moral training for children is very important for these parents and that they will be happier to enroll their children in Muslim schools if such an option was available in the host country. In places where the option was not available they opted to send their children to non-formal Qur'anic arrangements for moral training.

Some Muslim parents send their children, particularly sons, to Japanese public schools after few years of education at ABC International. The decision is based on the fact that they want to train their sons to be able to fit-in to Japanese society so that they will one day be able to continue the family business in Japan. Adila (mother of three) and Aakif (father of three) send their older sons to Japanese public school. Aamir (father of three) is also planning to send his eldest son to Japanese public school in a year or two. These Japanese public schools also have made special provisions for these children in order to accommodate their religious requirements. They are allowed to bring their own lunch to school instead of the one provided by school and to study some other subjects when the other children learn music or dancing. These children (and also Sinhala children in public schools) are also provided special Japanese lessons in what is called international classroom (*kokusai kyōshitsu*).

However, all Muslim parents are very keen that their daughters undergo the Islamic education of ABC International. Adila once returned to Sri Lanka with her children because they did not have a school like ABC International. After

spending three years in Sri Lanka she has returned as she now feels they have a reliable school to send their daughter to. Aabid is also planning to remove his daughters from Japanese public school and send them to ABC International in about another year. However, he will keep his son in public school. Parent's preferences of school types according to children's gender are a clear indication that they understand the assimilation strategy of Japanese education [see 4; 5]. The children (mostly sons) whom they want to stay longer in Japan and be adequately assimilated are sent to Japanese public school while those who will be one day returning to Sri Lanka are sent for an Islamic education in English to ABC International. Irrespective of which school the child attends majority of Muslim children are sent to one of the two Mosques in the area for reading the Holy Quran every day. This is a form of 'non-formal Qur'anic arrangement' discussed by Daun and Arjmand [16]. The ones who do not go for these lessons are either content with Quran recitations done in school or their parents do it with them at home regularly.

All Sinhala families studied are Buddhist by religion. Although the parents are keen to teach Buddhist values to their children it is not 'mentioned' as a core concern in socializing their children. They visit the Buddhist temple in Hachioji with the children when they can but not as a regular practice. The priest in the temple conducts a Sunday school and teaches Buddhism in very simple Japanese and also English to the children. Religious rituals are organized by the temple and the families participate when they can. Unlike Buddhist children living in Sri Lanka these children could not recite religious stanza (*gatha*). By this I do not intend to imply that the Sinhala families are less religious compared to the Muslims, but that there was less visibility of religion in their day-to-day lives and socialization of children. For example, Sumana was very keen to raise her children as she was raised by her mother. But she was, at the same time, aware that it is not an easy task in Japan. She said,

When my mother comes here on holiday, she makes sure that flowers are offers to Lord Buddha and gets the children to join her in reciting religious stanza. But as she leaves, the worshipping also stops. It is not that my kids don't want to do it, but they have other more interesting things that they want to do during the evening. I too am too busy and tired after work to do it.

Consequently, in Sumana's house and few other houses the Buddha statue was placed more as an ornament in the living room than an object of worship. There may be several explanations to this difference in 'expressed' religiosity among the two communities. Firstly, Buddhist philosophy is not a doctrine that puts a lot of emphasis on symbolic worship and rituals⁴ [17]. Secondly, research shows that immigrants from more modern countries are likely to be less religious compared to ones from less modern countries [18]. Although these two communities are from the same country, the Sinhalese are a more modernized community than the Muslims in Sri Lanka. Thirdly, individual factors such as age, sex, education and labour force status could be at play. Research shows that employed individuals have less time for religious activity (see Sumana's claim above) and that people with higher levels of education are likely to be less religious [see 18]. Compared to the Muslims, higher percentages of Sinhala parents are employed and more educated (see Table 1).

Both Sinhala and Muslim families had similar concerns about the socialization of daughters while in Japan. The Muslims' concerns are based more on Islamic values while the Sinhalese' concerns derived more from 'South Asian' values. Families with daughters were considering the option of returning to Sri Lanka. Muslims believe that a girl must be raised according to Islamic values and therefore thought ABC International as the best schooling option for them. All Muslim mothers interviewed have got married very young, that is somewhere between the ages of 16-19 years. All of them believe that it is the 'right age' for marriage and wish the same for their daughters. Consequently, many of them do not plan to educate their daughters beyond O/L standard. They believe that if they expose their daughters to the 'very Westernized' Japanese culture for too long they will not be able to impose these 'correct' ideals on their daughters. All fathers interviewed were unanimous in claiming that "it is difficult to raise daughters in Japan".

The Sinhala parents with daughters too had similar concerns about what they are 'exposed to' in Japan. Nadee and Saman (parents of two daughters) are worried that their daughters would want to imitate the clothing worn by Japanese girls and that they would want to start using cosmetics from an early age. In short, they do not like the culture that a girl could learn in Japan and they are also aware that it would be inevitable if they stay in Japan for too

⁴ "Buddism is not strictly a religion in the sense in which that word is commonly understood, for it is not 'a system of faith and worship'..." [17].

long. Therefore, they are considering the option of returning to Sri Lanka in a year or two. However, other Sinhala parents with daughters, who had similar concerns about their daughters' socialization opted to ignore the concerns and remain in Japan as the daughters did not like the idea of returning.

3.3 Day-to- Day Cultural Attributes: Fashion and Food

The study pays attention to fashion and food in attempting to understand more day-to-day cultural attributes of the families. Majority of Muslim mothers wear the black gown and scarf (*habaya and hijab*) whenever they leave the house while the others wear the Punjabi-suit/salwar and cover their heads. There is absolutely no visible influence of Japanese fashion on their attire. Their daughters too are always attired in frocks and never in jeans or t-shirts. They make sure their food is made from Halal ingredients and cooked by the mother/wife. Similar patterns of food and fashion have been observed by [19] among Muslims in Los Angeles.

In contrast, the mothers and girls in Sinhala families wear Western clothes similar to those worn by the Japanese. As the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka also wear Western clothes one cannot really say this is Japanese influence. But it is noteworthy that the females have given up the saree, their national dress, even as suitable attire for festivals. Only two ladies were seen in saree at the New Year celebrations (in Chofu city 2014), an event for which women would wear saree in Sri Lanka. Though Sri Lankan cuisine is the main food in the Sinhala families their food habits have also become Japanized. The mothers prepared Japanese noodles (*rāmen, soba, udon*), Japanese pizza (*okonomiyaki*), *tempura* and the like at home frequently. Their children prefer Japanese food because it is less spicy. Samanthi explained:

You cannot really help this cultural shift once they start going to Japanese public school. Their day from 8 in the morning to 5 in the evening is all Japanese. And sometimes even after 5, as they go out to play with their Japanese friends. They get used to Japanese food through *kyūshoku* (lunch provided by school). Then television is also Japanese. We are worried about this, but it's difficult to do anything about it. So we have decided to live the weekend like Sri Lankans. But you never know how they will react to it as they grow old (the son is now 9 years old).

The Sinhala parents seem to allow the influence of (Japanese) nature to take over that of nurture whereas the Muslim parents seem to be making a conscious effort to preserve 'Muslim-ness' in their children. Their strong desire to not be integrated to Japanese society along with the institutional setting (mosque, school, halal shops) developed by their community is undoubtedly facilitating this effort. The Sinhalese parents' attention seem less focused on preserving their culture and more focused on training their children to have a financially stable life in Japan in the future. As one Sinhala father noted:

I can't stand the Japanese. They stink. But their money doesn't stink, you know? We are here to earn, so it really doesn't matter whether they treat us like royalty or like garbage (Kelum, father of two children).

3.4 Aspirations about Returning to Sri Lanka

Majority of Sinhala families are either already permanent residents (PR) in Japan or are planning to apply for PR in the coming years. Majority of the Muslim families still have not completed the required number of years in Japan to apply for PR and when they do they too are likely to apply for PR. Three reasons were given for desiring PR: 1) to actually permanently reside in Japan as a family 2) for the father/husband to permanently reside and earn for the family in Sri Lanka (e.g. the Kawasaki group and most Muslims) and 3) to access benefits, such as bank loans that are open to permanent residents only.

All children in the sample liked the idea of going back to Sri Lanka and meeting their family and friends. The Sinhala children wanted this to be a holiday activity compared to the Muslim children who preferred longer stays in Sri Lanka.

In the Sinhala families, usually the husband and wife were divided in their opinion about returning to Sri Lanka. Nadee and Saman is the only couple having a common desire to go back. Many Sinhala parents are also attracted to the convenient lifestyle in Japan. Public transportation, schooling of children which does not involve a lot of homework or packing of lunch and the cool climate are some of the conveniences mentioned. These parents are also concerned about how they could earn an adequate income in Sri Lanka to support the very convenient lifestyle they and their children have got used to in Japan. A study on Sri Lankan immigrants returning to Sri Lanka shows how

they become frustrated upon realizing that they have very little opportunities for investment or work [20]. Unlike the Sinhala families who would have to depend on salaried employment if they return to Sri Lanka, the Muslims already have businesses (rice mills, shops, garages etc.) operating in Sri Lanka and therefore a solid financial base to return to.

The Muslim families with daughters have already taken their decision that they will be returning to Sri Lanka after their daughters reach puberty. The mothers will return with their daughters leaving the fathers behind as the money earned in Japan was vital for a comfortable living in Sri Lanka. Liu-Farrer [11], writing about immigrant Chinese points out that transnational living arrangements of this nature could have several negative impacts on family relations in the long run. It is too early to draw conclusions or make predictions about these Sri Lankan wives and children who plan to return to Sri Lanka leaving their husbands/fathers in Japan. However, one study on Muslim wives [21] has shown that Pakistani Muslim wives are likely to suffer from depression when their husbands live abroad for work.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the socio-cultural experiences of two groups of Sri Lankans (namely Sinhalese and Muslims) living in Tokyo. Data for the study came mainly from in-depth interviews with 13 Sinhala and 12 Muslim families.

Both groups of families are attracted by the financial possibilities available in Japan. While benefitting from these possibilities, the Muslims seem to be making a conscious effort towards preserving or retaining their cultural identity whereas the Sinhalese are increasingly Japanized. The Sinhala families, however do not seem to be completely surrendering their original identity for a Japanized one. Instead they appear to be adopting a hybridized culture (see Holton, 2000) with some components from their original culture and others from the host culture. These tendencies of cultural retention or integration are visible in how the two groups educate and socialize their children, their day-to-day cultural practices and their aspirations about returning to Sri Lanka.

Both groups of Sri Lankans maintain transnational linkages and contact [22] with Sri Lanka. In the case of Sinhala families, the children's growing inability to communicate in Sinhala or English may affect the frequency and quality of transnational linkages maintained with family in Sri Lanka. This would open up more possibilities for stronger cultural assimilation among second generation Sinhalese living in Japan. However, such assimilation of second generation Muslims is unlikely to happen due to the institutions that have been set up (and likely to improve further in future) for educating their children. The school, mosques and the families seem to work in tandem to ensure that the children learn English, Islam culture and their mother tongue so that their future existence would not have to be restricted to Japan. Having businesses both in Japan and Sri Lanka may further facilitate transnational living possibilities for these children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Grant No: L13507.

REFERENCES

- [1] H.D. Karunaratne, "Ethnic Resource Utilization of Sri Lankan Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Japan," In H.D. Karunaratne, Ed, *A Journey in Harmony: Sixty Years of Japan-Sri Lanka Relations*, pp. 139-170, Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 2012.
- [2] D.H. Ortloff and C.J. Frey, "Blood relatives: Language, immigration, and education of ethnic returnees in Germany and Japan," *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 447-470, 2007.
- [3] C. Kashiwazaki, "The Foreigner Category for Foreigners in Japan: Opportunities and Constraints," In S. Ryang and J. Lie, Eds., *Diaspora without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan*, pp 121-146, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
- [4] Y. Motani, "Towards a more just educational policy for minorities in Japan: The case of Korean ethnic schools," *Comparative Education*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 225-237, 2002.

-
- [5] K.H. Okano, "The global-Local interface in multicultural education policies in Japan," *Comparative Education*, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 473-491, 2006.
- [6] T. Tsuda, "Japanese-Brazilian Ethnic Return Migration and the Making of Japan's Newest Immigrant Minority," In M. Weiner, Ed., *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, 2nd ed., pp 206-227, New York: Routledge, 2009.
- [7] H. Shin, "Colonial legacy of ethno-racial inequality in Japan." *Theory and Society*, vol. 39, no. 3/4, pp. 327-342, 2010.
- [8] E. Tai, "Multiethnic Japan and Nihonjin: Looking through two Exhibitions in 2004 Osaka," In M. Weiner, Ed., *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, 2nd ed., pp 139-161, New York: Routledge, 2009.
- [9] S.R. Nagy, "Multicultural Coexistence Policies of Local Governments in the Tokyo Metropolis: A Comparative Examination of Social Integration in Response to Growing Ethnic Diversity," In L.A. Eng, F.L. Collins and B.S.A. Yeoh, Eds., *Migration and Diversity in Asian Contexts*, pp. 56-82, Pasir Panjang: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013.
- [10] M. Weiner and D. Chapman, "Zainichi Koreans in History and Memory," In M. Weiner, Ed., *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, 2nd ed., pp. 162-187, New York: Routledge, 2009.
- [11] G. Liu-Farre, "Creating a Transnational Community: Chinese Newcomers in Japan," In M. Weiner, Ed., *Japan's Minorities: The illusion of Homogeneity*, 2nd ed., pp. 116-138, New York: Routledge, 2009.
- [12] C. Usui, "Japan's Demographic Future and the Challenge of Foreign Workers," In T. Tsuda, Ed., *Local Citizenship in Recent Countries of Immigration: Japan in Comparative Perspective*, pp. 37-62, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006.
- [13] K.T. Pak, "Cities and Local Citizenship in Japan: Overcoming Nationality?" In T. Tsuda, Ed., *Local Citizenship in Recent Countries of Immigration: Japan in Comparative Perspective*, pp. 65-95, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006.
- [14] K. Yamanaka, (2006). "Immigrant Incorporation and Women's Community Activities in Japan," In T. Tsuda, Ed., *Local Citizenship in Recent Countries of Immigration: Japan in Comparative Perspective*, pp. 97-119, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006.
- [15] V.C. de Munck, N. Dudley. and J. Cardinale, "Cultural models of gender in Sri Lanka and the United States" *Ethnology*, vol. 41 no.3, pp. 225-261, 2002.
- [16] H. Daun and R. Armand, "Education in Europe and Muslim demands for competitive and moral education." *International Review of Education*, vol. 51, no. 5/6, pp. 403-426, 2005.
- [17] K.S. Dhammananda, *What Buddhists' Believe*. Singapore: The Singapore Buddhist meditation center, 2006.
- [18] F. van Tubergen, "Religious affiliation and attendance among immigrants in eight Western countries: Individuals and contextual effects." *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 1-22, 2006.
- [19] I. Furseth, "The Hijab: Boundary work and identity negotiation among immigrant Muslim women in the Los Angeles area" *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 52, no. 4, pp. 365-385, 2011.
- [20] B. Brown, "Indifference with Sri Lankan migrants," *Ethnology*, vol, 50, no. 1, pp. 43-50, 2011.
- [21] N.U. Sahar and N.I. Gillani, "Loneliness and depression among wives of Pakistani expatriate husbands," *Journal of Identity and Migration*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 25-36, 2014.
- [22] E. Fong, X. Cao and E. Chan, "Out of sight, out of mind? Patterns of transnational contact among Chinese and Indian immigrants in Toronto," *Sociological Forum*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 428-449, 2010.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Iresha M. Lakshman obtained her BA Degree in Sociology from the University of Colombo and then her PhD, also in Sociology from the Monash University, Australia. Her main research interests include education, urban studies and migration. She has several journal publications and one book entitled "Teaching of English: A Sociological Study" to her name.