

CASTE AND CULTURE IN CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM: DISMANTLING PERCEIVED HOMOGENEITY OF TAMIL IDENTITY

Abstract: Cultural disconnect for many refugees comes because of trauma from state-sanctioned violence. Refugees face cultural crises, alienating and denying them of personhood in the context of many nations' integration processes, which are meant to alleviate cultural distress. However, efforts by refugees and immigrants to preserve their cultures in the face of Canadian multicultural integration result in a homogenization of that cultural community. Canada was the first nation to “enshrine its multiculturalism policy in legislation when Parliament passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act” (Government of Canada, 2024). The Act includes four main objectives, which are “Recognizing and preserving the multicultural heritage of Canadians, Promoting the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society, Assisting individuals and communities of all origins to eliminate barriers to their participation in Canadian society, and Assuring that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law while respecting and valuing their diversity” (Government of Canada, 2024). This paper argues that the system of multiculturalism and integration in Canada while looking to promote “equitable participation of ... communities of all origins”, fails to address the marginalization of certain groups within the homogenized communities under multiculturalism. The caste-based and cultural oppression that many members of the Eelam Tamil (ET) community face is invisible in this mode of cultural depiction. In order to most comprehensively address the treatment of caste-oppressed groups in ET communities, the gradual dismantling of caste structures and the homogenous model minority Tamil identity is necessary. This will address the roots of cultural crises among refugees within their communities and in their new homes and is necessary to ensure that the reproduction of systemic caste violence is stopped, as well as the reductionist identity that upholds such a system.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Caste, Tamil Identity, Diaspora, Culture

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Acknowledgements: I would like to acknowledge my identity as a South Indian Tamil, and the influence it has had on this paper. I would like to acknowledge the privilege I have had and the different circumstances I have been in given my ethnic heritage. Tamil peoples in Sri Lanka have struggled against genocide, ethnic cleansing, and erasure of all facets of their identity. As an outsider to the Eelam Tamil community, I want to stress that my outlook on

multiculturalism and the experiences of Eelam Tamils (ET's) under such a system is not an experience that is my own. Having never experienced the effects of ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure personally as a South Indian Tamil, I have made an effort to ensure that the examples and conclusions made in this paper are informed by those who have lived experience as ET's under the system which this paper is critiquing. While this paper refers to Tamil peoples having ties to Sri Lanka as 's in uniform with the literature review, many Tamil people more closely identify with the term Eelam Tamil, with references to the Tamil state fought for and a unique Tamil identity independent of and before the Sri Lankan state (Sivathamby, 2006). I can only imagine the nuances I have overlooked. I look to continue learning more about the struggle, resilience, and thriving of the Sri Lankan Tamil and Eelam Tamil community.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of The Tamil Academic Journal.

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Canadian Multiculturalism

In the wake of the decades-long civil conflict in Sri Lanka starting in the 80s, brewing for decades before that, the island nation's inhabitants were made refugees. The Eelam Tamil diaspora grew to some 700,000 people (Sriskandarajah, 2005), with many Tamils moving and many fleeing all over the world. Countries in Western Europe, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Gulf States, and North America are some of the areas with the highest diaspora concentrations. Of these, Canada, specifically the Greater Toronto Area (George, 2012) has the largest Eelam Tamil population outside of South Asia. Canada takes a lot of pride in its diversity, and the Eelam Tamil population is one of many immigrant communities that call Canada home. Focusing on the presence and recognition of multiple identities in efforts to promote diversity and inclusion (Song, 2020), multiculturalism is heavily employed in Canadian policy. Whether it be through modes of integration or cultural respect and recognition events hosted by the state, the multiculturalist framework is expressed in several aspects of Canadian governance. While multiculturalism has been adopted by several countries in varying capacities, a distinction is to be made with Canadian multiculturalism. The use of the term “multiculturalism” throughout this paper will be in reference to the Canadian mosaic model of multiculturalism. Canada employs the “mosaic -- brightly colored bits of ethnicity, culture, racial identity and language embedded side by side” (Schneider, 1998), rather than the melting pot seen in the US and various European countries. The melting pot emphasizes the creation of a new identity of “the American”, whereas the mosaic emphasizes diverse identities coexisting (ECPS, n.d.), instead of immigrants being encouraged to forsake them. Canadian immigration policy is heralded as a cornerstone of its multiculturalism and inclusivity. And compared to several of the other nations listed above, it has been. However, it is necessary to be critical of the true inclusivity of such policies, considering the origins of a state such as Canada. “... Several scholars have argued that multiculturalism is an extension of the ‘white settler state’ which allows just enough room to be different and accepted by Canadian society, but not enough to change institutional power or challenge patterns of privilege that stem from the settler state and it's “whiteness,” (Hyndman, 2016). The Indigenous peoples of Canada have been stripped of

their homelands, and the opening of the borders to a settler state on stolen land is grounds to question the true mosaic of Canada. Is a state truly multicultural if its acceptance of certain groups relies on the displacement of others? Is multiculturalism of any worth if certain groups lack the agency to change how they are treated? With that in mind, it's important to recognize that multiculturalism has apparent flaws and also that it isn't a set-in-stone framework.

The Tamil identity

Multiculturalism has evolved from the conception of the Canadian state and the erasure of Indigenous culture and peoples to the time Tamil people have been coming to Canada and over the past few decades. It has been echoed repeatedly in recent Canadian history that Canada is a nation of and for immigrants, with children being introduced to the idea from a young age in classrooms (Tsangari et. al, 2022). Even then, a clear distinction has been made between multiculturalism and lenient border policy, especially in its earlier days, making clear the conditions with which the mosaic was employed. "I wish to make it quite clear that Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. It is not a fundamental right of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege", announced 1947 Prime Minister Mackenzie King (Denton, 1986). There have also been several Canadian leaders who have been advocates of immigrant acceptance, with Prime Minister Mulroney publicly stating that "we are not in the business of turning away refugees" in the wake of the arrival of Tamil refugees on the Newfoundland coast in 1986 (Balasundaram, n.d). This policy of "turning away" no one has since been preached in varying degrees by politicians and officials alike. However, the arrival of Tamil refugees on the Sun Sea merchant vessel carrying around 500 Tamil refugees to the shores of British Columbia in 2010 confirmed a glaring aspect of multicultural policy that had been largely addressed at surface level: populist backlash. Those on the Sun Sea were met with Canadians calling them "terrorists" and other racist, violent stereotypes, as well as referring to them as the "boat people" (Anandasangaree, 2016).

However, this has not been the response all Tamil people have been met with upon

their arrival to Canada. In a study conducted by Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, it is clear that multiculturalism has given Tamil immigrants and the second generation a sense of inclusion that they were denied in Sri Lanka. Respondents made clear their affinity to Canada and its multiculturalism due to their improved treatment in comparison to their treatment in their homeland. "In Sri Lanka, you're not respected as a Tamil. You feel that you are one below, you know? The UK is not an immigrant country, so you are never a part of the country. You're always an immigrant. In Canada, everyone is an immigrant. So, Canada can be your home." This respondent is an earlier immigrant, and his sentiment is not uncommon among his counterparts. Multiculturalism was the chance for many Tamils to start their new lives, and thus, many report feeling more security and inclusion. There was a sense of stability in understanding that one fit in with the nation's ideal population makeup and that stability lent itself to security in starting anew.

Still, there are also many Tamils who feel their sense of inclusion and security has been jeopardized due to populist backlash. A series of interviews with Tamil youth in Canada reveal that many have been subjected to negative stereotyping, such as being labeled a "Tamil tiger" or a "fraud" (Boyd, 2012). "There is a pervasive stigmatization of Tamil people in Canada carried out by public officials, journalists, experts, and a significant number of the public at large. This stigmatization has portrayed Tamils in Canada as dangerous, rulebreakers, fraudsters, and has strongly conflated the general Tamil population in Canada with Tamil Tigers, a group recognized as a terrorist organization by most of the world" (Boyd, 2012). Such stereotyping is potent and carries dangerous and heavy implications for the perceptions of Tamils in Canada. In another mode of homogenization, the rise of negative stereotyping has created the Tamil identity to include being "dangerous, rulebreakers, [and] fraudsters" (Boyd, 2012). Populist backlash influences the construction of identity under multiculturalism and goes beyond alienating minorities within minorities. Harmful stereotypes construct identity in their whole, and even the homogenized identity thus perpetuates dangerous, inaccurate, and corrupting portrayals of the Tamil community. This stereotyping has been more prevalent among the younger generations of Tamils, according to Boyd, compared to older generations. "Tamil

activists and migrants were frequently conflated with Tamil Tiger terrorists and were framed as “bad immigrants” in contrast with ‘good immigrants’ or ‘law-abiding citizens’, finds Ryan Boyd, Strategy and Innovation director at the Ontario Cabinet Office, who holds his MA in sociology from Carleton University. The conflation of negative stereotypes and younger Tamils and positive notions being associated with older immigrants highlights an interesting trend. This may be because of younger generations targeting such stereotypes and thus targeting the set view of Tamil refugees in the eyes of the majority. “It’s whatever they see on the news... that’s what they say,” (Boyd, 2012) says respondent Nirosha, a Tamil woman in her early 20’s. While these comments and the views held by the majority are symptoms of the larger problem of xenophobia, such xenophobia may stem from multiculturalist policy. Older generations are more likely to feel indebted to the country. While this view may be legitimate, it also means older generations are less likely to criticize the way they are treated. This is who is seen as the “good immigrant”: one who contributes to the country and its diversity but also one that does not overstep the lines the larger Canadian public and multiculturalism have drawn. Multiculturalism has long served to promote inclusion, but that inclusion has been on very surface level grounds, “...a multicultural ethos rarely moving beyond “saris, samosas, and steel bands” into something more substantial” (Hyndman, 2016). Tamil culture and community have been reduced and homogenized.

Well-known food and clothing, the holidays of the majority group, etc., are painted as the face of Tamil culture. While these are not necessarily wrong things to highlight, they leave out minorities within the minority, alienating them from what the state and its people consider to be “Tamil”. As a result, the Tamil community is being portrayed as monolithic. The monolithic nature of identity also obscures things like power hierarchies existing in the homeland.

One such example, which this paper will discuss in further detail, is caste dynamics in the motherland, where many upper-caste Tamils make tangible distinctions from lower-caste Tamils (Pfaffenberger, 1982), a hierarchy unseen under multiculturalism in Canada. This narrow view of who is Tamil also makes it easier to identify who isn’t.

Tamils who pursue motives to better the treatment of their communities outside of adhering to this idea of what Tamil is face backlash because they define being Tamil as more than food and clothing. The nuances of what it means to be Tamil are met with backlash due to individuals taking up more space than allotted to them by narrow definitions of their identity. Religion, struggles, political beliefs, gender, sexuality, caste identity, etc., are facets of Tamil life that go largely ignored by the multiculturalist mosaic and thus are aspects of Tamil lives that are not recognized by the mainstream Canadian public. Younger generations challenging antagonizing stereotypes are met with backlash due to the challenge of these set categories. It is important to recognize that these “categories” have been preached by the state. Recognition of the Tamil culture, which may foster community and unity in a country far from home, leaves out several identities already marginalized in the homeland, who continue to face marginalization in a system of integration supposedly designed for the Tamil. Populist backlash in the face of rejection of the Tamil identity, especially one of antagonization that results from surface-level multiculturalism, is a symptom of multiculturalism's inherent tendency to paint minority groups as monolithic.

Caste in Tamil Immigrant Communities

Homogenizing the Tamil identity and experience is especially dangerous for many reasons, but mainly because the reduction of a complex identity into a palatable one upholds hierarchies of power from the homeland. The multiculturalist preaching that all are treated equally, and all are included in the massive blanket of ethnic heritage pertains only to the idea of the model minority monolithic Tamil identity. Minority religious groups, noncis-gender Tamils, and lower caste Tamils are all still Tamil, even if mainstream categories of who is and isn't Tamil do not reflect this. These are all also groups that have traditionally faced persecution and othering within the larger Tamil community, especially within the confined Tamil identity constructed under multiculturalism. This paper aims to discuss the status of those with marginalized caste identities under multiculturalism, but there are varying identities that have been subject to similar marginalization and erasure

within their homelands and in Canada, some of which have been mentioned above. Caste is one such identity.

Caste is a method of rigid social stratification in many South Asian countries, meant to dictate one's occupation and way of living, with very little mobility. Caste is an ancient system and hierarchy and has undergone numerous changes in its 3000 (Florida State College at Jacksonville, 2017) years of existence, including regional differences. The modern-day system and practice of caste are complicated and far-reaching, interacting with the many political and economic systems at play in our societies. Caste identity impacts your access to resources for success, and the community support you will receive. In its interaction with capitalism, caste influences who has access to capital, who has higher social mobility, and who is able to build wealth. Oppressed caste individuals have less access to the above, and this reinforces the social divides of caste. Aside from economic and political systems, caste infiltrates every aspect of one's life: schooling, work, social interactions, marriage, and in more extreme cases, who you are allowed to speak to, be around, and where you are allowed to be.

Commonly associated with Hinduism and India, caste is practiced in most South Asian countries in some capacity, including Sri Lanka. It is also practiced by some of the various religions in those countries, such as Islam and Christianity, and is not exclusive to Hinduism. In the book *Mistrusting Refugees*, Valentine Daniel and Yuvaraj Thangaraj's (1995) work on Tamil immigrants and caste identity in the UK identifies that earlier immigrant communities consisted of wealthy upper-caste Vellalar individuals who had moved for reasons relating to education and career opportunities. Individuals from varied caste identities arrived in larger numbers after the civil war (Daniel & Thangaraj, 1995). This highlights the privilege that upper caste immigrants had in their status in their new country. Upper caste individuals not only had better access to jobs and education due to their migration status, but they were also the individuals who helped define the narrow view of Tamilness subscribed to today. Upper-caste, wealthy, well-educated Tamils had different relations to their Tamil identity than the lower-caste individuals who migrated later on. Host countries with larger Tamil populations can see similar dynamics, with

earlier immigrants typically being overwhelmingly upper caste. It is no coincidence that these immigrants are also those who were pioneers of the Tamil identity, the one that is subscribed to by many Canadians today. In Thanges Paramsothy's (2018) research on caste identity in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, he mentions being asked questions regarding his background in a manner meant to locate his caste identity and background. This is not an uncommon scenario. Caste identity is an integral part of one's life but is not always an obvious identity to place. Though many Tamils publicly denounce caste discrimination, the presence of these questions indicates the embeddedness of caste in Tamil spaces (Paramsothy, 2018). The necessity of identifying one's caste shows the role it plays in one's potential relations and beliefs of that person.

In another example of caste practice outside of South Asia, author, activist, and technologist Thenmozhi Soundararajan outlines her experiences as a Dalit in her book *Trauma of Caste*. She discusses her experiences as a South Indian Tamil Dalit, including her parents having to hide their last names in public gatherings to avoid their caste identity being outed and her own experiences being served with different plates in a Brahmin friend's household upon disclosing her identity at a young age (Soundararajan, 2022). Caste identity is not something that disappears in places outside of South Asia. The caste system practiced elsewhere may not be as overt in its manifestation as it is in South Asia, but its presence is felt by those in South Asian communities and is kept alive by community members. Areas with higher Tamil populations, for example, under multiculturalism, create environments in which lower caste and caste-oppressed individuals live in fear of caste discrimination and differential treatment from within their own communities. However, caste identity is more complicated than just this. As discussed before, there is an increasing notion that "articulating such an identity openly is viewed as rude and offensive" and thus should "not [be] openly discussed in public" (Paramsothy, 2018). This makes the issue of caste-based discrimination much harder to address when coupled with the homogenization Tamil people face. The lack of discussion around caste makes it much more difficult to address and harder to see that it exists. Caste becomes a phantom presence, one felt and seen but one no one wants to acknowledge. Asking for surnames, using different utensils when serving certain people, making comments on caste

and ancestral occupation and power to coworkers, and in some cases, outright aggression with regards to caste identity in power imbalance relations are not isolated or minimal incidents in the West. Such incidents are targeted ways of upholding caste, and when comparing such actions to the repeated denial of caste in our ‘modern’ times, there becomes an obvious disconnect between what is experienced and what is acknowledged. Acknowledging discrimination that is insisted to be nonexistent is difficult. On paper, caste is in the past, but it is still a marker of identity recognized and upheld by many Tamils. The silent nature of these divides within the homogeneous Tamil identity means caste cannot be explicitly addressed without breaking from the Tamil identity, as caste identity not only differs from the homogeneity of “Tamilness” but is a threat to it altogether due to its deep roots in Tamil communities.

Integration and homogeneity

It is necessary to revisit the basis of multiculturalism in Canada in order to further analyze its effects on caste identity. A key influence on multicultural policy is the “role Canada plays in an imperial system that extends geographically beyond borders and internally into individual lives [and] ...the channels that are created for colonial force through the Settler identity of the majority population of the Canadian state” (Barker, 2009). The shallowness of identity encompassed under multiculturalism is apparent here. Multiculturalism is built on the foundations of a state that was designed to erase Indigenous sovereignty. A settler state that promotes cultural identity is limited in its depth and nuance in cultural depiction because of its nature and principal foundation being to erase. This one-dimensionality is apparent in relation to caste identity within Tamil spaces, as the presence of the Tamil identity rests on the erasure of those who do not fit the model minority. The diversity painted by multiculturalism is exclusionary. A large part of diversity and monolithic identity is established during integration. The term integration refers to the process by which refugees and immigrants are “integrated” into their host country. This can include things like employment, housing, and education opportunities in a new country, but also less tangible things like cultural awareness of local customs, new norms and rules, etc.

Approaching integration from a non-multiculturalist lens has proved to foster enough problems on its own. Ideas of assimilation and cultural preservation have been at odds with methods of integration in countries like the United States. Integrating refugees and “accepting” (Penninx, 2003) them into society has been about transitioning into a society of individual emphasis and leaving behind communities steeped in culture, where identity is a function of synchrony, not a disruption of productivity. The preservation of one’s culture without forsaking other aspects of success is a difficult balance to achieve and is even harder to achieve under non-multiculturalist integration. In the words of Alexis DeTocqueville (2000), a French political scientist and historian of the 19th century studying American democracy, “Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures; and to draw apart with his family and his friends; so that, after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself.” Unlike the mosaic model, the American mode of integration emphasizes individualism. The communities, or at least the homogenous identities we see under multiculturalism, are of little value. Instead, immigrants are encouraged to hyphenate their ethnicities and to take on an “American” identity. Straying from even such an identity is grounds for backlash and marginalization. Also, societal change regarding a community's treatment and their common interests is seen as the burden of theirs alone. Given the emphasis on the individual rather than one’s community, for immigrants and refugees, this means that they will not see the change they want unless they create it, which is an emotionally and physically taxing task to take on alone. On top of this, refugees must become active participants in the very society that doesn’t accept them to garner success due to a lack of popular support and awareness of such individuals. Whether it be attending school or finding a job, this results in them forcibly distancing themselves from their cultures to better assimilate for better opportunities, forsaking the community in times of need. This is where integration sans multiculturalism fails: instead of equipping refugees to participate in their new communities without having to forsake their own culture, they instead are expected to appeal to productivity and individualism, with which they lose their cultural identities to an American one and are alone in their displacement. Individual emphasis

continues to be valued, and this negatively impacts immigrant communities who are forced to adapt to this dynamic to survive under the lens of integration. This assimilationist and isolating mode of integration only further harms those of lower caste and Dalit identities in the US, as not only is caste seen as invisible, but it is also absorbed into an “American” identity over a South Asian one. These individuals are tasked with trying to preserve their cultural identity in the face of assimilationist integration alongside trying to battle caste-based discrimination within American South Asian communities. The South Asian identity still exists, but it is not endorsed by the state in the same way it is under a multiculturalist framework.

Canada’s multicultural integration is largely different from American integration, but this does not mean it is entirely the opposite of assimilation and cultural distress. Focusing on the recognition and presence of multiple identities (Song, 2020), there are several benefits to multicultural integration. It provides for a more culturally aware population in which interactions with other identities are prevalent and encouraged by the state. It prevents complete assimilation, as the state plays a larger role in the preservation of culture and encourages civil society around such efforts. However, what the state is encouraging must be further examined.

Multiculturalism emphasizes collective identity. This is also an integral step in the simplification of complex identities. “Multiculturalism is essentially a value statement. At its broadest level it is an attempt to promote tolerance, respect, and recognition of different ethnic groups within a nation-state.” (Sriskandarajah, 2010). Multiculturalism is recognition, at best. It is not designed to allow individuals to fight caste oppression. A destruction of populist tolerance of the Tamil results in the overstepping of imaginary lines drawn by the public, and this is, in fact what we see today. The negative stereotypes conflating individuals with terrorists and thieves are responses showing a break in tolerance. “...it is just a blanket to hide the kind of racial disparities that are here,” says a respondent in Anuppiriya Sriskandarajah’s study in reference to multiculturalism. “And it shuts you up easily that when you do bring it up, and you are like I am feeling this, this racial disparity, or this racism, or race comes into play to question of it is just like but oh

we are a multicultural country you can't, it shuts you up. So it's, it's kind of a blanket because state policies are still created toward a westernized, Caucasian population. (Nisha, 23, female, student)” (Sriskandarajah, 2010). In reference to broader Tamil society, it is clear that even with a multicultural mode of integration, the preservation of cultural identity is not substantially better than in the US. Even homogenous Tamil identity is still difficult to maintain in the face of populist backlash, especially ones drifting from the model minority. Integrating into what is tolerated is the way an individual can retain respect and limited culture. The lack of recognition of lower caste identities within the Tamil community and in broader Canadian society means these individuals have no real way to challenge the discrimination they face without breaking from tolerance. The recognition of caste identity is far removed from reality, with “caste [being seen] as cultural practice rather than a hierarchical structure” (Yalamarty, 2022). It is much harder to target an issue that is sanitized, and the reason for that being upheld is, in part due to multiculturalism.

Anti-caste movements

“Racialized groups are then incorporated into the national imaginary of Canada as evidence of its ‘mosaic’ of diverse cultures, wherein these diverse cultures are tolerated, homogenized, sanitized and commodified for consumption as inclusion” (Yalamarty, 2022). The challenging of this process has never been popular, and also not very frequent. This past March, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) passed a motion introduced by caste-oppressed trustee Yalini Rajakulasingam to ban caste discrimination in the district, a historic move towards the end of caste-based oppression in Canada and around the world. The move was met with backlash growing from deep-rooted caste identity in the Canadian South Asian community. Toronto saw the mobilization of several Hindu and South Asian groups opposing the movement, claiming that the move was “Hinduphobic” (Mathew, 2023). This sort of claim was seen as legitimate by Canadians due to the fact that it was painting a movement against oppression within the South Asian community as a threat to its homogeneous identity. Change is infinitely harder as it is vilified. “There is little evidence or reports of ‘caste oppression’ in Toronto and, for that matter Canada. Hence, the

declaration that ‘there is a rise in documented anti-caste discrimination in the diaspora, including in Toronto’ makes the motion misleading, prejudiced, and lacking in integrity,” (The Wire, 2023) reads the petition created by the Canadian Organization for Hindu Heritage Education. Its claims on caste being nonexistent are legitimized because caste oppression is not a part of this monolithic identity. Yalini Rujakulasingam reports various incidents of caste discrimination experienced by families in the greater Toronto area, quite in contrast to the claim that these experiences are “misleading”. This historic win for caste-oppressed groups in Canada, which includes Tamil immigrants, is because of those willing to break from what is tolerated. Simply expanding a homogenous identity to encompass more under an ethnic umbrella cannot be an effective approach. This does not provide individuals with adequate resources or support to dismantle systems of oppression. It instead co-opts one’s struggle into a larger identity without addressing the root of the issue. The homogenous identity of the Tamil must first be dismantled to address caste in Tamil spaces. To minimize the oppression and backlash caste-oppressed individuals face when combatting caste, the identity rendering them invisible must be dismantled. Canadian multiculturalism’s tendency to create these identities must be targeted.

Creating change

However, policies aiming to make this a reality don’t reflect this. Policies in place currently acknowledge identity in government approved spaces, but lived experiences are not factored into the treatment of these groups in the eye of the law (Sriskandarajah, 2010). “The policies are not meant to overturn the structures of inequality but rather to contain and manage them, so the state’s legitimacy is not questioned. Multiculturalism is a method used for conferring agency to these groups on non- structural or nonmaterial grounds.” writes Anuppiriya Sriskandarajah (2010), assistant professor at York University. This leads to a major critique of multiculturalist integration; it is that laws aiming to challenge the Canadian foundations of homogeneity in representation aren’t structural and, therefore fall short of achieving change for these groups. Current policies are performative and do not aim to challenge the source of the crises caste-oppressed individuals are facing, nor do they actually alleviate the impacts they face. They instead serve to maintain the interests of the

state: maintaining a palatable model minority Tamil identity. When those interests were initially and currently designed to render invisible caste-oppressed individuals, change will never occur. Policy formulated with the intent of maintaining *the* Tamil identity cannot be used to effectively dismantle caste oppression. Hence, moves aiming to shatter tolerance and passivity pushed by multiculturalism must be supported. Moves such as the ones taken by the Toronto District School Board are such examples. The empowering of groups through community solidarity, local organizing, and collectivizing for a radical political agenda are ways to challenge these structures. The organization of community allows caste-oppressed immigrants to be a part of a community that understands their hardships without diminishing them and will allow them to be better equipped to handle their plight (Foster & Louie, 2010) rather than be a part of a community one fostered by multiculturalism, that alienates caste oppressed individuals. Where integration aims to reduce and homogenize, the culture here will thrive as the community fosters it in a space where generalities are not enforced. “Anyone who has fought these kinds of battles knows that the resistance itself, especially together with kin and allies, can sometimes be healing and nourishing. And anyone who has won these kinds of battles also knows that political wins are not the same as an end to the trauma and suffering” (Soundararajan, 2022). A political agenda that goes against these structures is what will achieve concrete change. Since this is impossible to achieve within the confines of Canadian politics that play into these structures, grassroots organizing allows for caste-oppressed individuals to express their beliefs and experiences in their political needs. Entailing campaigns, protests, and meetings, this critical involvement of immigrants in their advocacy is what makes it most effective in achieving their needs, as change and strategies are directly informed by those affected (Foster & Louie, 2010). The promotion of anti-caste rhetoric in the face of the default dominant caste supremacy will shape a new perspective on the Tamil community in the eyes of the Canadian public. Approaching this goal by targeting the workplace, universities, schools, religious institutions, etc., instead of isolated surface-level policies will help guarantee the comprehensive structural nature of such an approach to combating caste oppression. Populist backlash that results from breaking tolerance will no longer be a legitimate reason for the Canadian state to recognize dominant caste narratives as caste oppression will be rendered visible and thus impossible to ignore. Visibility is not possible

within the confines of the Tamil identity. Prioritizing solidarity and community in place of tolerance and passivity is the only way caste-oppressed Tamils will see change in their treatment and preserve their identities in the face of violence and reduction.

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