

Achievements and Challenges of the Tamils of SriLanka in Canada

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Back ground & context

- **Pre-1983:** Relatively small number of Tamils lived mostly in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto
- **1983:** Civil riots in Sri Lanka: 1000's of refugees
- **1983-1987:** Population in Canada ~40,000
- **Now :** Tamils in Canada estimated at ~250,000

Challenges faced by youth

A group of six diverse young people are posing outdoors in a wooded area. One young man in a white t-shirt is leaning over, interacting with a young woman in a blue shirt. Other young people are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is filled with green foliage and trees.

- Racial abuse
- Lack of awareness of our culture on Canada
- Frustration with lack of understanding by those in authority led to formation of gangs

Challenges faced by the Working population

A photograph showing a group of women, likely from a developing country, standing outdoors. In the foreground, a woman in a blue sari carries a baby on her hip. Behind her, another woman in a blue sari carries a child on her back. To the right, a woman in a red and white sari looks towards the camera, and another woman in a red sari is partially visible. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

- Women traditionally did not work outside the home
- Fear of cultural differences
- Language and communication problems
- Qualifications & experience not accepted



Challenges faced by Senior Citizens

- Traditionally looked after by their children at home
- Cut off from friends and family especially during the cold weather
- Lack of entertainment and access to information in the language of their choice

Opportunities

- **Multiculturalism** – Ability to retain the culture, language and traditions
- **Access to Education** – Able to upgrade skills and learn the language
 - Most were already educated at least to high school level
 - Some had knowledge of English
 - Parents were educated so children were motivated
- **Peace and Safety**



Achievements

- **5 Radio Channels**
- **Several Newspapers**
- **2 Television Channels – All day**
- **4 Churches for Thamil people**
- **30 Hindu Temples**
- **Business : Owners of businesses from grocery stores to large industries**
- **Chamber of commerce**
- **Tamil taught as a course at U of T**
- **Over 200 Doctors originally trained in Sri Lanka**
- **Many Engineers, Lawyers, Accountants & Teachers**



Support and Education

- Tamil Eelam Society – Provides help and assistants for new immigrants
- Tamil communities of Seniors in Seniors homes
- 11 Tamil educational institutions
 - Students enrolled = ~4000
 - Locations
 - Vancouver
 - Toronto
 - Ottawa
 - Montreal
 - New York
- Many Language schools and Schools of fine art





In Canada today

- ~10,000 learn the language Tamil
 - 750 students taking Tamil as a credit course at University
- ~ 10,000 learn the cultural dance Bharathanatyam

தமிழ்

What else do we wish to achieve?

- We need a community centre...cost ~\$10 million
- We need to establish a private school for Tamil elementary and high school children
- Many others.....

Points to ponder

- Don't let racism derail you
- Networking is easier than you think
- Don't lose your self confidence and sense of identity by losing touch with your culture, language and traditions
- Be a mentor and role model to those who come after you
- Learn to leverage the culture you come from and the culture you now live in
- Leave an impression!..... A Good one.