

Reconstructing Culture and Place: The Sri Lankan Society and Space in Melbourne, Australia

Ranjith Dayaratne
Department of Architecture and Interior Design,
University of Bahrain
ranjithd1@hotmail.com

Abstract

Many Sri Lankans live in Australia; a large number in Melbourne. They form communities and places to progress as participants of the Australian multi-cultural society. Simultaneously, they form institutions and spaces with unique social and spatial patterns to create culture and place to produce dual identities and become settled and integrated residents.

This research examines how they re-construct culturally essential and meaningful places. Through a physical survey and observations of domestic and public spaces, it uncovers the forces and processes underlying their formations. It unravels the culture and places to locate the historical and social upbringings buttressing their make-up.

Keywords: Sri Lankans, Melbourne, Culture, Place, Multi-culturalism

Introduction and Background:

Large-scale migration to Australia from Sri Lanka began in the late 1960s. At first, the Dutch-Burgers descending from the Colonial European rulers who felt uneasy after the post-independent Sinhalese cultural revival migrated to Australia. Later, some of the minority Tamils made their way out to Australia to avoid the ethnic conflict in the 1980s. The Sinhalese often left home looking for prosperity and as a result, from the earliest migrants to Queensland in the late 19th century, the Sri Lankan community in Australia has grown from 601 in 1901, to 109,849 in 2016. Victoria had the largest with 55,830.

(<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/mca/files/2016-cis-sri-lanka.PDF>, accessed on 30th Jan 2021).

Literature on migration shows the natural tendencies among migrants to gravitate towards their cultural origins. It is a way of re-discovering identity, creating a sense of community and a sense of belonging to search for roots and cherishable possessions in terms of values and imageries, necessary to recreate the dual identities. Moreover, to integrate to the new society, the migrants must also make 'home': the establishment of an adobe for 'being' and an appropriate surrounding for its 'dwelling'. Culture must be reconstructed, assimilated and recreated anew that stabilises the encounters between the past experiences, the present existence and the future expectations. These involve the transformations of the 'alien' new locations to familiar ones and the reconstruction of both self and identity (Lorde, 1996)

Making home and making place are the rudimentary activities of 'being', 'becoming' and 'dwelling' (Heidegger, 1971; Dovey, 2010). Home, an experiential relationship between people and their environments manifests as culturally meaningful, spatial, temporal and socio-cultural order (Dovey, 1986). Migration, a process of 'up-rooting' and 're-rooting' has anchoring and 'rooting' as its primary objectives. To be rooted, to become, and to dwell, one must recognize a 'universe' of things and people to associate and establish a culturally meaningful order and a centre of that universe: the home (Dayaratne, 1992). Indeed, home as

the storehouse of dreams, memories, relationships and belongings that have been and will be part of the person must be recreated. More over, a universe comprising a pattern of places, an order of things and a network of people must be transformed to be related to the home-centre and to manifest as an 'attachment'; a bond between the person and the 'others'; people, places and things. As Dovey (1986:38) points out, sense of home may be re-evoked when the way of relating to the environment could be transported from place to place, and if the patterns could be recreated. Undeniably, new landscapes pose the Sri Lankan migrants, opportunities as well as obstacles in recreating those patterns in the new locations.

If original cultures of migrants have influence upon the processes of adaptation, assimilation and acculturation in the migration processes, then it is possible to hypothesise that such cultural characteristics must also spatially manifest and be visible in the landscapes they inhabit, in order to settle. Sri Lankans are known to have strong attachments to place; to land, to people and their manifestations: culture (Dayaratne,1999). Uprooting is a painful experience and re-rooting an equally hard one especially when the destination is predominantly of Western culture. For example, Dissanayake (1998) says that the Sri Lankans are an essentially 'rural' people and that every one has a root in a village. Unlike many of the European migrants, most Sri Lankans therefore would find the new encounters in Australian society and space challenging, and culture difficult to reconcile with. Nevertheless, adaptations have to be made and routes taken to 'assimilate' and to remain culturally in place and their processes of transformations will eventually determine the nature of Sri Lankan society and space created in Australia.

This research examines the Sri Lankan society and space in Melbourne from the points of making home, making place and reconstructing culture. It unravels the nature of the community and the spaces and places that have emerged and the forces and processes of their making. Migrant places have particular histories in the 'new world' and this research aims at contributing to the 'Sri Lankan spatial history' in Melbourne: a cultural landscape of homes and other places. It examines the different ways in which some of the significant Sri Lankan migrant places in Melbourne have been set up and the different ways in which their identities have manifested in them. It delineates strategies employed by the migrants and their social institutions to negotiate, construct and dwell in those places.

Review of Literature

Studies on the Sri Lankans in Australia are limited and those examining culture and space in specific terms are even rare. Notable among them are those of Endagama (1981), which examines the Sri Lankan material culture in North East Queensland, and that of Pinnawala (1984), which examines the construction of ethnicity, and De Jong (1986), which examines the complexity of acculturation. Few other studies also exist. For example, Pereira (1991) has studied the Ceylonese Burgher women migrants to demonstrate their successful processes of assimilation and the role they played in creating a Burgher ethnic identity. Another study (Weerasooriya, 1988) has focussed upon the 'links' between Sri Lanka and Australia, and records the stories of many noteworthy Sri Lankan migrants in Australia and their origins. The most notable study related to architecture and space however is that of Beynon (2002) which, while examining hybrid representations of public Architecture in Melbourne, discusses the Sinhalese Buddhist Temple in Keysborough through which the Sinhalese Buddhist culture has intervened in the making of the Sri Lankan-Australian identity and consciousness of Buddhist spatiality in Australia.

Endagama points out that while early settlers in Queensland have assimilated beyond recognition of their Sri Lankan origins, many of the recently (1980s) arrived Sri Lankans there maintain the traditional practices, at least in food preparation and keeping kitchen gardens. They also have popularised tea, both as a plantation and social drinking. However, most migrants have come from areas in Sri Lanka exposed to European culture during colonisation. Thus, they have been a product of both cultures but having firm roots in neither. There has been no evidence of a strong Sri Lankan cultural link and any notable material culture, except in the form of souvenirs and ornaments adorning Sri Lankan living rooms. According to Endagama,

in domestic architecture, furniture, games and toys, there is a complete change to the new culture while in others, there is an intermingling of Australian and Sri Lankan ways.

Gamage identifies three 'categories' of such Sinhalese migrants in general. He lists them as follows.

- (1) Those who seek Australianization actively and give a second priority to the Sri Lankan ways of life.
- (2) Those who follow the Sri Lankan lifestyles conditioned by the Sinhala Buddhist culture and consider some of the Australian ways of life undesirable.
- (3) Those who have no definitive involvement with either the Sinhalese community activities or the Australian ones.

According to Gamage, the first two categories constitute largely of persons who have arrived either during early days of migration from 1960s or late 1990s. Those who seek Australianization strive consciously to assimilate and to enter into the mainstream easily. In fact, they have had an exposure to western culture prior to migration through British colonial influence, or have lived abroad on scholarships and working, and had acquired such cultural facets through previous experiences. Being of urban backgrounds, they have been 'pushed' towards migration, because, they knew the kind of life-styles to expect and were quite comfortable in living them. Although parents or elders sustained nostalgic attachment to the Sri Lankan culture, the younger generation feels more comfortable with the Australian ways despite being often persuaded by the parents to appreciate their roots.

De Jong (1986) on the other hand has studied the ways in which the Sri Lankan culture has come about and exists in that island, and attempts to see if any of those traits have manifested in the Australian Sri Lankan community. Although De Jong does look at the spatial distribution of the Sri Lankans in Melbourne, and constructs detailed information about their ways of social behaviour, it is Beynon (2002), who has delved deep into the nuances of cultural fusions and conflicts within the multi-cultural framework, and how those have been spatially represented in the public realm of the Australian Landscape.

Beynon's study however is not concerned about the Sri Lankan community and its spatial construction in particular but the notion of 'hybridity' that has resulted from migration and intermingling of cultures and their building traditions. In fact, Beynon has examined the 'other' architecture of post-colonial Australia, often excluded because of the Western, Anglo-Celtic or the 'white' framework within which the celebrated architecture of Australia has always been positioned. Among other communities such as the Vietnamese, the Turkish etc., he has thus studied the Dhamma Sarana Sri Lankan Buddhist Temple at Keysborough, and points out the ways in which they mediate between the local and global and exist as an 'in-between', representing many layers of identities. Beynon Argues that such buildings hold difference at bay, and at the same time embrace it, while their presence challenges the post-western culture of Australia and needs to be acknowledged.

Reconstructing culture and place however is a natural accompaniment to migration either voluntary or forced. Korac (2009) for example, while looking at reconstructing life, place and identity in Rome and Amsterdam, argues that refugees, understood as social actors, make and remake their lives in new sociocultural environments. By focusing on refugees, he argues that the different types of connections, emerging forms of interactions, and networks of social relations enable them to forge a place for themselves in a new society, create meaning and form attachments. Similarly, Bhatti et al (2001) examining why the migrant Punjabi Sikh community came to be established in the particular area of Woolgoolga, in Australia, and why they were predominately farmers, point out that though Woolgoolga is not in Punjab, "Punjab" exists in Woolgoolga. Bhatti says that "its connection with Punjab and Punjabi culture remains steadfast" (Asri,2017). As Olshtan et al (2000) show, reconstruction of culture and place is at the heart of all people moving from one place to another, and is accomplished through, the maintenance of values, attitudes, habits, language, rituals, food, as well as the construction and adornment of spaces and places.

Given this, it is necessary to delve into the nuances of the Sinhalese culture in order to understand its “reconstructions”. For this, Dayaratne (2008) provides a good analysis of its significant facets while interpreting the existence of culture as being constituted of “core” and “peripheral” facets. According to Dayaratne, the core facets are comprised of the following.

Table 01: Sri Lankan Characteristics of Culture

Source: Adapted from Dayaratne, 2008

Core Characteristics	Affinity & Basis	Manifestations in space
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World view; • Ways of life; • Social structure • System of values and attitudes • Sacred and Profane 	Influenced by religion-Buddhism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborated articulated erections of the sacred • Unpretentious rudimentary domestic built-forms, spaces and places • Moderate appropriation of built-forms and spaces. • Re-use of material and spaces in the built-environment. • Built-forms in harmony with Nature • Allotment of land based on community benefit/ least damage. • Predominance of communal spaces • Enriching and complementary spatial organization. • Each settlement providing for habitation • Aesthetics created through exquisite craftsmanship • Presence of strong social symbolism in landscape
	Simplicity buttressed by Buddhist values,	
	Respect for and the recognition of the venerable, the elders and the learned	
	Associations with the temple and learning of Buddhist 'dhamma'	
	Affinity to religion and celebration of the sacred	
	Modest indulgence in worldly pleasures	
	Reluctance for over production and consumption	
	Hesitation to waste and saving for future	
	Reverence for Nature, fauna and flora.	
	Reverence and care for land	
	Centrality of community living	
	Emphasis of shared labour and collective gain	
	Coherent and self-contained social organization	
	Value of human relations, involvement and skill	
Strong attachment to commonality of place		

Although the above list is not exhaustive, it does provide an insight into the nature of Sinhalese culture as manifested through built-forms and spaces particularly in the traditional settings. Construction of culture of space in the migration context is different because those who have migrated to Australia hardly come from the traditional settings, although they do carry the residues of those facets with them, as Dissanayake pointed out that all Sinhalese Sri Lankans have derived their culture from the rural base. It is indeed a good basis to examine the reconstruction of culture and spaces among the Sinhalese community in Melbourne.

The Research Methodology

The research employed multi-faceted methodologies involving interrogation of literary discourse, location of key figures snow-balling to in-depth case studies and qualitative investigations (Burgess,1984;McNeil,1985), of ‘settled’ migrants and new comers and a visual

survey and observation of selected significant places. The entirety of Melbourne was investigated but a convenient sample, that was representative of the urban landscape. The variety of the research techniques was intended to provide a holistic understanding of the manifestation of culture and space and as opportunity to corroborate the findings generated through each of the techniques.

Indeed, as Whyte shows, despite the differences, such techniques “share common characteristics and offer flexibility of execution, deliberate interaction between the researcher and the researched, and a richness of data stemming from the textual nature and grounding in the language of the informants” (1984:35).

The research tasks began with a search of the researched discourses of the Sri Lankan migrants in order to construct an understanding of the issues investigated and revealed and also to ascertain and elucidate place-related insights. Simultaneously, and following the literary sources and other indicators, an identification of key figures that held the entry in to the collective consciousness of the Sri Lankan society and space in Melbourne was carried out. The foremost among them was Victor Melder, who had migrated from Sri Lanka very early and had kept a library of Sri Lankan published material. Three others were also consulted: Rohan Jayasinghe, Sandya Aryaratne and Dhananjaya Senanayake, all architects in practice in Melbourne.

This was followed by an in-depth qualitative investigation of case histories that unravelled the nature of place making, identity negotiation and integration. The research involved physical, visual and literary exploration of the significant places and constructed a visual montage of places representative of the ‘reconstructed’ places.

Throughout the study, insights gained from previous research on Sri Lankan place-making (Dayaratne, 1992) vernacular culture (Dayaratne, 1999) and transformations of culture and built-form in Sri Lanka (Dayaratne, 2001) were utilized to understand the specificities emerging within the Sri Lankan society and space in Melbourne.

Research was carried out in four localities of Melbourne, between September 2018 and March 2019,; namely around the Monash and Scoresby suburbs in the East, in the Dandenong suburbs of the South East and around Moreland suburbs of North of Melbourne. The observations were carried out in these localities and discussions were held in order to probe in to the issues. The study focussed upon the Sinhalese, although Sri Lankans are comprised of many other ethnic groups. Given the fact that the Sri Lankan ethnic communities have appropriated the Australian space so separately from each other, it was necessary to examine only one of the groups, if only to avoid confusion in using the term ‘Sri Lankan’ at the investigative level and suggest any spatial representations of their ethnic and cultural identities. In this research therefore, the use of the term ‘Sri Lankans in Australia’ means the Sinhalese who have arrived from Sri Lanka to Australia.

Findings:

Sri Lankan Society in Victoria: General

It is hard to talk about a composite Sri Lankan society in Victoria or Australia, similar to Sri Lanka itself. Most noteworthy however, is that although the different ethnic communities may be more or less mixed both socially and spatially across the Sri Lankan geographical space despite its past turmoil, it is certainly not the case in Victoria or in Australia. In fact, the Sinhalese, the Tamils, the Muslims and the Burghers seem to have created their own separate communities and spaces with loose and occasional interactions across them through selected institutions for specific purposes. These divisions have specially led to segregations of the two main religious groups: the Buddhists and Hindus also stemming from the practices that prevail in Sri Lanka. In fact, almost all Buddhists are Sinhalese and almost all Hindus are Tamils and it is hard to come-by a Sinhalese Hindu in as much as a Tamil Buddhist. There are however, both Sinhalese and Tamil Christians, who have enabled the creation of cross-religious communities and spaces.

The division and segregation between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities may have invariably come from the ethnic conflict that existed in Sri Lanka in the past few decades, and

the resulting mistrust that has come about between the two ethnic groups. The polarisation has occurred even prior to migration and has been reinforced through the processes of settlement on arrival here. For example, the Tamils particularly from the North and the East of Sri Lanka have left the country having been traumatised and victimised by the war or to avoid its impact. The war being perceived to be waged by the Sinhalese dominated government, the migrating Tamils carry with them a 'distance of resentment' from the Sinhalese, which is then translated naturally into social and spatial, practices in Australia. The geographical space of Victoria is thus occupied by these groups in patterns that signify the existing social and spatial divisions in Sri Lanka itself.

Reconstructing Culture and Place

The present Sinhalese community in Melbourne is active and makes great efforts to re-enact, promote and maintain the affinity to the original Sri Lankan culture and some of the spaces while adapting the Australian facets. In terms of culture, these manifest at four levels: individual family level, closely-knit relations level, associations with friends level and at the institutionalized social level. While the institutional social level performances were enacted annually on the days celebrations occurred in the Sri Lanka it self or close to those days, some institutional activities took place initiated and organised at the convenience of the holidays available in Australia. At the associations with friends level, the culture and place were enacted almost always in the week-ends or evening, when the closely related groups could gather, at one of the places of the group. The places however came into being at the time of the event with the participation of the group and ceased to exist once the event was over. The closely knit relations level was more unplanned, spontaneous and ad-hoc and occurred in the situations of one family visiting the other often on the occasions of annual festivals or celebrations of births, birthdays. Again, the rejuvenation of culture and place were ephemeral, leaving only memorial traces and residues that were re-called, when inquired. Among these, the individual family level were the most, permanent, deliberate articulations that could be observed, as they existed within most domestic spaces.

1.1 Individual family level

At individual family level, the Sinhalese re-enact and maintain the affinity to the original culture by means of the ways in which the domestic space is appropriated. While the houses they occupy are Australian constructed and thus possess the characteristics of that culture, the domestic space avails to be adorned by the Sri Lankan artefacts. Of 25 houses surveyed in the South East region of Melbourne, the following artefacts were displayed in either the living rooms, dining spaces or kitchens.

Table 02: Cultural artefacts in Sinhalese homes re-enacting culture and place

Source: Author

Living & Dining Spaces	Kitchens	Outdoors
Kavichchi	Clay pots	Atteria trees
Sesath	Clay water coolers	Penniwarts (<i>Gotukola</i>) plants
Tall Brass lamps	Coconut Scrapers	Curry leaves trees (<i>Karapincha</i>)
Batik Paintings	Coconut shell spoons	Rampe leaves
Buddhist Statues	Sri Lankan teapots	
Reclining Chairs	Cup and Saucers	
Woven placemats	Sri Lankan mugs	
	Sri Lankan Herbs & Spices (<i>Thuna Paha</i>)	
	String hopper makers	
	Mortar and pestle	

Table 03: Popular Food Productions in Sinhalese Homes,

Source: Interview with Nilani Aryaratne

Every day Food	Food for Special Occasions
Kiribath (Milk rice)	Kiri Kos
Appa (Hoppers)	Aluwa
Indiappa (String hoppers)	Kokis
Pol roti (Coconut Rotis)	Mung Kevum
Kotthu Roti	Helapa
Gotukola Mellum ()	Aasmee
Mukunuwena Mellum	Athiraha
Kirihodi	Peni Appa
Pol Sambol	Lavariya
Lunu Miris	Malu Paan
Polos	
Kekulu Hal Bath	

The routine cultural activities such as the New Year celebrations and the Vesak (celebration of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away) as they happen in Sri Lanka, although this has not been the case during the early 1980s. A number of strategies are employed for these cultural reconstructions, the most significant of which is the formation of social organizations based upon many commonalities rediscovered on arrival here. However, of exception is the Sinhala Cultural Community Services Foundation that as a stated objective has been the pioneer and is now in the forefront of promoting Sinhalese culture. Most others, while promoting socialisation and focusing also on humanitarian tasks directed at vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka from time to time, also manage and maintain a wide range of recreational cultural events in Melbourne thus participating in the reconstruction of Sri Lankan culture and place. Linking these diverse groups, media productions offer communications across the entire community. Geographically, however, it is the temples that provide a permanent base to locate culture in a communal place while taking care of the religious and educational sustenance of the re-constituted communities.

If, as a means of preserving a social group and its identity, culture needs to perpetuate itself and pass on from one generation to the next, the Sri Lankan Australian community seems to be making a conscious effort to do so in the absence of natural everyday processes in the Australian context. On the one hand, they are reconstructing and perpetuating their particular ways of seeing; feeling about and understanding the world through the beliefs, art forms, morals, laws, customs, and habits they have brought with them on arrival as migrants. On the other, concerted efforts are being made to import 'things' and 'events' from their homeland from time to time for the very purpose of re-introducing and disseminating such cultural consciousness among themselves and their fore-bearers and at the same time remain associated with the developments taking place in their homeland.

Community Organisations

For a small community of approximately 26,000¹ people in Victoria, the Sinhalese seem to have organised in to a notably large number of institutions and community organisations. According to the statistics maintained by the Victor Melder Sri Lankan Library, by 2005, there were 254 associations in Australia of which 147 were located in Victoria²; an

¹ As per the statistics available at DIMIA.

² As per the records available as accessible through the internet by June 2005

average of 175 persons per association³. Although it is hard to classify them in terms of exclusivity of purpose, one of the most notable aspects is that a large proportion of them are based on past-relationships in Sri Lanka established often through place-orientations or occupation orientations. In fact, many past pupils' associations of the leading schools in Sri Lanka have been re-established here. Similarly, Occupational groups who have been working in a leading company, government organisation or a professional association seem to reconstruct those linkages both at informal levels and at a formal level. For example, Old Pupils Associations (OPA) such as the Royal College Old Boys Association, the St Thomas College Old Boys Association and the Vishaka Vidyalaya Old Girls Association exist. Similarly, Ex Planters association, Ex Bambalapitiya Flatters (people who lived in a well known medium-rise flat in Colombo), and Ex Cable and Wireless company staff and many other ex-staff members of various organisations have come to form Associations in Victoria. Among them, the past pupils of the German Technical College at Ratmalana stands out as the largest and the most active community group having a notable impact in the reconstruction of Sri Lankan culture and space in Victoria. The distribution of these Associations is as follows.

Table 04: A Classification of Sri Lankan Associations in Melbourne: 2019

Source: Author

Type of Association	In Melbourne
Cultural	03
Religion-based	28
School-based (past-pupils)	31
Occupation-based	05
Social	25
Region-based	02
Political	03
Sports	17
Miscellaneous	40

Such social grouping on the basis of former 'places of associations' in Sri Lanka is an interesting phenomenon, which may or may not be happening also in other communities. However, an overriding manifestation of them is that they enable the reconstruction of memories of those places, the events that took place there and an entire rejuvenation of 'Australian places' that are immediately and continuously connected to those in Sri Lanka. The re-performing of popular dramas such as 'Sinhabahu' and 'Mahasara'; productions of the Peradeniya University for example has now begun to take place in Victoria through which both past memories of culture and place are re-produced even in an alien soil.

Cultural Dissemination through Media

Most Sri Lankans live scattered around Victoria although there are some concentrations in specific geographical locations and regions. Dandenong, Knox, Monash and Narre Warren are the major urban regions that have attracted the Sinhalese while the Burghers have been attracted to Broadmeadows. Media, therefore is a major mechanism through which they are brought together.

There are two main monthly newspapers being published, namely 'Serendib⁴ News' in English and 'Ayubowan' (The term for greeting meaning 'wish you a long life') in Sinhala distributed freely through local stores frequented by the Sri Lankan communities. These

³ It should be noted however that a person could be a member of a number of organisations at the same time

⁴ Sri Lanka had been known as Serendib from which the term Ceylon is believed to have been derived.

newspapers often report both Australian and Sri Lankan news and also discuss Australian issues of common interest. Apart from these two, other newspaper publications also exist. 'Divesa' is a recent Sinhala publication of similar nature. 'Pahana' (meaning Lamp) is a Buddhist newspaper mostly available at temples. While a one hour TV program on Saturdays between 10.00 and 11.00 AM focuses on events persons and other cultural activities taking place around Victoria, a once a week two-hour radio programme titled 'Lakhanda' (meaning Voice of Lanka) is broadcast on Sundays with news, community announcements and most importantly, cultural programs that keep the memories of the Sri Lankan Diaspora alive.

Added to these are the electronic media, that plays a major role with a number of Internet sites being managed by different community organisations, which present their own programmes. One of the sites maintains a composite 'calendar' offering the whole range of activities taking place at any given time and acts as the major promoter of cultural interaction. In fact, the often-isolated individual families are brought together through the social and cultural events, at which cultural consciousness and engagement is inadvertently nourished.

Not-so-visible though powerful institutions are the libraries that sustain their cultural interest and initiate the young and generate greater awareness and interaction among the Sinhalese community as well as the other Australian communities. Most notable among these is the Victor Melder Sri Lankan Library in Broadmeadows, managed by Victor Melder who had migrated to Australia a long time ago. The Victor Melder library has a large collection of books, newspapers and magazines and also manages an Internet site through which general referencing is offered.

There are a number of public libraries in Melbourne that have sections for Sinhalese materials. Brunswick and Dandenong community libraries are notable among them and possess Sinhalese books, videos, and CDS and engage often in activities promoting Sri Lankan culture. Book exhibitions and talks and presentations by eminent Sri Lankan personalities are commonplace at these places and contribute immensely to the rejuvenation, maintenance and creation of awareness of Sri Lankan culture among the other Australian communities.

Making Places for Re-territorialisation of Culture

When looking at the processes of place making adopted by the Sinhalese however, Victoria can be seen more as a stage - a theatre for cultural production rather than as a habitation of culture. As Hastrup and Olwig (1997) says, cultures of the 'modern nomads' such as the Diaspora, refugees and others are de-territorialized, and their re-territorialization is a measured process. Sri Lankan society in Victoria no doubt produces their culture; particularly those that are non-material, and those that require no particular geographical anchorage. Of the material culture, and particularly architecture, everything except the temples suggests a reluctant muted cultural existence as Sinhalese, but as Australians. While restaurants and retail shops acquire and display a Sri Lankan cultural flavour through the authentic groceries, tools and the packaged Sri Lankan food, architecture of most such places remains largely unarticulated. This is more so in the domestic sphere where only some of their interiors are furnished with furniture, artefacts or the removable wall hangings. In fact, at the public level, Victoria's Sri Lankan cultural productions are acted out in sporadic, momentary occupations of space transformed for those specific events and to be swiftly removed when the performing functions are over.

Thus in re-territorialising the Sri Lankan culture spatially in Victoria, the Sinhalese are taking a cautious and guarded approach. While at a public and collective level, it is exhibited celebrated and cultivated, at personal and individual levels, it is hardly exhibited or revealed. Interestingly, the strong rooting of Sinhalese culture in Buddhism has enabled this manifestation to be conveniently managed so that the people can maintain their cultural belonging and rootedness privately while publicly being present as 'Sri Lankan-Australians'. This dichotomy is both interesting and intriguing because, their public production and celebrations are for private engagement while the private- personal and individual behaviours and practices are meant for managing their public presence. Thus temples with clearly visible Sri Lankan architectural characteristics are being constructed and firmly established in a number of areas that seem to have concentrated Sinhalese communities although the exact

locations are somewhat away from the Australian public spaces. Sri Lankan grocery shops and restaurants located well within the Australian public spaces however only 'indicate' their Sri Lankan orientation through semi-fixed objects displayed internally or through the naming of their enterprises. In contrast, when it comes to the residential environments, Sri Lankans make no efforts to display their identities either as individuals or as a community to the public. Rather, they merge and hide away in the Australian residential landscape as much as possible.

The places that do strive to reconstruct Sri Lankan culture through space are the religious institutions and the temples, which as the public collective representations of the community have the capacity as well as a legitimacy to do so within the multi-cultural society and space in Australia. Indeed, they seem to be fast developing into a network of places that not only enable the Sri Lankan community to engage in their religious activities but also to distribute and display their religious and cultural pageantry to claim a notable position in their new world.

Sri Lankan Spaces: The Temples

The establishment and continuous development of the Sinhalese Buddhist Temples⁵, many of them with the essential components such as the *Bo-tree*, the *Stupa* and *Bodhighara*⁶ demonstrates the Sinhalese Sri Lankans attachment to Buddhism and their desire to spatially articulate their identities at this collective level of existence.

To date, six temples have already been well established although at different stages of consolidation while a number of other meditation facilities also exist.

Table 05: Locations of Sinhalese Buddhist Temples in Victoria

Source: Author

	Temple	Location	Facilities
01	Dhamma Sarana	329, Greens Road, Keysborough	Comprises a Stupa, Bo tree and a Bo-Maluwa, Image house and the preaching hall.
02	Daham Nikethanaya of North Victorian Buddhist Association	1690, Mickelham Road, Yoruke	Founded in 1993 comprises a shrine and Cultural Centre, Stupa, and a Bo tree. Bo Maluwa is being constructed
03	Buddhist Vihara Victoria	21 Rich Street, Noble Park, Vic. 3174 Tel: (03) 9548 4525	Noble Park, Vic.
04	Sakyamuni Sambuddha Vihara	No. 93, Holmstead Road Berwick, Victoria Berwick	Bo tree and Maluwa exists with the image house and monk's residence. A Multipurpose Buddhist Community Centre, Stupa, Bodhiya, Vihara (Shrine), Meditation Area, and Ponds planned
05	Bodhivana Monastery	12 Rainbow Trout Ave., East Warburton Vic. 3779 Tel: (03) 5966 5999	East Warburton Vic.

⁵ There are a number of other Buddhist temples serving other Buddhist communities in Melbourne, such as the Vietnamese and the Thai communities.

⁶ These are essential components of a Buddhist temple. Bo-tree is the sacred tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment; The Stupa is often a bell shaped, white painted mound that is expected to have buried deep inside the treasured particles of Buddha and also represents the abandonment of worldly pleasures as one rises to enlightenment.

06	Buddha Vihara Temple	939 Canterbury Road, Box Hill, Vic. 3128 Tel: (03)9899 0638	Box Hill, Vic.
07	Dharma Dweepa Vihara (Sri Lankans Buddhist Meditation Association)	43, Hemmings Street, Dandenong, Vic. 3175 Tel: (03) 9794 9492	Dandenong, Vic.
08	Ringwood International Buddhist Meditation Centre; Vipassana Insight Meditation Foundation Inc	1 Evelyn Road, Ringwood, Vic 3134 Tel/Fax: (03) 9876 0036	Ringwood, Vic
09	Sri Lanka Buddhist Vihara	66 Regent Avenue, Springvale, Vic. 3171 Tel: (03) 9547 0872	Springvale, Vic.
10	Malvern Buddhist Vihara		Malvern

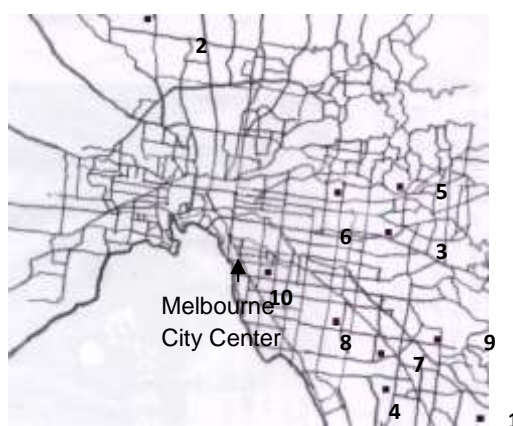
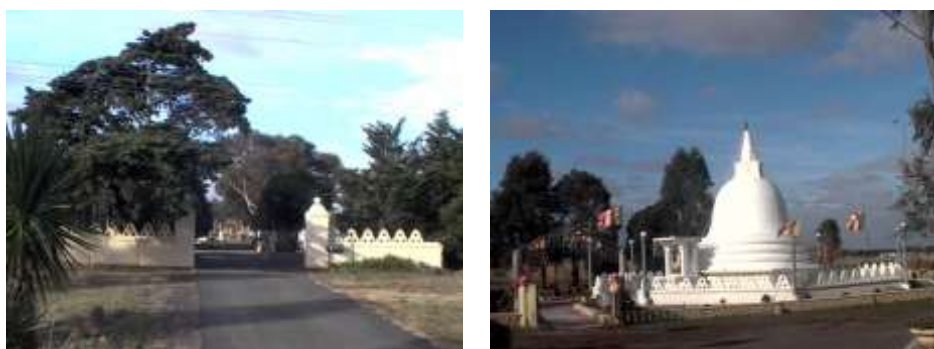


Fig. 1: Locations of Sinhalese Buddhist Temples in Victoria⁷

Source: Author



**Fig. 2: Daham Nikethanaya of North Victorian Buddhist Association
Yoruke Temple**

Source: Author

Situated in the northern suburb of Yoruke, Daham Nikethanaya is one of the most well articulated and established Sri Lankan temples in Victoria. Having been initiated in 1996, it now comprises a Stupa, an Image house and a Preaching hall, Sangaramaya (Monk's Residence), and a Bo-saplin. The Bo-maluwa (the Terrace surrounding the Bo-tree) has still not been completed.

⁷ There are a number of other Buddhist temples of other ethnic communities not included in this map

The Architecture of the temple shows a stunning resemblance to those of Sri Lanka, from its location to detail although there are also notable indicators that replace that context. Since the temple is located away from residential areas, and surrounded by the vast agricultural fields *en-route*, the journey to arrive there resembles the ancient Anuradhapura region; the cradle of Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka⁸. A low, whitewashed ‘Cloud’ wall (Walakulu Bemma)⁹ marks the front of the site and a gate in the middle hung on gateposts displays vividly a Sri Lankan character. On the wall, the temple name is hung on a plaque with the Buddhist Flag background while behind the shrubs and trees, a single storey building with a Sinhalese tile roof and the Dagoba and its pinnacle could be seen through the foliage.

This is indeed how a Sri Lankan temple will often be seen in the Sri Lankan landscape. Here, the exact replica has been created perhaps almost unintentionally because internally, the lay out of the temple shows no deliberate ‘plans’ to create such an image. It is in the making of the *Dagoba* and the making of the temple *sanghavaasa* (the priests residence) that the components of the image have manifested. In contrast however, a letter box mounted just outside the entrance with a unique Assie-style ‘hanging pot’, quickly reminds that it is in fact located not in Sri Lanka but in another place: Australia.

The Stupa

The stupa located at the end of the approach way is, without doubt the most visible and powerful of all buildings that show the Sri Lankaness of the temple architecture. Although smaller in size, the bell-shape of the Dagoba has been fashioned to look like the great Dagoba in *Anuradhapura*; the *Ruwanweliseya* and is again surrounded by a ‘cloud’ wall. Much like most Sri Lankan temples, the entry to the ‘inner Bo-maluwa’ (the surrounding ground of the stupa) enclosed within the wall has been guarded by a guarding sculpture that is carved in concrete. The guard stone is moulded in concrete instead of being carved in stone, a practice that is now common in Sri Lanka itself. The sculpture is a replica of popular guard stone figures of a Deity.



Fig. 3: The Preaching Hall and the Sri Lankan Carvings

Source: Author

Preaching Hall and Image House

On the left to the Stupa on arrival is the main Preaching hall and the image house of the temple that however shows little resemblance to either the preaching halls or image houses in Sri Lanka. In most Sri Lankan temples, the image house usually is a square or a rectangular building with two chambers; an outer and an inner chamber serving two different purposes. The

⁸ Many Sri Lankan visitors have expressed this experience on arrival at the temple as cited by one of the principle Dayaka (sponsor) of the temple.

⁹ This wall has first been constructed around the lake and the temple of the tooth relic in Kandy, during the king Rajasinghe symbolizing the presence of the temple in heaven. The wall having an undulating pattern on top and painted white is believed to appear at a distance, as the clouds at the base of the temple. The wall has become symbolic of the Buddhist temples around the island.

outer chamber to which the devotees often enter is decorated with paintings of Buddhist Jataka stories (550 Stories about 500 previous lives of Buddha exist) while the inner chamber houses the Main image of Buddha (either in seated, meditating or sleeping position) surrounded by images of Gods and disciples venerating him. The walls and ceilings of the inner chamber are also decorated with elaborate paintings of stories. While the devotees offer flowers and venerate Buddha at the feet of the Image in the inner chamber of the Image house, the outer chamber is to be walked around, while being awed and inspired by the paintings often articulating either the greatness of the Buddha, or the peaceful and honorific acts performed during his previous births.

The preaching halls in Sri Lankan temples are entirely different buildings. There are no images or paintings and the buildings are often open pavilions with a central elevated stage. It is where the Monks will recite Dhamma, the Buddhist talks, or Pirith, the Buddhist recitals invoking blessings to devotees and the devotees will learn Dhamma (Buddhist philosophy of life) or observe Sil (Behave strictly according to a set of avowed Buddhist precepts), on the Poya (full moon) days.

Unlike the Sri Lankan situation, here at Yoroke (and in many Sinhalese-Australian Buddhist temples this is the case), a singular building has brought all these activities in to a singular space. This building indeed is a unique Sinhalese-Australian Buddhist Building type and interestingly has been also constructed in that manner. A long hall with a proscenium arch style low stage at one end, this building accommodates the images on the stage, with the *Mal-Asana*; the seat for offering flowers. Surrounding are many artefacts of Sri Lankan culture, most notably a pair of elephants' trunks mounted and placed in the upright position.¹⁰ The monk has a public addressing podium at a corner of the hall and in front of the statue, defined partly by a decorative small carpet and the low table and chair placed upon it covered in white cloths (*piruweta*). The hall has doors on the other three sides and an outer veranda supported on decorative columns. The windows on these three walls are located at a high level and the walls have been decorated with colourful paintings depicting the story of Buddha's birth and enlightenment. Unlike the Sri Lankan temples where the paintings are usually done on the wall surface itself, in the Sri Lankan Australian temples, the paintings are done on canvass, framed and mounted on the walls. This difference is a result of the painters being in Sri Lanka and the paintings therefore having to be done there and imported to Victoria afterwards.

The architecture of this building shows the Australian and Sri Lankan hybridism emerging; the Australian character and framework in the macro structure and enclosure, and Sri Lankan character and meanings in the infills, surfacing, ornamentation and detail. The building is primarily a steel pre-fabricated structure clad in Aluminium roofing. Double walled, its exterior is brick encased while the interior is finished in a smooth plasterboard surface. Doors however are decorative timber, carved with Sri Lankan motifs, set in decorative architrave.

Landscape

Landscaped spaces of the Euroke temple show a unique emergence of the multi-cultural influence of the Australian context in the Sinhalese-Australian temple. Unlike the temples in Sri Lanka where the temple ground is largely a sand court, with flowery bushes on the edge and the flowery *araliya* trees in the turfs, the Australian temple articulates places in the garden with sculptured enactments of some significant events in the Buddhas life. At Euroke, three such places exist. One of these events show the Buddha with the five key disciple monks (*Pas Waga mahanun*) while another depicts the passing away of Buddha. A third place re-enacts the event of the birth of Sidhdhartha the prince; before enlightenment. This practice of creating replicas of historic places in the temple gardens has indeed been borrowed from the Vietnamese temples in Victoria together with the sculptures and the arrangement of the events on ground. Such

¹⁰ The trunks are not real but carved out of timber and painted. The display of trunks in this manner is a sign of the highest form of reverence in front of Buddha Statues in Temples and is often performed also at funerals; placed at the head of the deceased body in coffin.

sculptural garden places and the walkways that connect the places and the construction of the lotus mounted pillars; gateways and their balustrades are unlikely to be found at any temple in Sri Lanka and shows the cultural openness of the Sinhalese Buddhist temples to share with the other temples and at the same time, the desire to acquire more symbolic elements and practices that are believed to enrich their own practices.



Fig.04: Sculptures in the Garden – Imitating new Cultures

Source: Author

Sinhalese Buddhist temples in Victoria are thus not places where the Sri Lankan culture and place are only reconstructed, but also where new cultural fusions are being initiated among Thai, Chinese, Cambodian and Vietnamese religious cultures that, through the monks' travelling to and from Sri Lanka quite often, may influence the cultures and practices of the Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka itself. At the same time, it is fair to assume that similar cultural influences may also be fashioning the other Buddhist temples in Victoria and in fact in Australia itself.

Creating a Cultural Base

Re-performing the cultural activities that take place in Sri Lanka, or the continuation of food practices that have been inherited are not the only means by which the Sri Lankan community engages in constructing culture and place in the Australian setting. To the contrary, the fact that many migrants have also been involved in the production of cultural activities in Sri Lanka prior to their arrival here, and the increased awareness and need to continue to engage in them coupled with the desire to retain their children attached to the Sri Lankan culture have prompted the Australian Sri Lankans to engage in the productions of similar activities originated here. Aimed also at passing down skills and training together with attitudes values and familiarity with the 'original' Sri Lankan arts. The migrant parents have come to recognize that unless the Sri Lankan Australian children also begin to value and celebrate achievements in this sphere themselves, any efforts to re-perform original cultural activities in Australia can continue only so far; only as far as the parents remain active and alive. For these reasons, a number of people, places and cultural productions have now begun to surface within the Australian Sri Lankan community, notably in the areas of dance, music and media productions. It is noteworthy that they have now initiated a project to construct a Sri Lankan Cultural Centre to be located in the South East area of Melbourne of which the architecture will surely make a notable statement of the society itself.

Undeniably, this is an indication of the maturity of the community, an acknowledgement of the opportunities of multi-cultural policies to enable communities to grow healthily with their own cultural progress and most importantly the assertion of an ability to create their own identity as Sinhalese Australians.

Conclusions

Undeniably, Sinhalese Sri Lankans in Melbourne today are busily engaged in reconstructing Sinhalese culture particularly in the intangible realms. This is a remarkable difference in comparison with the nature of the community that existed two decades ago. For instance, De Jong (1986) wrote “Amongst the hundreds of Buddhists with Sri Lankan origin in Victoria, only a small percentage tend to congregate at Buddhist house in Mary Street in Richmond, where there is a Sri Lankan Bikshu (Buddhist Monk) in residence specially on Poya days (approx. once a month) for Sinhalese New year (in April) and for the festival of Vesak (in May)” and “it remains to be seen as to whether these oriental philosophies will play a vital role in the Australia of the future. From behaviour patterns observed at present, it does not seem likely”.

This research was initiated on the belief that making homes as places for being culturally rooted (Heidegger, 1971) is essential for the migrants to become settled dwellers in the new landscapes and that sense of home is evoked when patterns of places experienced before can be transported and re-established (Dovey, 1986). However, the ways in which the Sri Lankan community is reconstructing culture and place suggests an absence of culturally rooted homes and an emergence of new patterns of existence together with a new sense of home. There is evidence that the process of moving from ‘being un-rooted’ to ‘being rooted’ has commenced and has become the main driving force of the community activities. However, to be culturally in place does not seem to mean to be geographically located in a culturally transformed domestic space. Rather, it seems to need culturally articulated places of anchor within access and a pattern of places that have the affordances to be transformed as and when needed. Unlike the dwellers in their native landscapes, the migrants seem to shift their stronger anchors to collective places that can achieve legitimacy and permanence, while remaining ‘lightly-rooted’ in the unstable domestic places. For the Sri Lankan community, the temples provide this opportunity and that is why they are being elaborately reconstructed. However, This hypothesis will need wider research across other communities and other places for generalizations if at all possible.

In the multicultural mosaic of the Australian urban landscape, it is now possible to observe the Sri Lankan cultural deposits within the many temples that exist now but did not exist two decades or so ago. As the community consolidates, they will interact with the cultural diversity and viscosity surrounding their new habitations more vividly providing clearer insights on the processes of making home and making place and cultivating roots by migrant communities in the new world. In this regard, this research offers an interim understanding of the processes taking shape in the Sri Lankan community within the Australian landscape at this moment of time.

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