

Ethnic Group: Tamil
Interview number: 7
Date: July 17, 1993
Place: Toronto

Demographic Information for husband, Murali
Gender: male
Age: 33
Place of Birth: Eastern Province, Sri Lanka
Religion: Methodist
Marital Status: married to Rita
Education: A-level
Occupation: bank employee
Children: son, age 10; daughter, age 6 months

Demographic Information for wife, "Rita"
Gender: female
Age: 32
Place of Birth: Eastern Province, Sri Lanka
Religion: Catholic
Marital Status: married to Murali
Education: A-level
Occupation: bank employee, currently unwaged mother
Children: son, age 10; daughter, age 6 months

Interviewer's Comments:

Murali was referred by a contact from a Tamil agency. The contact gave me a list of men's names and remarked that each name on the list represents a different Tamil district in Sri Lanka so I would be able to hear a range of stories of traumatic experiences Tamils have faced. I explained that the research concerned family change in Canada more than refugee's experiences in Sri Lanka.

When I first contacted Murali on the phone he was expecting that I would interview him about the political situation in Sri Lanka. It is apparent that my informant had selected members for their political views. I asked Murali to save his comments about the war in Sri Lanka until the end of the interview. I also emphasized that I was interested in his own experience of the war-how his family was affected and what prompted them to leave Sri Lanka.

I also told Murali on the phone that I preferred to interview either him or his wife, but only one of them. He opted to do the interview. However, we had just started the interview when his wife, Rita, joined us. As it was in her own home, I was reluctant to ask her to leave. It became a good opportunity to see how the couple interacted, and how they dealt with their disagreements. I have included their dialogues.

Sometimes Rita appeared to understand my question better than Murali. Once she had to prompt him by saying, "No, Appa, that's not what she means. She wants to know..." I found Rita better able to speak from personal experience than Murali. He tended to generalize, or speak in abstractions. More than once he forgot my question in the course of his answer.

We sat on couches in the living room of their small suburban Scarborough home. Murali and I faced each other on adjacent couches. Rita sat next to her husband and turned her body so she faced him. She always looked directly at him when he spoke. From time to time she stroked his thigh. The first time she joined in Murali said, "No, no, I'm talking." I directed some questions at her. By the end she spoke more. When Rita was talking Murali gazed out the window or up at the ceiling. Sometimes he appeared annoyed that I was inviting her views. His enthusiasm for the interview seemed to diminish the more she participated.

The interview took place on a Saturday afternoon. The family was visiting a neighbour when I arrived but they were expecting me. Murali's brother-in-law greeted me and called them on the phone to meet me.

The house was comfortably furnished. A TV/VCR/stereo unit covered an entire wall of the living room. I could not see anything distinctively Sri Lankan in their home except that outside a bowl of salted, yogurt-covered hot chillies was drying in the sun.

After the interview Rita served me a bowl of Sri Lankan fruit salad (bananas, pineapple and pureed mangos with sugar). I held their baby, looked through their wedding album and chatted for about twenty minutes. Both of them drove me to the subway.

I. MIGRATION HISTORY/ FAMILY BACKGROUND

I: When did you leave Sri Lanka and come to Canada?

[Murali came in 1986. He got a job and an apartment. Within a year his wife and 3 year old son joined him. Even though they intended to immigrate to Canada, they did not come together because...]

Murali: In my case, I would never ever take a risk in any matter. In fact I did not even resign my job. I was doing a very good job in the bank, the trading corporation in Colombo. I had a very good future, but, you know, circumstances... So, I don't want to take that kind of risk all at once, to go and see [about chances for settling in Canada]. I took a medical leave from the bank and I came.

I: Why did you chose Canada?

[Murali said, "It was more or less up to me to decide," between Canada and Australia. He chose Canada because he likes cold weather, is attracted to the snow and fresh air and he dislikes heat. He learned about Canada from library books.]

I: Did you have any relatives in Canada at the time?

[Rita had 6 or 7 cousins who had been here for 15-20 years, but they did not influence his decision to come here. They had same number of relatives in Australia.]

I: Have you sponsored or helped anyone to come since then?

[They brought Rita's younger brother from Italy. He now lives with them. Their household also includes a widower who lives in a basement apartment. This man was born in South India but married a Sri Lankan Tamil woman from Jaffna. They learned that he needed a place to stay from other Tamil friends. He prefers to keep to himself.]

I: What family members do you have back in Sri Lanka?

[Rita's brother and mother and Murali's two sisters and mother. Murali's brother is in London.]

I: How much contact do you have with them?

[They write letters weekly and call monthly. They have little contact with relatives other than immediate family members.]

I: Do you plan to sponsor or help anyone else come?

[Murali would consider bringing his mother for a visit, but the others are occupied with their own jobs and families. They have

no intention to bring extended family. Murali remarked: "You know the life here, you hardly have time to look after yourself."]

I: What were your first weeks in Canada like?

[Murali found it hard to understand the English spoken here and to get used to the new words and mannerisms. He considers himself and his wife very good at English. He used to win prizes for English every single year in school. He finds North America "very mixed up in language."]

I: Did anyone help you get settled here?

[Murali received help from friends rather than relatives. There were not that many Sri Lankans here at that time. People he didn't even know helped him. In the eighties it was hard to find an apartment in Toronto but easy to get a job. Quite a few people helped him.]

I: What did you do at first?

Murali: I realized there's a vast sea here. The opportunities are vast. You just grab it. You have the opportunity. You can conquer the world. There [in Sri Lanka] everything is so restricted. You can't do anything. Even if you have the ability, even if you are hard working--no. I would say, an immigrant, if he does not achieve what he could to the maximum, that's a sad event. So we felt we could do... especially economically.

I: What kind of work did you do?

[Murali explained that he accepted jobs that were below his qualifications in this way:]

Murali: The colonial English brought some culture with them [to Sri Lanka]. The [British] style was followed by the educated class [of Sri Lankans]. What do you call it? Status symbol. You don't do a job if it doesn't fit your qualifications. I don't have that kind of status thing. I believe you open the door and do whatever you can.

[Murali was able to get temporary jobs, sometimes 2 or 3 at a time. He did accounting, worked as a security guard and janitor in banks and offices. Rita also did temporary jobs. Now they both work in banks. However, they feel they came to Canada too late in their careers. "We should have come during our education. We wasted time. When you're young you can do more."]

II. IDENTITY

I: How do you describe your identity?

Murali: Definitely not Sri Lankan. I could say I'm Tamil, but not Sri Lankan.

[Murali and Rita refer to Sri Lanka as Ceylon. They claim that's what Tamils call it. They say the name "Sri Lanka" is Sinhalese and means that the island belongs to the Sinhalese. That is why they prefer to call themselves Ceylonese rather than Sri Lankan.]

I: Is Canadian part of your identity?

Murali: Generally, yes. I'm a Canadian. I like to be called as a Canadian. But sometimes it's funny. You go to England and you say you are Canadian, you will be looked at funny. Because generally Canadians are, you know, white. But then, you can't do anything about it. So, you have to be proud of who you are. I always tell my son, be proud of who you are.

[Rita calls herself Tamil first, but she is also proud to be a Canadian. Tamil comes first because: "We have to have our identity, especially where the children are concerned."]

I: How do you think your children will answer to a question about their identity when they are older?

Murali: That's interesting. You get the good things and the bad things. You can tell your kids what it is all about, what's the tradition and why the tradition is there. I encourage him to go to Tamil classes. And I always tell him be proud to be Tamil. A couple of years ago one of his classmates asked him, did you come here because you didn't have anything to eat there? They see these aid programs on the TV. He came and asked me and I said, no, we were very well off there and had everything there. I have to explain to him why we are different, why he has to be proud. So, you can tell your kids, but you can't force them.

I: Are your friends mostly Tamil?

[Their friends are "mixed." Non-Tamil friends include neighbours, co-workers and teachers.]

I: What Tamil practices do you continue?

Murali: The tradition itself. Not because of the clothes and stuff like that, but you know, certain beliefs, customs, morality. One of the things that we dread about here is the amount of liberalism. The kid has been told, "You feel comfortable about it, you do it." The kid doesn't know what is right and wrong, more or less, in many circumstances. That itself [moral beliefs] doesn't just belong to Tamil, but most of the Eastern side. There is a moral background of what to do and what not to do and why the reason behind it is. Those are all part of the culture.

[Murali and Rita highly value the ancient "Dravidian" Tamil literature from southern India.]

Murali: I don't know how much you are involved with the Tamil language itself. That's one of the languages in which you can't scold anybody. If you scold somebody it won't be vibrant. It's like singing a song. The alphabet itself. The tongue should go like this. It's so lively. Especially the literature. You can talk about Shakespeare, the richness, but it's not in that sense. But the wisdom itself. It's been written a long, long time before the Bible was. Every single one [verse] applies today in our lives.

[They explained why their emphasis on Tamil's South Indian Dravidian heritage does not connect them with present day south India.]

Murali: Though they are our ancestors they are very much mixed now, not pure as we are. That's one of the reasons why this struggle is going on so strong and people are willing to die for it. It's like the Jews--how strongly they feel. The language the culture, the literature itself.

Rita: We speak much more pure Tamil than the Indians, though they are our ancestors.

I: What else do you do in your home and in your daily life?

[They eat Sri Lankan food, except for "junk food" like pizza. Rita wears sari and jewelry to special occasions. They attend a Tamil church, although they noted that "Not much of Christianity is associated with [being] Tamil." They do not attend regularly because of the baby, but they send their son to Sunday school.]

At home they discuss religious and moral teachings with their son and read him ancient Tamil poems. They are involved in a Tamil school association and attend Tamil cultural programs. At home they listen to Karnatic music (classical south Indian-Tamil) and Christian songs in Tamil. Their son is taking organ classes. They plan to send their daughter to learn Barathanathium dance (classical dance).]

I: Do other Tamils influence your behaviour in any ways?

Murali: No, vice versa. They don't, but we are very much concerned about other Tamils.

I: In what ways do you try to influence their behaviour?

Murali: Taking part in expressing our opinions through letters to various associations involved. Speaking to them on how to do things and what not to do. Now I am working on convincing the Tamils to get very much involved in politics here.

I: What are the issues you see as important?

Murali: I'm disappointed about the Progressive Conservatives not pressuring the Sri Lankan government to end the war, giving money through CIDA. I am very politically aware of issues here as well as there.

III. MARRIAGE

I: When did you get married and how old were you at that time.

[1982. Murali was 22, Rita was 21. Murali commented that they married younger than usual. The usual age for marriage would be between 27 to 28. Theirs was a "love match."]

I: Why did you get married so young?

Murali: It was the obvious next thing to do. Maybe here you would live together and see if it's working or not. There you don't. You can't do that. You can't go on and on and on and on. It's the obvious choice.

I: What education did you have then?

[Rita and Murali went as far as advanced level. Murali did not go to university because of family responsibilities. His father died so he had to work to support his family.]

I: Where did you work at the time of your marriage?

[Murali worked for a bank. Rita was secretary at a finance company. They met because Rita's father was Murali's boss.]

I: Did all your parents agree to the marriage?

[Rita described her parents as "very liberal. They didn't mind."]

Rita: In fact, my father also lost his father at the age of 15. So he had the responsibility of bringing up his three brothers and sister. So he felt like because he [her husband] was also in the same position he had all the potential of coming up in life.

Murali: They say if you have responsibility you'll be a decent man.

I: Were there any proposals for Rita before you decided to get married?

[Rita's parents were bringing her proposals to consider. Murali was not one of them. Rita did not like the proposals.]

Rita: It was like this, when they propose, especially with my father being in a higher position, then you get all the high class people. They try to propose you to all these doctors and engineers who were much older than me. I was only 20, 21. Most of the ones they were looking for, I didn't like them. They were not my type. I really wanted a friend. Not someone who was much older than me.

I: Was it okay for you to reject the proposals?

Rita: My mother was very liberal. She always taught that it should be my choice. Even my father was like that. Any time I said no, I don't like this person, they just dropped it. Even though there was a lot of pressure from my relations on both sides, still they always stood by me.

I: Were your parents concerned about your religious differences? [Rita is Catholic, Murali is Methodist].

Rita: They would have cared if I went into a Hindu person. That my father would not have liked. But still he wouldn't have opposed it either, if I had chosen it.

I: Did your parents have any concerns at all about Murali?

Rita: No. Except socially, where they stood among the others, there was so much pressure for them among our relations. "Why should they get her married to an orthodox?" They were trying to fix me within the circle of Catholics, within the family circle, within the cousins. Mostly they were going like that. So naturally all those people started opposing it. I have a very large family. That's where they faced most of the opposition.

I: Among Christians is there any concern with caste?

Rita: Yes there is. To a certain extent. But not as bad as the Hindus, but yes.

Murali: Well, I don't know. I have been brought up and... Very little, hardly... You know, this person is doing this but you don't make it an issue. I would say the caste issue, now it's completely gone. Especially with this struggle. In the North there was a bit, but in the East it was more relaxed.

Rita: That's because the East is mixed and the North is not mixed. [In the East] they don't look so much. Most of them are considered the same. Whereas in Jaffna you get the highest caste and the lowest caste. They hardly mix, in marriage or anything. They would never, ever mix. In my case, my mother is from Jaffna and my father is from the Eastern Province.

I: So some of your relations would be very much concerned about you mixing?

Rita (emphatically): Oh, yes.

Murali: I think that was an issue a couple of years ago. You see, my generation was brought up with all this struggle. As younger generations we were very much involved in uprooting this caste system. So more or less it's gone. The upper caste people elected a lower caste MP. It was an issue some time back.

I: Is your marriage similar to your parents' marriages?

[They said they were "more or less similar." Murali's parents had a proposed marriage.]

Rita: In my parent's case they loved and then it was proposed, but they loved within the family.

I: How would your married life be different if you were in Sri Lanka than it is now in Canada?

Murali: Here more or less you look after your own business. There you are very much involved with your relations as a close community. Sometimes you might pick up unnecessarily on what people are saying. Like, say for instance you get someone married to one of your friends, and they would fall into trouble... social life... you help somebody get employment and he gets in trouble... you are very much involved in your community and your relations. Here it's different. We prefer this life. There are lots of good things on that set up [Sri Lanka] as well. Like extended families. My mother would simply call somebody from the road and say, "Take my kid to the school." And they would go and take the kid. You can trust them. You are so close even though you are not related. You are so close and so united. Whether it is someone's wedding or a birthday party or somebody's death, they will come and give you their lives, everything. That is what I tell my son. A couple of houses away my grandmother was living. When she hears one of us coughing, she'll send my grandfather with all these medicines and stuff like that in the middle of the night. So close. My father's brothers and sisters took care of us. They would take us everywhere. They were like guardians and they'd see that we are well protected.

I: Why do you prefer to live here?

[For Murali it makes "economical sense." There is a higher standard of living.]

Rita: Why I prefer it here is there is less interference. Though there is an extended family and there are good things, there is sometimes a lot of interference. Here there is less interference.

Murali: Here you don't care. It doesn't matter. Nobody can do anything. Whatever they think, I would say it is my business. Even if they have any opinions, it is our opinion that counts. Whereas there you have to see to your mother's opinion, his mother's opinion, you know? Here if we make a decision, we do it, whether it's right or wrong, that's fine. We learn our lesson if we do something wrong.

I: What kind of matters concern family members in Sri Lanka?

Murali: Practically everything. The child's education, the child's well-being, the health and social behaviour, pretty much everything. They are very much concerned.

I: Are they concerned about how you treat each other?

Murali: No. That is a personal question. That they won't [interfere]. Maybe if we had any problems, but we don't have any problems so they won't come and interfere.

I: Do you know any couples who have had a divorce?

Murali: It's very rare. There are very few cases if at all. Lately I hear about a very few cases [in Canada]. Out of ignorance. Economic freedom would sometimes make them go astray. But other than that, it's not much different than there [in Sri Lanka]. There even if you do have problems you try to go through the elders and resolve it, because you depend on each other economically. You can't say, "I'll find my own apartment and go."

I: What are the main pressures on people's marriages in Canada?

Murali: The lifestyle itself. You are so busy, you hardly spend time with each other. There the whole time you are with your family. The way I was brought up, as soon as my father comes home we are around him. I feel very sorry for my son. I hardly find time to spend with him. That is one of the major concerns. Even if you have problems, you are unable to correct it. You don't have time.

Rita: I would say time is a big pressure. Especially for a woman, you have to go out and work, plus come, do the housework and all that. But now I think our men have changed a lot. They help out with the housework. But still there is this guilty feeling. If he is working you feel... Because there we don't allow our men to work. I mean, you do everything. Whereas here you can't do that. But still, sometimes I find him working a little hard and I feel guilty about it. Sometimes I try to do it and maybe I can't do it.

I: Does your community give any help to couples that are having problems?

Murali: I don't think there is any help group. If at all the religious groups, a pastor or an elder maybe.

IV. CHILDREN

I: Do you plan to have any more kids?

[No.]

I: Does your son speak Tamil?

[Murali and Rita speak Tamil at home. Their son understands but doesn't speak Tamil. It is very important to the parents that he learn to speak Tamil. They plan to enroll him in a language course.]

Murali: At least he should read the great richness of that language. Or it is lost forever. We have to pass on to the other generation what we have enjoyed and been enriched by. There is a great, vast richness.

I: What do you want for your children in life? What are your hopes for your son and your daughter?

Murali: We will try our best to educate them to become intellectuals. That is our wish. But on a lower scale we want them to be good citizens, to be useful to this country, to the people, to think about the unfortunate people.

I: What personal qualities do you want to see in them?

Murali: Exemplary. Morally...
Rita: More like us. (laughing)

I: Do you have the same expectations for your son and your daughter?

Murali: Sure.
Rita: Yes. But I would like her to get married and settle.
Murali: Obviously (laughs).

I: You are already starting to think about her marriage?

Murali: In fact, that's the thing. I very much wanted a boy. Not because I don't like girls or something like that, but at one

point and time they are going to their husband. Very much their decisions are going to more or less depend on their husband. Whereas a boy can lead. I always tell my son, you have to conquer the world. There is a vast world to be captured. And he says, "I want to become a scientist, and find some medicines and do something good."

I: Do you expect that your daughter will become dependent on her husband?

Rita: No.

Murali: Generally, what marriage means is not dependence, but her decisions would more or less, in a larger degree, be dependent on her husband. Whereas a boy, a man, is a leader, the captain of the ship. He has more say.

Rita: Well, I would think that she would have an equal status with her husband. They should make decisions together.

Murali: No, not in the day to day things, but in the general direction.

Rita: Yes, that is what I am saying.

Murali: Well, if she wants very much to be politically active, you know, it's a bit difficult.

Rita (tone of disagreement): Being a woman?

Murali: Yes, that is what I am saying. That's the old saying way back at home. "One day you will get married and go with a man." When the parents bring up their daughter, so lovely, so beautiful, one day she is going to be gone. (Changing the topic) That's another thing, in our culture. Even small kids, we call them "Amma" [meaning, mother]. Any female. That's the kind of respect we give them. We give that motherly respect. That's something that very much upsets me here--the degrading, especially the females. That's very bad. You hardly ever think of doing such things. Very, very disturbing sometimes.

I: In what ways are females degraded here?

Murali: Oh, in every aspect I would say.

I: Are you talking about Sri Lankan or Canadian females?

Murali: Canadians.

Rita: I think the [Canadian] men don't give the same amount of respect [as Tamil men].

Murali: Though they are talking about feminism, the feminist movement and how much they have achieved, pay equality and that and this, but, I find it very hard to accept the fact that women have gained grounds, maybe materially, but not... I don't think. The males don't give that kind of ... See, the mother plays an important role in our lives, in our community. The mother only creates the culture. So we give that respect. The values, the morals, everything is very weak here. Single mothers and children just being brought up with nothing, the crimes being committed against females... the relationships... very disturbing sometimes.

I: What kind of marriages do you want your children to have?

Murali: Oh, somewhat like us.

I: Do you expect them to marry Tamils?

Rita: No. I mean, that's very difficult.

Murali: Preferably. But, it's left to them. We are not going to

force them.

I: Do you have the idea that you will lose your daughter when she marries?

Murali: Even the son. Here they are very much independent. There [in Sri Lanka] you have contact forever. Here [in Canada] they are gone, after the university they are gone. You hardly see them for Christmas. There it's not like that. In your day to day lives you interact with each other.

Rita: There we have an obligation to somehow or other go and see your mother, or write to your mother or do something. Suppose he doesn't write, his mother will give him a call or his brother will give him a call and say, "Why haven't you written to Amma?" They expect that. I don't think we can do that with our children. Because when it comes to their time, we know what sort of pressure they will be undergoing.

I: In what other ways is your parenting different from what it would be if you were in Sri Lanka?

Murali: There the parents make the decisions for the kids. Everything up to the point of marriage. Education, extra-curricular activities, where you move, practically everything. And they [parents] are gods. They expect you to really perform for them, to do very well in life, to be a model to others. Parents should be proud. There is a saying: "There is a lot of pride when a son is born for a mother, but she has more pride when she hears others speak about her son so good." "The father is getting the pride of his life when he hears that his son is among the learned."

I: Do you think you will be any different as parents since you are living here?

Murali: No, other than the free say that they have here. Here you don't force your kids to do something. There they have no second word about it. When your father says do something you do it the very minute, whether it's right or wrong you do it.

Rita: Here of course, we try to listen to him [their son] and try to accommodate his views also.

Murali: Yes. More or less it's an enlightened society I would say. Scientifically you have a reason for everything. You don't just blindly follow the traditions.

V. PARENTS

I: What obligations do you feel towards your mothers?

Rita: Writing letters, giving moral support.

I: Are you typical in this way? What are the usual obligations of Tamil children towards their parents?

Rita: We have to take care of them. Normally what happens is when parents become old they come and stay with their children and we take care of them.

[Rita's mother took care of her own mother for about three months when she was sick, but she took care of her mother-in-law for a longer time in her home, even after her husband died.]

I: How much does being in Canada change what you would do for your parents?

Murali: We forget all about it.

Rita: Now we are helpless. Practically they are on their own.

Murali: My view is that you should not depend on your children, even here or there.

Rita: But in our cases, his mother is staying with his sister. I wouldn't like for her, like he says, to take care of herself on her own. That wouldn't be nice.

Murali: But also, the lifestyle here itself, it's not practical to have the parents. Barely you have time for yourself, and the structure of the house, and...

Rita: Like my mother, when she was here, she felt very lonely and very left out. [She came to stay, but went back to Sri Lanka]. One of the reasons was we didn't have time for her. The maximum we could do was buy her tablets.

Murali: Especially, another thing is that here the middle age and old age people are very much active, very much involved in physical activities and keep themselves healthy. There they don't do much. After a certain point they stop everything. So they fall sick. They can hardly hear, they are unable to cross the street. So it is very difficult here unless they are physically active.

Rita: Otherwise they feel terribly bored. The maximum they can do is give calls and talk to all their friends over the phone.

I: Your mother went back, was it her choice to come to Canada in the first place?

Rita: No. Actually I wanted her to come. Because when we bought the house I didn't have proper day care for my son. I didn't feel comfortable to go and leave him in a house to be taken care of by strangers. Because, he went to a day care and he was also not very happy. So that's why I brought her here. She stayed with me for quite some time.

I: Did she always plan to go back or did she think she might settle here?

Rita: She waited until my brother from Italy came over here. She feels that he will take care of me. He's a help to us as well.

I: Who looks after her?

Rita: She's on her own. I have another brother, but he's not very active. He's a sickly person. But since there is an extended family and friends and all that, there are people to come and help her out.

VI. RELATIVES

I: Do your relatives expect anything from you?

Murali: No, I don't think so.

I: Is that different from in Sri Lanka?

Murali: Yes. Of course, yes, they expect. Especially if you are in a particular position, they expect you to do something. [For example, if] you are holding a higher position in a bank, when some vacancies come, they would like to have some sort of help from you.

I: If one of your relations wanted to come to Canada would they

expect some help from you?

Rita: Yes.

Murali: We have helped a lot of our friends who have come and stayed with us for a couple of months or so.

VII. ATTITUDES AND NORMS.

I: Is your family, and are your views, typical of Tamils or different?

Rita: It's different. Now we have adapted.

Murali: I think more or less Tamils have adjusted to life here. I'm very much pleased with the majority's performance, especially in secular activities and education. I think most of them have adjusted.

I: Do you think you will go back to Sri Lanka?

Murali: Not in the near future. If things are quite normal we might, but not permanently. We would prefer to send our kids during their summer vacation so they will have a parallel view of things.

I: If a young couple had just arrived and came to ask you for advice, what would you tell them?

Murali: Oh, quite a lot. About every aspect of life. When we came we met a man who had been here for the past thirty or forty years. He told us a few things. Even today I remember. I call him on Christmas.

I: Can you give some specific examples?

Murali: One of the things he told us was about our cooking. We have to be very careful about our cooking. The smell is easy to get on to your clothes, so when you go out the others might feel uncomfortable about it. And [he told us] about the clothes and what to wear and how the system works, what this is all about, the democratic rights that you have as citizens of this country, nobody can come into your house and arrest you, what can you talk and the amount of freedom you have to express your views.

I: Tell me about your circumstances in Sri Lanka which led up to your decision to come to Canada.

Murali: It was coming to a boiling point where your life was in danger. If I was single it would have been a different story. I would have taken a risk. If I lose myself, okay. But then you get married, you have kids... From time to time there were riots. So we were hiding ourselves in Colombo, house to house, running, and in refugee camps. Things started getting worse and worse day by day. There came a point where I felt my life was in danger. Even if I died nobody was going to bother. Nobody was going to give protection to my wife.