

SRI LANKAN FOOD

MEMORY, FESTIVITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN NEW ZEALAND

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of  
the Master of Design at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

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## ABSTRACT

Recipes that have been passed down from one generation to another serve as portable pieces of the Sri Lankan past. Therefore, food and generational memories go hand in hand as powerful transmitters of cultural heritage to the emerging generation of Sri Lankan-New Zealanders. This thesis employs typography to communicate generational memories and experiences primarily evoked by food. The research sets out to explore the formal and experimental properties of Sinhala and English typography through the use of word concepts and recipes. The research through design process explores the relationships between the verbal and the visual to communicate aspects of Sri Lankan cultural values through typographic form. Consequently, typography works as a tool for carrying cultural tradition forward in New Zealand. The research argues that Sri Lankan food acts as a cultural link but in the context of a continuous process of adaptation. Therefore, the role of a festive Sri Lankan recipe in New Zealand assumes a deeper significance. Actively combining and layering visual modes of graphic language and typography weaves together the ideas of generational experiences, the process of adaptation and Sri Lankan identity in a contemporary New Zealand environment. The production of graphic design work that incorporates both Sinhala and English typography has been very scarce. Therefore, through research for design and analysis this thesis will offer some insights into cultural visibility and its impacts on cultural identity drawn from the literature on food and generational memory.

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**SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

## 1:1 CENTRAL PROPOSITION

Food plays an important role in Sri Lanka's festive tradition by evoking cultural memory and communication in Sri Lankan culture. The properties of Sri Lankan food can be expressed through recipes as they serve as portable pieces of the Sri Lankan past, easily adapted in the kitchen of the New Zealand present. Sri Lankan food is a unique language in itself as the cultural memory linked with its taste, texture, smell and ways and means of preparation are all powerful transmitters of cultural heritage. Food and memories share an intimate connection and a festive environment sets the scene for the design process. This research will explore the impact that food and memories have on Sri Lankan cultural identity in New Zealand through visual communication design methods.

## 1:2 PROJECT AIMS

- 1) To use typographic form to communicate cultural memory evoked by food, within contexts drawn from both everyday life and celebratory aspects of cultural festivals.
- 2) To explore the formal and experimental properties of Sinhala and English typography through the use of word concepts and recipes.
- 3) To explore relationships between verbal audio documentation and visual graphic communications to communicate aspects of Sri Lankan cultural values.
- 4) To draw upon the particular cultural values embedded in Sri Lankan food culture and festivity and use typography as a tool for carrying the culture forward.

## 1:3 CONTEXT

The expansion of the Sri Lankan immigrant community in New Zealand has created several opportunities for maintaining cultural identity and communication between generations. This section of the thesis explores a brief history of the Sri Lankan immigrant community in New Zealand and considers cross cultural communication as a visible form of cultural maintenance.

### a) The history of Sri Lankan immigrants in New Zealand

#### i) Movement and migration

The term "diaspora" has been used to describe the experience of movement and migration. Cheran (2003) affirms that the term Diaspora is derived from the Greek *diáspeirein*, meaning dispersal or scattering of seeds from one place to another. The terms *diaspora* and *diasporic* communities are used as metaphoric definitions for expatriates, immigrants, displaced communities and ethnic minorities. Life is a continuous journey. Therefore, it is not very likely that people will live their entire lives in just one country or place. A key characteristic in New Zealand today is that its population is made up of many cultural communities. These communities include different generations (of members) who have varying degrees of closeness to their culture. Asian people now form a significant part of the New Zealand population and can be categorized into several individual ethnic groups.

#### ii) The Sri Lankan population in New Zealand

The immigrant population in New Zealand has been growing rapidly over the past decade. The eight largest Asian ethnic groups in New Zealand are as follows: Chinese, Indian, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Sri Lankan, Cambodian and Thai. According to statistics New Zealand (2001 census) the Chinese ethnic group is the largest Asian ethnic group in New Zealand, closely followed by the Indian ethnic group comprising of 26 percent of the ethnic population. Although commonly categorized as part of the Indian ethnic community, the Sri Lankan ethnic group stands on its own and has risen over the years to three percent of the ethnic population. McGill (1982) stated that the first Sri Lankan immigrants migrated to New Zealand in the 1960s, chasing a brighter economic future. Others migrated to provide their children with a safe future and a

sound education. Consequently, Wellington has been the home to a large population of Sri Lankans for many years. The immigration process introduces possibilities for change, as well as new cultural experiences. Therefore, immigrants are faced with keeping in touch with their cultural identity while becoming familiar with the culture of their country of residence. Cultural identity is expressed in various practices such as rituals and festivals, food, language, literature and music. By observing cultural practices such as food, we may gain an understanding into the levels of cultural identity and integration into New Zealand society.

### iii) Festivity in Sri Lankan culture

Sri Lankan culture is one that is vibrant, lively and full of festivity and celebration. In Sri Lanka, people celebrate nearly 30 public holidays a year, observing the country's national and religious festivals. There are ceremonies and rituals associated with every part of Sri Lankan life. For example, the first solid meal, the first hair cut, the first job, and "first" anything must be done at the right, and auspicious time. Most activities and rituals during certain festive occasions must be performed at precise times known as the *nakatha*. In between these rituals, the time is spent playing games, visiting family and friends, enjoying the food made for the occasion, and generally having a wonderful time. The arts, music and dance are a big part of the festive period and everything is very vibrant and joyous. Festive culture is an important way in which cultural values are kept alive and passed onto the emerging generation of New Zealand born Sri Lankans. Festive food embodies aspects of ritualistic festivity. Therefore, if one learns to appreciate the food then one can learn about the culture as well. Furthermore, food is related to cultural memory; it nourishes as it keeps us alive and connects us to the past. It connects us to our culture, our families and our heritage. It is not just the spices and ingredients that make Sri Lankan food so special. The ways in which the food is prepared, served and eaten contributes towards making the Sri Lankan food experience a culturally significant one. Traditionally, a festive meal in Sri Lanka is prepared either the day before or in the early hours of the morning. The women folk come together in the kitchen with their clay pots and pans and bring their ancestors' recipes along with them. The memories evoked by Sri Lankan food often work as the

secret ingredient as they have the fierce ability to nourish one's consciousness and a sense of identity.

### **b) Cross cultural communication and cultural presence in New Zealand**

Festivals are a visible form of cultural presence in New Zealand. They have the ability to draw people into cultural traditions through food, dance, clothing and music.

When cultural variables play an important role in the communication process, the result is cross-cultural communication. Dodd (1995) implies that it is a special type of communication as one learns to respect and appreciate diverse cultural traditions. Cross-cultural communication bridges both the generation gap as well as the communication gap. Therefore, culture and communication are inseparable. Sri Lankan culture generates symbols, rituals, customs, festivals and language, which are an integral part of the lives of Sri Lankans living in New Zealand. The role of the Sri Lankan festive tradition in New Zealand assumes a deeper significance. It communicates several aspects of cultural tradition to both the emerging generation of New Zealand born Sri Lankans as well as to other members of the cultural community. Food plays an imperative role in Sri Lanka's festive tradition. Furthermore, food is a universal form of communication and offers a language of cross-cultural communication, especially to the younger generation. It is a medium that appeals to most generations and communities in New Zealand. The recipes, preparation, serving and sharing of festive Sri Lankan food plays a fundamental role in cross-cultural communication. Dodd explains that "a group's history provides a social continuity, an identity, as if to say, this is who I am" (2000, p. 38). For members of other cultural communities, food becomes a language that is offered and shared, tasted and appreciated at the same time. Ethnic dining plays a significant role in New Zealand life. Ethnic food has the ability to reach out to people and make a cultural connection through taste, smell and texture. If a spoken language is not held in common, then food is a form of expression that often makes that cultural connection. The acceptance of Sri Lankan food in New Zealand culture resides in the harmonization and compromise between maintaining authenticity while consciously modifying it when required.

The deeper significance of Sri Lankan food in a festive context can be communicated through typography by actively combining and layering visual modes of graphic language. Bing (2002, cited in Chattopadhyay, 2004) claims that eastern and western cultural assumptions are challenged when visual communication design is employed to communicate cultural change and adaptation. He argues that the role of typography is not to glamorize the text, but to articulate it. This project utilizes typography in an aesthetic way to enhance cultural visibility, by incorporating all the inspiration it can draw from Sri Lankan festive culture, rituals and individual experiences. The Sinhala alphabet is a unique form, with a round, bubbly, festive appearance. Each letter has an identity of its own, symbolic of individual ingredients, experiences and people. The typography is part of how the community expresses itself, individually and collectively. Therefore, this project employs both Sinhala and English typography to characterize the deeper significance of Sri Lankan food in New Zealand.

**SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

## 2:1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review addresses both sociological and theoretical research that contribute towards the achievement of the research aims. The sociological significance of food focuses specifically on the meaning of food, cultural significance and cultural memory. The second section reviews theoretical findings that explore the relationship between verbal and visual language forms.

## 2:2 THE SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD

### a) The Meaning of Food

Fig.1, Food and celebration, 2005



There has been much interest by sociologists such as Super (2002), Sheringham (2003), Bassett (2003) and Cargill (2003) in the relationship between food and society as it is central to both physical survival and social relations. Food serves both biological and social purposes in human societies. The purpose of this

literature review, however, is to look at the social significance of food. Food is loaded with meaning. It is grown and cooked by certain people for others, who eat it jointly or by themselves. Across almost all societies the process of eating together or giving and receiving food reinforces social relations and group memberships. Food contributes towards moulding a person's personal, cultural, and ethnic identities. Specific foods or significant eating events such as festivals, holidays and celebrations are imbued with core social values. Super (2002) argues that food plays a complex role in human society and notes that:

*For the most enthusiastic, food is the ideal cultural symbol that allows the historian to uncover hidden levels of meaning in social relationships and arrive at new*

*understandings of the human experience. The tug of anthropology and sociology is strong here, and underscores food as symbol and metaphor, a cultural numerator essential to the human equation. (2002, p. 165)*

Rozin, 1982, cited in Sheringham, 2003 reports that “Culinary behaviour” or “cooking”, is an activity that is practiced daily by all cultural communities across the globe. Each community or group however, cook to suit their personal tastes and needs. Rozin suggests that:

*Every culture cooks, but each is intimately bound to its own unique and individual cultural practice. In order to assess the nature of the relationship between a culture and its cuisine, we must attempt to determine, if only at first in very broad terms, the specific acts and processes that comprise the activity of cooking.*

(Rozin, 1982, cited in Sheringham, 2003)

Sokolov suggests that Christopher Columbus the famous explorer is a very important figure in the history of food. It was Columbus who was responsible for making the trans-Atlantic exchange of foods a success. Sokolov reports that:

*This bringing together of two hemispheres to the one table was a period of substantial change to food and eating practices around the world.*

(Sokolov, 1991, cited in Sheringham, 2003)

Douglas, (1975, cited in Sheringham, 2003) argues that food can be treated as a code that relates to social and cultural events about rituals, traditions and social relations. Similarly, Mintz refers to cuisine as the art of eating together. He suggests that :

*Cuisine, in its true sense, is a set of foods eaten by a group of people who care about it, have opinions of it, have common social roots and comprise a community.*

(Mintz, 1996, cited in Cargill, 2003)

## b) Food and cultural significance

Fig.2, The process of cooking at home, 2005



Food has always played an important role in Sri Lankan society as a medium through which core cultural values and traditions are kept alive. Food is especially significant in Sri Lanka's festive tradition. The way food is used in celebrations varies within homes and regions. Knowles (2003) suggests that the smell

of a festive meal remembered from one's childhood can evoke a strong sense of nostalgia and bring back a flood of memories of culture, tradition and of past generations:

*What could be more useable than recipes? They proved to be very portable pieces of the lost world, easily re-created and shared with family and friends - and so very delicious!* (Knowles, 2003)

Norris (2004) researched the sociological significance of food, focusing on the history of pickle making. She collected more than eighty pickle recipes and all of them had been passed down through families for generations. Norris goes on to suggest that in most Asian pickle recipes the stories behind the recipes were all linked to language, people, places and culture:

*In many circumstances, I found that people's food memories were what was the easiest for them to maintain after migrating.* Norris (Interview with Yoon, 2004)

In several cases some recipes had been adapted to suit the western kitchen mainly due to the lack of authentic ingredients. However the culture and language embedded in the recipe lives on. In order to preserve the memory, the recipe has to be made in some sort of fashion. Consequently, the recipe and culture lives on. Bassett (2003) supports Norris's idea that culture is a learned experience as we acquire it from our

Fig.3. Homemade food at a festive event, 2005



families and the people around us. It is the same with food. The foods that we use for celebrations in our own homes as young children are more than likely to become the foods we use to celebrate with as adults.

Bassett notes that:

*Every culture resists change; even though some of the*

*foods we use may change, many will stay the same because of what we learned as children.* (Bassett, 2003)

Food is a necessary part of our lives no matter where we may be in the world. The emerging generation of New Zealand born Sri Lankans may eat the foods that their parents do just because it is such a prominent part of their culture. Bassett discusses the ways in which food can act as a powerful element that has the ability to bring old memories of people, places and events to mind. In Sri Lankan culture most festive foods are made at home. Moisió, Arnould and Price (2003), collectively look at how food and the memories attached to them can be “valuable threads” of one’s cultural heritage. They suggest that:

*Homemade food and the memories associated with the respective food, bring together the notion of the festive cooking event and the people that engage in such activities. However, these mental images are also highly nostalgic. They represent the collective past.* (Moisió et al., 2003, p. 6)

Homemade food generally expresses norms of family togetherness and solidarity. Imagery surrounding homemade food brings about family events as precious and special, incorporating them with themes of happiness and sharing. Homemade food is an expression of family unity and bringing family members together. Language and cultural tradition is kept alive through recipes and cultural memory.

### c) Food and cultural memory

Older Sri Lankan immigrants in New Zealand are charged with cultural memories, which they pass on to the emerging generations. Intergenerational communication should be encouraged as it contributes towards maintaining cultural identity. For example, what has been experienced by our parents can also be part of our own life. Therefore, the traditional Sri Lankan experience that many of the older immigrants have had becomes a valuable factor when communicating cultural values to New Zealand born Sri Lankans. Attias-Donfut and Wolff (2003) report that:

*Each generation is sensitive to the lifetime of their parents, and similarly, to the lifetime of their children. Sometimes they identify their own generation with the lifetime they share with their parents or the lifetime they share with their children. (2003, p. 16)*

It is based on this level of communication that one's cultural heritage can be passed on and appreciated from one generation to the next.

Sociologists such as Sheringham and Cargill have explored links between food and cultural memory and have said that when families gather for a festive occasion, the kitchen becomes the first meeting place. That is because the kitchen is where both food and memories come alive. All families have favourite foods that are served on special occasions. Most people make their own festive food not necessarily because it tastes better but because it is fun. It is something they have made themselves. The process of cooking enables family members to talk, share and communicate. This is the sort of experiential learning that engages all the senses and focuses on cultural identity. Moio et al. suggest that:

*The unpredictability of homemade food communicates the presence of a human element. Through its imperfections homemade becomes a resource for valued experiences. (2003, p. 9)*

Preparing and eating traditional food at home proves to be a rewarding experience to many. McCartney (2002) suggests that the process of preparing and eating ethnic food brings family members closer to one another. He goes on to suggest that:

Fig.4, Rice, 2005



*It is one element of a shared commonality that should be passed down to each generation.*

(McCartney, 2002)

These research findings are reinforced by my own experiences in New Zealand. For most Sri Lankan immigrants living here homemade food has an iconic relationship with their remembered pasts and family identities. For them, combining

authentic and fresh ingredients, knowledge and transmission of recipes reproduces homemade food. Just as Sri Lankan food enabled me to discover things about my cultural heritage, food contributes to understanding identity in both national and local contexts. Wright-St Clair et al. have discussed the way in which food and food rituals bridge a gap between the past and the present. This is a key issue that this project will address through visual modes of representation. Everyone eats rice, at all times of the day, all year round. Therefore, I have used rice as a metaphor for something authentic that is changed to suit new environments. No matter how it is prepared or eaten it still maintains its cultural symbolisms. Rice eliminates the geographical distance and thereby assists one in the recovery of cultural roots. It can communicate feelings beyond words. It has the power to create a bond between wives and husbands, mothers and daughters, grandparents and grandchildren.

These issues have been explained further by documentary filmmaker and connoisseur of good food Paul Kwan, a Chinese American who moved to the United States over 25 years ago. In Kwan's most recent documentary titled "*wok-in-progress*" (2000) he explores relationships between food and his Chinese past and American present. His earlier documentary "*anatomy of a spring roll*" (1994) also explores these ideas.

Matsumoto (1994) of the *Los Angeles Times* summarises part of the movie as follows:

*For Kwan, food is the most accurate and enjoyable means of connecting with his ethnic roots. When we see his septuagenarian mother intensely preparing a Vietnamese feast in her California kitchen, it's not work but a form of cultural and artistic expression.*  
(Matsumoto, 1994)

Through food and the memories affiliated to each festive dish, culture can be easily re-created in a New Zealand kitchen. Food serves as a medium or link between two cultures or further still as a link between two generations. For most first generation New Zealand born Sri Lankan children of immigrant parents, traditional food acts as a cultural link. Cultural tradition continues but in the context of a continuous process of adaptation. According to Lu and Fine (1995), some authentic recipes utilize new ingredients and techniques, due to migration and the unavailability of ingredients, technological change or alterations in food-related preferences, such as the level of spice one's taste buds can handle. They report that:

*The maintenance of a food pattern does not depend on whether it is identical to its original form but on whether the fundamental characteristics of the recipe are defined as being continuously present and connected to core cultural beliefs, and recognized as a differentiated food pattern.* (2003, p. 541)

Traditions are most special when they are passed down from mother to child through recipes. There are so many people who have learned the recipes as children, and then repeat the motions and the ingredients from their hearts, not from a piece of paper. Something as simple as a family recipe can act as a metaphor for cultural tradition. It may also act as the only connection between the past and the present, new homes and old.

The relationship between festive Sri Lankan food and ceremonial rituals is important to this research. Moisiso et al. state that:

*Imagery surrounding homemade food valorizes family events as precious and special.*  
(2004, p. 6)

Consequently, a festive meal with cherished family recipes, the smell of homemade food, ways in which the food is prepared and eaten are the most important ingredients of personal and cultural identity. The warmth, culture, language and comfort found in the food continue to be passed on to the emerging generations. Due to the large number of immigrant communities in New Zealand, recreating a traditional meal in one's home is not as arduous as it used to be. Several types of food and ingredients that were somewhat unheard of and hard to come across a decade ago are more accessible to the emerging generation of Sri Lankan New Zealanders and the general public.

Lahiri was born in the United Kingdom to Bengali parents and has spent over thirty years in the United States. She uses food as metaphor in her book, *Interpreter of Maladies* (Lahiri, 1999). Lahiri explains that food provides us with a sense of familiarity when we are away from our homes or comfort zones. She argues that it induces a sense of belonging. Food proves to be a unique language in itself. In a strange land familiar items of food are as welcome as familiar faces. Lahiri shares Kwan's beliefs that food serves as a medium or link between two cultures or further still a link between two generations. Choubey (2001) notes that:

*For immigrants and non-residents food certainly serves as an important part of their identity. When away from home, the food from one's land brings as much pleasure as a mother's voice on overseas calls.*

Choubey (2003) reports that Lahiri's work suggests that food serves as a symbol and acquires more of a metaphoric stature than mother tongue, for the simple reason that most immigrants around the world speak English.

## 2:2 VISUAL AND VERBAL LANGUAGE MODES

### a) Graphic language as a means of communication

The use of graphic language and visual modes can be utilized to express the interchange of festive Sri Lankan food by engaging a number of sensory and language dimensions. Food memories and recipes are conveyed both verbally and visually. Therefore, actively combining and layering visual modes of graphic and expressive language can communicate the deeper significance of food, festivity and cultural specificity in Sri Lankan culture. As graphic designers succinctly communicate ideas and information through the visual representation of the written word and images, graphic language can play a key role in cross cultural communication. Human society communicates with each other and interacts with the environment through both verbal and visual languages. This is done through movement, speech and visual imagery.

Haust states that:

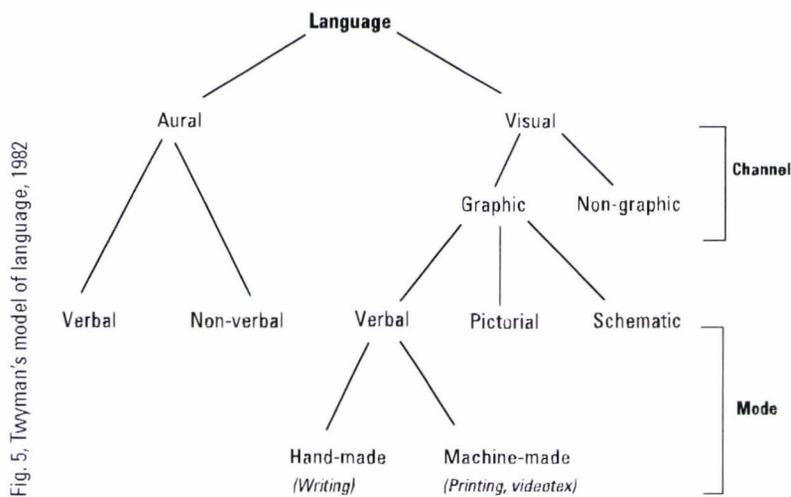
*The spoken word competes with other forms of communication throughout childhood and since the word is more universal and a more socially interactive language, speech becomes the language of choice, as a child grows and learns. (1989, p. 23)*

Haust reports that visual language is a form of communication that occurs through visual symbols. Simple lines and marks are usually one's first introduction to visual language forms. Similarly, Lester (1995) reports that before people learn to read and write a simple outline of an object and a letter is one and the same in their eyes. He explains that as time goes by combinations of these letter-pictures mean more complicated things. Lester observes that the recognition of the importance of words at an early age results in typographic recognition and appreciation in the future. Walker (2001) is an important name in the field of typographic language and research. She suggests that making sense of a written language depends on the typographic relationship between its various graphic components.

We use all types of language in our day-to-day lives. Walker (2001) distinguishes between expressive language which refers to the words and sentences we use when communicating with others, and receptive language which refers to our understanding of what people say to us. Walker (2001, p. 8) notes that language is either spoken,

written or visual and may contain surface and deep structures. Surface structure refers to the rules of grammar while deep structure involves knowing the meaning of each word within a sentence. Twyman (1982, cited in Walker, 2001, p. 9) extends these views even further in his language chart that focuses on the modes of graphic language.

Graphic language refers to drawing or writing by hand or machine. He proposes that



graphic language has three components; the verbal, pictorial and schematic.

Twyman's model has greatly influenced the visual communication of food and generational memories in this research as food memories and experiences can be conveyed both verbally and visually.

The language of food is a combination of the verbal, visual and the written. Using visual modes in ways that engage a number of sensory and linguistic dimensions can expand the communication of this. An authentic recipe and its cultural significance can be communicated through layers of ingredients, memories, colour and experiences spanning several generations of the Sri Lankan community in New Zealand. Twyman's model (1982, cited in Walker, 2001, p. 26) utilises "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" as descriptive terms for the graphic attributes of written language. He describes intrinsic features as residing in the characters themselves as well as in the size, style and weight of the letterforms. Extrinsic features are those that manipulate the space around the characters. Colour is both an intrinsic and extrinsic feature in graphic language. These principles will underpin my explorations of the visual communication of food and cultural memory in this research.

## **b) Visual language as a system**

Horn (1998, p. 11) suggests that by actively combining verbal, pictorial and schematic modes, a new language system will be formed and this would greatly enhance our ability to communicate. Written language or hand written text is closely linked to typography. Therefore, Walker (2001, p. 2) describes typography as the “visual organization of written language”. She suggests that:

*Visible language is another term sometimes used to refer to handwritten, drawn or mechanically constructed letters, all the orthographic forms, in fact perceived by the eye. (2001, p. 8)*

Visual language can express things that are hard to express in ordinary written or spoken language. It is a language that can be understood universally. Horn defines visual language as:

*The integration of words, images and shapes into a single communication unit. (1998, p. 8)*

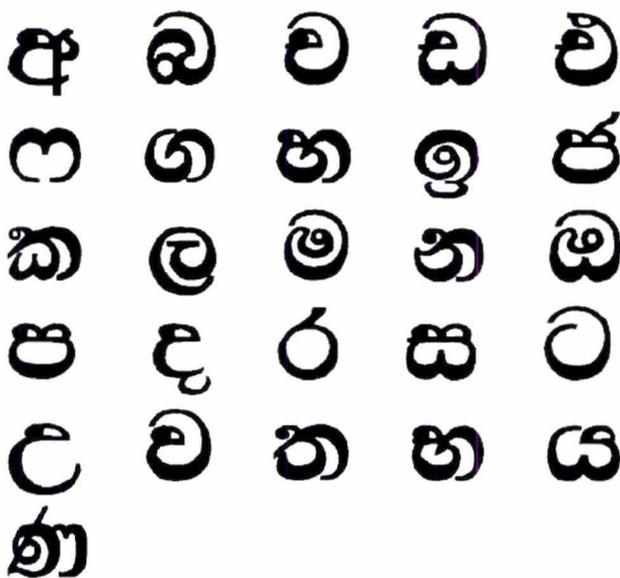
When words, images and shapes are used separately they do not provide us with a visual language. As Horn suggested, there needs to be a tight integration of the three components in order for it to become a visual language.

**c) Theorising the verbal, the visual and the typographic**

A number of theoretical models can be employed to advance the understanding of the relationship between verbal, visual and typographic languages. Varga (1989) claims that since the evolution of language and writing, the written word has either been heard or seen. Varga refers to a term known as “word and image morphology”. This concerns the spatial relationship between verbal and visual language. Varga reports that word and image merge completely. The translation from the verbal to the visual and back again is an important aspect of any design process as most discussions between the designer and the client are conducted initially through verbal language. Therefore, the process of any design project has to go through the task of translating between the verbal and the visual.

Both verbal and visual language can be equally expressive. Together, the layering of verbal and visual language modes become very powerful mediums of design and expression. Derrida (1974) used the term “grammatology” to name “ the science of writing.” Derrida’s “grammatology” provides an important reference point for this thesis as it considers relationships between the spoken word and the written text. Spoken Sinhala is very musical and can be quite evocative for the listener. Similarly, written sinhala has a distinctive character and portrays a symbolic sense of musicality.

Fig.6, The sinhala alphabet, 2004



Each letterform has a character of its own and a story to tell. Therefore, part of my design work incorporates both the spoken and the written word, to be viewed and listened to simultaneously.

Lupton and Miller (1994) argue that if writing is a copy of spoken language, then typography can be a mode of representing the spoken word. They suggest that:

*Writing in fact invades thought and speech, transforming the sacred realms of memory, knowledge and spirit. Any memory system is a form of writing, since it records thought for the purpose of future transmissions.* (Lupton & Miller, 1994, p. 347)

Catherine Zask's (2004) work demonstrates typographic principles and styles which provide useful reference points for this research. Her work has made an important contribution to the field of visual communication design by using a unique combination of typography and word play. Like Varga (1989), Zask explores the spatial relationship between verbal and visual language. David (2004) notes that it is the spatial relationship explored in Zask's work that conveys a language of its own. David reports that:

*Catherine Zask puts the word in the middle of everything – a word's hidden meaning, the word one remembers, the word one clings to, the word one forgets.* (2004, p. 43)

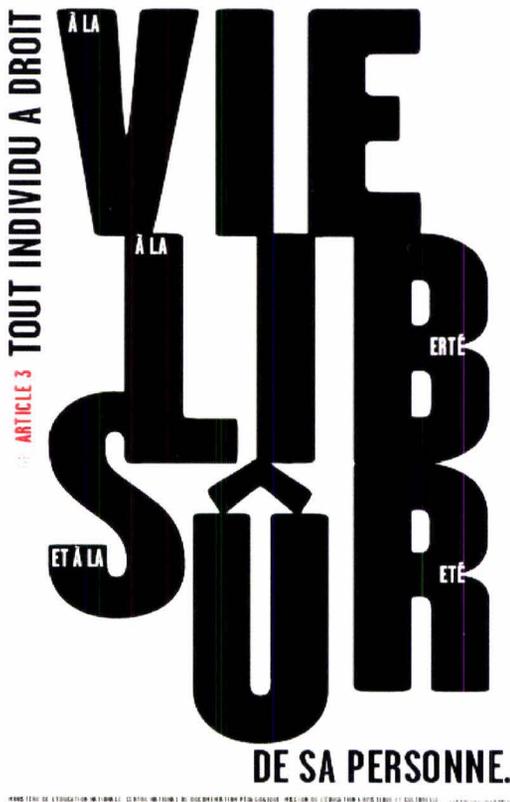
Zask's desire for typography is linked to her desire for words. Working from a firm belief that typography creates image, she never uses any photographs, illustrations

or pictures. No visuals are required to prove a point at any stage. Her choices of colours are primarily black and white along with a couple of vibrant shades to make certain bits of information stand out more than others. The letterforms speak for themselves. She employs bold letterforms and colours to convey her ideas. Zask notes that:

*Words for me always lead to images. I like to read, to say to write, to decorate, to rub the letters and the words against each other. Then the computer's fantastic reactivity shows me a visual step that produces another idea, opens up another pathway.*

(Zask, 2004, cited in David, 2004, p. 43)

Fig.7, Vie-lib-sur, 2001



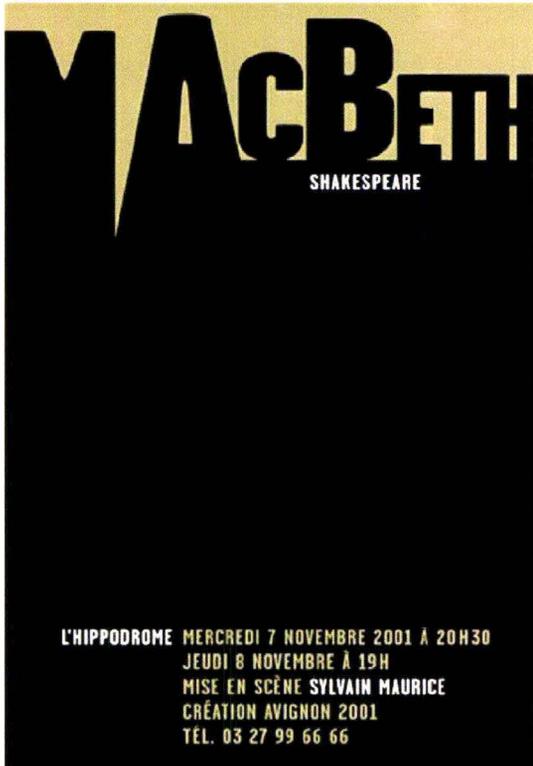


Fig.8, Macbeth, 2001

Zask considers the integration of both formal and expressive typography. She also considers the use of negative space on a page and the impact it has on the entire visual composition. In her poster for *Macbeth* designed for the National Theater l'Hippodrome de Douai in 2001, the typography sets the scene for the Shakespearean play. Large black letters create a dark and grim setting, while the gold space between the first two letters form the shape of a deadly blade used by royalty. The negative space demarcates a space symbolic of Lady Macbeth's dark, blood stained hands.

## 2:3 ARTICULATING CULTURAL CHANGE

### a) When authentic becomes adapted

Fig.9, Mixing flavours, 2005



Lu and Fine (1995) suggest that external changes such as immigration affect cultural traditions. These changes affect food traditions as well to some extent too.

In a society that values cross-cultural communication, the emerging generation of New Zealand born Sri Lankans as well as members of other

ethnic groups yearn for an experience imbued with cultural tradition. Cultural tradition in this day and age is continuously adapted. However, when the traditional characteristics of a respective dish have been modified or transformed, it is done to meet New Zealand taste buds. The adaptation of Sri Lankan food in New Zealand culture is a process of innovation, reinvigorating a unique tradition to be passed on to future generations and should be considered as a form of cultural maintenance. Despite modifications in the ingredients, spices, processes of cooking, and styles of consuming a festive meal, the fundamental principles involved in Sri Lankan food have been retained. Dishes of various kinds and flavors are prepared. Sri Lankan principles of multiple ingredients, and mixing of flavors remain evident. Another major feature of the Sri Lankan food system, the separation of the staple (rice) and accompanying dishes (meats and vegetables) in the meal structure has also been retained. Therefore, festive food prepared here is simultaneously Sri Lankan and New Zealand, authentic and adapted. The success of evoking cultural memory through festive food depends on how it is presented to its target audience. Lu and Fine (1995) conducted a series of interviews with several Chinese Americans as well as Chinese restaurateurs in America. Van den Berghe, 1984, cited in Lu and Fine, 1995 reports that ethnic food has served as a "paradigm of ethnicity" and is the most "pleasant way to cross ethnic boundaries."

## **b) Communicating authenticity and adaptation through typography and design**

This project sets out to explore food, memory and its significance through typography and design by actively combining and layering visual modes of graphic language. Several typographers, graphic designers and calligraphers have utilized typography as a tool for communicating cultural authenticity and adaptation. Scotford (2003) conducted a series of typographic exercises with graduate and undergraduate students at four Indian universities and design schools. These projects provide an important precedent for this research. Scotford's design brief used a recipe as the content for a typographic assignment while teaching in India. By using a traditional recipe for *dahi bhaat*, a simple and common rice and yogurt dish often served for lunch or as a snack, Scotford explores both functional and expressive forms of typography in English and several other Indian languages.

Scotford defines "functional typography" as that which is easily readable and organized for understanding, and "expressive typography" as the interpretation of words, associations, emotions and context. She argues that legibility is not as important in expressive typography. The brief asked the students to consider the typographic differences between English and Indian languages such as Hindi. Scotford also focused on typographical content, layout and information hierarchies, as they are important factors linked to the visual composition of a design. Scotford notes that while the students were initially wary, as they started to analyze the recipe, various food memories, as well as discussions of family and cultural traditions, started to arise:

*This was exactly what I had hoped for: a way for me into a new culture through language and food, a way for Indian students into experimental typography starting from some familiar ground. (Scotford, 2003, p. 125)*

The students worked first in English and worked on a functional typographic layout and then moved onto an expressive typographic brief. This project fulfilled one of Scotford's goals to learn more about Indian languages and alphabets in a typographic context. She notes that:

*Working in two and three languages produced several rewards for students, in addition to pure novelty. Translating between the languages showed differences in sentence structure and hierarchy. They were confronted with aspects they took for granted in their primary language and now perceived differently in all languages.*

(Scotford, 2003, p. 144)

The use of Sinhala typography is an important aspect of my study. There has been very little expressive typographic work done in Sinhala to communicate cultural experiences, and my project utilizes both Sinhala and English to advance an understanding of generational change and cultural fusion evoked by food.

Xu Bing's work provides another important precedent for this thesis. Bing, a leading figure in the international art and design scene was born in China and studied calligraphy, printmaking and bookbinding. Bing has always been passionate about the power of words. He has been exploring the meaning of language since he was relocated from his home during the forced regulation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1975. He moved to the United States of America in 1990 and has become a key figure in the fields of typography and calligraphy. Like Scotford's students Bing uses two languages (English and Chinese) in his work. He plays with language as a system of symbols that can be rearranged to create new meaning. Bing considers the themes of authenticity and adaptation, which I am exploring in this project. He does not do this through food and recipes like Scotford. However, he does it by using English and Chinese typography alone in his "square word calligraphy" series. This work produces a new system of writing where each letter of the English alphabet has its Chinese counterpart:

*English letters are arranged to fit into squares according to the principles of writing Chinese where each character occupies the same amount of space. These works appear to be scholarly Chinese texts and yet on closer inspection are found to be familiar English poems and stories and slogans and even nursery rhymes such as Little Bo Peep. (Bing, 2002).*

Bing uses a script he designed known as "Chinglish," which looks like Chinese characters, but actually reads in English. What at first seems like a confined language



Fig. 10, Little Bo Peep, 2002

barrier becomes a bridge of communication. Bing's unique typographic style incorporates Chinese brush strokes. The letterforms enable his Chinese and Chinese-American audiences to rediscover their pasts and to value their culture. When his non-Chinese audience realize that they are actually reading English, they are able to see the beauty of a culture that might have seemed alien to them at first glance. Bing sets out to explore the differences in words and languages, different cultures between people and cross-cultural communication:

*Xu regards his history – China's history – as something that has allowed him to forge a new path, separate from the East and the West. (Lui, 2004, p. 95)*

Bing is not trying to create a new language, but instead, a unique system of writing for other languages to help people understand different cultures. Through studying English, he found that he could understand his own language and other languages better. Bing knows how language and words inspire and connect people. He has given the emerging generation a new language that makes them aware of their cultural heritage. Bing believes that to change a written language even a small amount changes people's thinking. Bing's work provides a precedent which demonstrates how the adaptation of language should not be perceived as written language manipulation, but as a form of cultural maintenance. Therefore, his beliefs support my views that cultural adaptation and even cultural fusion should be viewed as a form of cultural maintenance.

This literature review provides evidence that food can be a medium through which cultural identity is maintained in New Zealand and other diasporic contexts. The ingredients that make up a traditional recipe, as well as the methods of preparation

and eating can evoke cultural memory that contributes to the preservation and development of identity and culture. The research discussed also provides evidence that verbal and visual language modes, graphic design and typography can communicate contemporary cultural values.

**SECTION 3: RESEARCH METHODS**

### 3:1 RESEARCH METHODS

The cultural memory linked with festive food is a powerful transmitter of cultural heritage, especially for the emerging generation of Sri Lankan New Zealanders. To achieve the research aims, this project will employ a combination of design research methodologies that encompass *research through design methods* and *research for design methods*. This set of methods is based on design as an expressive and iterative process. Research **through** design will be the primary method of research in this project.

The research **for** design will inform the expressive design work. Downton (2003) defines research for design as being the research that is carried out during the overall design process to support designing in whatever way the designer regards as useful and this includes information that is necessary to successfully conclude the undertaking in question. Informal and semi-structured conversations will be conducted to gather descriptions of experiences related to food by family members, friends and members of the Sri Lankan community. The aim of this component of the research is to explore, describe, and interpret the experience of individuals who have varied perceptions of Sri Lankan food and culture.

### 3:2 RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN

The primary aim of the research process will be to transform the verbal audio documentation into a series of visual graphic communications that will weave together aspects of Sri Lankan cultural values and generational memory through typographic design. Visual communication design will be used to reflect on and to build layers of cultural experiences through multi model strategies. This will be achieved by drawing from the particular cultural values embedded in Sri Lankan festive food culture.

Therefore, the role of a festive Sri Lankan recipe in New Zealand assumes a deeper significance, as the words are defined and undeniable, thus making its deeper significance factual. Throughout history, people have used letterforms for the practical purposes of communicating ideas, story telling, and recording facts and memories. The research through design will become the primary method of research in this project. It will employ typography as a tool for carrying the culture forward. Typography's advantage over photography or illustration or any sort of imagery is its immediacy and

its ability to visually transform verbal documentation into visual graphic communications. This project will employ what Abu-Jaber (2005) describes as a “three dimensional narrative” in her interview with Sullivan. Abu-Jaber notes:

*I was intrigued by the possibility of a “three dimensional” narrative, one that seems to step off the narrative page. By giving the reader recipes, it provides an important additional step. Not only are people reading the stories, if they try the recipes they’re also able to enjoy tasting, smelling, and touching alongside the writer. It’s a uniquely sensuous and inclusive experience, and seems to offer more than what a simple recipe can. It seemed like a perfect, natural, and very organic union to me.*

Abu-Jaber (Interview with Sullivan, May 4, 2005)

Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p. 45) suggest that “background knowledge can sometimes be an invaluable resource” in any circumstance that involves interviews and other methods of collecting data. The background knowledge will provide direction and inspiration towards fulfilling the necessary research through design. Therefore, layers of meaning that symbolize and embody the authenticity and adaptation and the transformation of cultural identities and generational memory will be explored through a series of visual communications. The end result will be a symbolic representation of spoken media versus print media that work together harmoniously.

### 3.3 DESIGN COMPONENT: RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

The body of design work will consist of the following:

- 1) A typographic banner
- 2) A conceptual recipe book
- 3) A conceptual DVD

This body of work will be designed to communicate aspects of Sri Lankan cultural values evoked by food, and will communicate an understanding between the verbal, visual and typographic language modes. The colours will be drawn from graphic descriptions of Sri Lankan food. The banner will set out to use typography as a tool for

carrying cultural tradition forward through the values and practices embedded in Sri Lankan food culture. The vibrant, bubbly and almost lifelike letterforms will capture the festive nature of the research project. The conceptual recipe book will draw from both everyday life as well as celebratory aspects of Sri Lankan festivity. The fusion of the two typefaces, content, colour and format will represent both adaptation and authenticity. As outlined in the research aims, the DVD will draw both the verbal and the visual components of this project together.

### 1) Typographic banner:

The banner will explore the formal, experimental and spatial properties of Sinhala typography. The letterforms will be a metaphorical representation of the individual ingredients, generational memories, mixed cultural experiences, cultural adaptation as well as cultural change. This metaphorical representation will be expressed through the Sinhala words for mother (am-ma) and child (la-ma-ya). The simple typographic letterforms will be transformed through the emotive food memories, methods and rituals to gain full symbolic meaning in the design process. A square format will be used to symbolize the solidarity or the essence of an original recipe or cultural tradition as its essence always stays the same. Therefore, while the letterforms and colours change, the square format will stay the same. The letterforms will start out in their original form, unchanged. Yet as the squares merge the letterforms and colours will merge creating new shapes and colours. As one's eye moves across the squares the letterforms will change a little too, still legible and maintaining their meaning. This will be symbolic of the ingredients of a recipe changing to suit new environments. If considered even more metaphorically, cultural traditions are passed on through food and the process of making it. However, cultural traditions are adapted to suit generational changes as well as environmental changes and this is what the banner will set out to explore. The banner could either be viewed simply as an exhibition piece or as a banner at a Sri Lankan festival in the future.

## 2) Conceptual recipe book:

The recipe book will provide the audience with a visual component that will be both a typographically expressive and informative piece of design work. It will be designed to function as a portable piece of documentation for the emerging generation of Sri Lankan New Zealanders. As mentioned in the research aims, typography will enable them to reflect on a Sri Lankan cultural experience as a whole. The book will be designed to conceptually explore the individual ingredients that make up a festive Sri Lankan environment. Food of course will be the main theme. However, the book will also consider aspects such as rituals, clothing, the preparation of food, the art of eating, hospitality and gift giving. The book will demonstrate the understandings of the conventions of typography. It will employ both Sinhala and English typography, a metaphor for both fusion cooking as well as the fusion of two cultures. A legible and clean sans serif typeface such as *univers* will be chosen to capture the verbal process in print format for the emerging generation of Sri Lankan New Zealanders. It will maintain the square format and colours as that of the typographic banner. It will also maintain the outward appearance of a conventional cookbook. However, as the pages unfold, the meaning behind each page and each festive ingredient will unfold as well. This format will provide the reader with multi dimensional sections of ingredients and recipes, that will unpack what may seem like a simple context on the surface. While every page is different to the other, the overall typographic layout will still maintain a sense of uniformity. The recipes in the book will be typically festive ones that are adapted to suit new generations and environments.

## 3) Conceptual DVD

This component of the design project will be a critical reflection on the experiences of food, memory, cultural identity and adaptation within a diasporic culture. It will be a very concise yet conceptual DVD that will reflect on and build layers of cultural experiences and meaning through a multi model strategy. The audio track or the verbal component will work as the narration. The audio track will capture vital information gathered from the semi structured conversations conducted. The verbal information provided in the audio track will give the viewer a better understanding of the significance

of the DVD. The audio track, though short and concise will capture several thoughts and phrases that greatly influenced the design process. Further still, it will set out to capture the essence of generational memories and experiences through time. The typographic banner or the visual component will set the scene for the content and colour choices. The DVD will use both still photography and video sequences as well as typography to bring out the essence of a sensory experience. It will employ both an expressive as well as a documentary style of sequencing and will aim to provide the viewer with a sense of being caught in a Sri Lankan cultural moment. The DVD will set out to piece together the individual ingredients that make up a cultural experience that has a distinctively festive flavour. Consequently, the relationship between the heard and the seen will create a multi sensory dimension for the viewer.

The overall research through design process will be one of constant experimentation, modification and reiteration. The body of work will aim to engage the audience in the interplay of the relationship between the verbal and visual modes of communication. Therefore, it will aim to offer an evocative and sensory experience of Sri Lankan culture.

### 3:4 RESEARCH FOR DESIGN

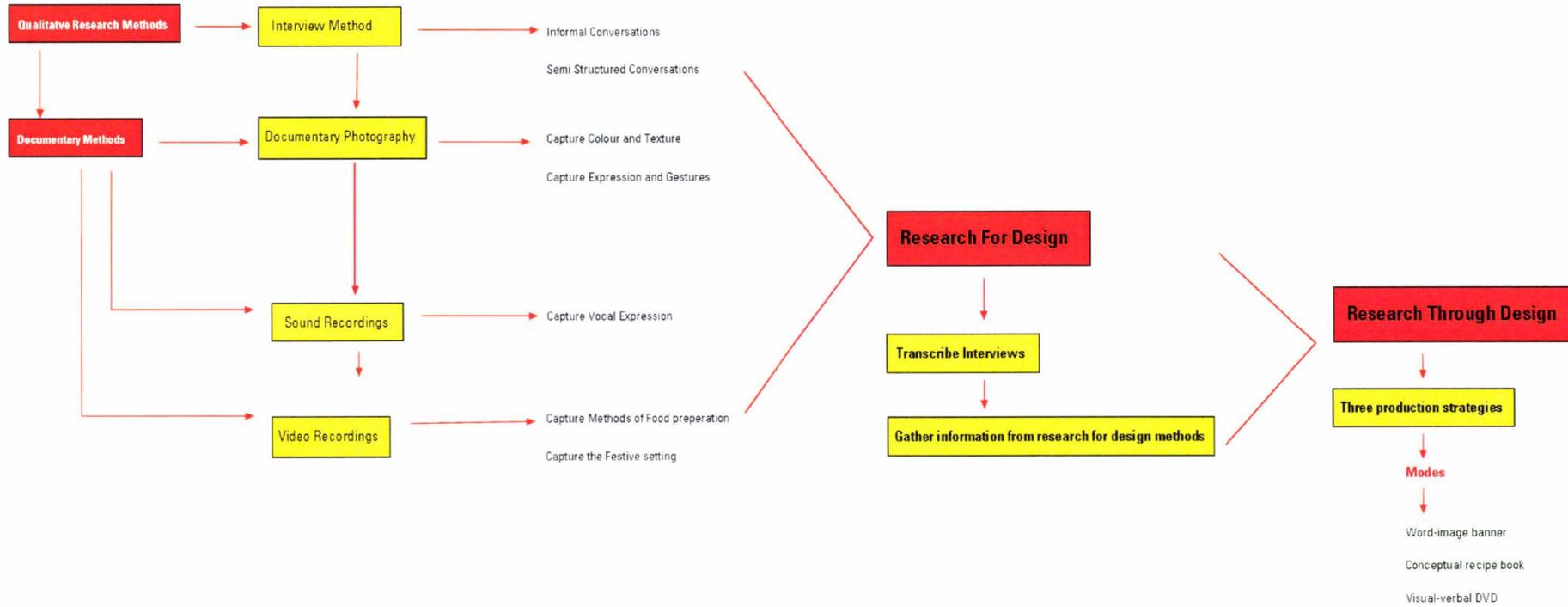
The conversations aimed to evoke stories and memories about rituals and the way food was prepared in Sri Lanka, how the food has been adapted in New Zealand, key ingredients and what festive food meant to them. At the end of the conversations the participants felt that it was a positive experience that made them think of festive food, memory and its significance in a completely different fashion. Documentary methods were employed, with photographs and sound and video recordings when required, documenting local cultural festivals and gatherings. These methods provided me with the flexibility to capture emotions, festive environments, settings and colour. However, most of the data that supported the research for design was primarily based on semi-structured conversations with members of the Sri Lankan community in Wellington. All the interviewees signed a consent form prior to the conversations I had with them. The three key interviewees were of three different age groups. They were all female, as the kitchen is predominantly reported as the domain of Sri Lankan women:

- 1) Adults aged between forty to fifty years old who had spent most of their lives in Sri Lanka.
- 2) Young adults aged between twenty to twenty five years old that had lived or visited Sri Lanka at some stage of their lives.
- 3) Young adults aged between twenty to twenty five years old that had never lived or visited Sri Lanka at some stage of their lives.

I selected the informal yet semi-structured conversation as the process provided me with the flexibility to change the order of questions, explore questions within themes that came up in the conversation, and to allow for a more natural conversation flow. Questions relating to certain topics of interest were suggested, but were only meant to guide the conversation. The key interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. This process allowed me to listen more attentively to the interviewee and remain focused so that I was able to participate in the lines of discussion and seek clarification if the need arose. As for the interview setting, I left the final decision to the interviewee. The setting was prone to change based on the age and availability of the interviewee. I wanted them to feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible. Therefore, their home or mine was suggested as the interview setting depending on both of our perceived levels of comfort and security. A low noise-level is generally important to interview methodologies of this kind for ease of conversation and clarity in taping. On the other hand, some interviews and documentary methods were conducted in louder venues such as festive or cultural gatherings. The conversations set out to provide specific and detailed information and insights into the following areas:

- 1) The ways in which the Sri Lankan community in New Zealand experience their festive culture through food.
- 2) The different ways and reasons why Sri Lankan food is adapted in New Zealand.
- 3) How memories evoked by festivals and food can transmit cultural traditions to the next generation.
- 4) How recipes can be perceived as a language that can serve as portable pieces of the Sri Lankan past.

Fig.11, Research method summary, 2005



**SECTION 4: INTERVIEW SUMMARY**

## 4:1 INTERVIEW SUMMARY

This component of the research project was designed as an exploratory study to collect and document information that would inform and inspire the research through design phase of the project. The topic of food in a festive environment was of much interest to all of the respondents. Therefore, they engaged easily and openly in the interview process and contributed their stories, thoughts and memories with much fondness and enthusiasm. This section identifies some key themes that emerged from the interviews and provides specific examples of the ways in which the themes were evoked by memories of food related events.

### 1) Passing down cultural memory from one generation to the next

Many of the participants talked of recipes as part of a cross generational experience. An interview with a Sri Lankan female between 40 and 50 years of age, who had spent most of her adult life in Sri Lanka, produced the following exchange:

I: Thinking of the meal, I had a few questions. When preparing this meal would you follow a recipe or does it come to you quite naturally?

R: It comes naturally. I think it comes from mother to daughter and aunts. I have never used a written recipe for Sri Lanka food.

I: Did you learn from your mother?

R: From my mother or from the servants. Or you just learn it by discussing.

I: So it's word of mouth?

R: Yes, that's right.

I: So most of the recipes have been acquired from past generations?

R: That's right, yes. So the method may have changed but the recipes are almost the same.

It is through the recipes and methods that a sense of the Sri Lankan past can be recreated in the New Zealand present. This process is quite beneficial to the emerging generation of Sri Lankan New Zealanders. The respondent proceeded to elaborate on

the importance of preparing and sharing festive food with family, as the process was imbued with layers of cultural meaning:

I: When you are cooking these things, do any specific people or memories come to mind?

R: Yes. I always say “your grandma made it like that”. I mean I tell my children that at home we used to make things out of fresh coconut, but here since it is not available, we use the cream... Stuff like that. Sometimes I say one grandmother makes this like this, but the other one who is from another area would make it like this. In Sri Lanka, in the different areas, they have different ways of cooking.

## 2) Adapting the authentic to suit environmental and cultural changes

Cultural identity is formed and reformed over time by blending cultural traditions and remaking new ones through festive foods and family rituals. An authentic festive recipe that is adapted to suit New Zealand palettes, environments and the availability of ingredients is symbolic of the idea of cultural identity being formed and reformed. Therefore, the concept of substitution and adaptation in relation to a festive recipe was quite apparent in the interview summary and was quite important to the research for design:

I: What would you say would be the most substituted ingredient?

R: I think the most common is coconut. We wouldn't buy a fresh coconut here and scrape it.

I: Too much hassle?

R: It is too much hassle. Even for a special occasion I don't cook with fresh coconut. It is not worth the time. Sometimes I just use milk out of a bottle because it is much healthier. It has less fat.

The comment communicates a prime example of the adaptation of something authentic. There was a definite sense of cultural adaptation as she spoke of using bottled milk to stay healthy and to save time and energy. In Sri Lanka such factors would not be

considered an issue. By substituting certain ingredients the respondent is not discarding her cultural traditions. She is however adapting her Sri Lankan traditions in order to make them more practical in this environment. She is also adapting these traditions to make them more appealing to her New Zealand born children.

I: Do you think that for the emerging generation here, for them to learn about the festive culture, would you say that teaching it through food is a good way?

R: It is a good way so long as we practice it at home. I would expect my children to learn. We also have some community functions, and they might learn through them as well. The problem is that they might not bother so much because it takes so much time. They might think it's not worth it.

I: What would be a way to make them want to learn?

R: Just by giving them the taste I think. If you like to eat something then you learn how to do it.

### 3) Cultural identity evoked through food

It is quite important to get a child accustomed to certain tastes from a young age. Consequently, as they enjoy the food, they learn to enjoy and appreciate their cultural heritage as well. The second phase of the interview process was with a 23 year old Sri Lankan female who had visited Sri Lanka a few times. However, she believed that the feeling of connectedness to her cultural background through food traditions gained greater significance to her after she left Sri Lanka to start a new life in New Zealand:

I: Do you have Sri Lankan food quite often?

R: Yes. We have it almost every day. We have at least one Sri Lankan meal a day. It is very common in our home. I've grown up that way, with spices. I need a little zing in my food.

This quote illustrates how eating Sri Lankan food on a daily basis had brought the respondent closer to her culture. Traditional food was in some ways her first introduction to Sri Lankan cultural tradition:

I: I was thinking... sometimes food is more of a first language than a person's native tongue. Especially if we don't practice it or speak it, then food is like this constant connecting thing... more than a language. Would you agree?

R: I would agree. I do think it is a form of language because anyone can relate to food.

#### 4) Food as a universal language

I conducted a third interview with a Sri Lankan female, in her early twenties yet again in order to get her views on food being a vehicle for cultural communication:

I: Do you think food is a language?

R: Yes, I do think food is a language. Because it is universal you don't have to understand every word. It is something that everyone appreciates, and everyone needs. It is like sports and music.

I: Can food transport us to places?

R: Yeah, like in your own home you can feel like you are in Sri Lankan or you can create that atmosphere with food.

She confirmed that she grew up watching her mother effortlessly prepare meals inspired by her grandmother. Her mother had a story to support every traditional dish. Even the non-traditional food had a Sri Lankan flavor to it:

R: When mum makes non Sri Lankan food like pasta or pizza or something, it has a Sri Lankan flavor! I don't know how homemade pizza can have spices in it!

As she continued to talk about the significance of Sri Lankan food in her home, the deeper significance of traditional food emerged. Using an age-old recipe or a clay cooking pot brought over to New Zealand from Sri Lanka, or setting an oil lamp on the table on a festive occasion serves to keep memories of people and places alive. Therefore, in the generations that followed, the family recipes and heirlooms used in cooking and serving festive food will remain as symbolic reminders of family members

and family traditions (Wright-St Clair et al., 2005, p. 342). Although considerable research in the past conducted on similar topics has emphasized the need to keep one's native culture and tradition vividly alive through food, memory, and language, these conversations took that theme a step further by evoking home and cultural tradition through generational memory, recipes, ingredients, and methods of preparation. Festive food and the ritual of its preparation and consumption is a celebration in itself, moments to be savored. It is how memories truly come alive in the kitchens of many Sri Lankans living in New Zealand.

## **SECTION 5: CONCLUSION**

## 5:1 CONCLUSION

Interest in studies related to the significance of food has grown considerably over the past few years. The literature review identified that the study of food and food related memory becomes instrumental in understanding sociological notions such as cultural identity in a diasporic culture. This research investigated how food was prepared, eaten and adapted based on generational and cultural traditions within a festive setting. Gathering and interpretation of information in this research process focused on generational memory evoked by food or the knowledge passed down from mother to child. A review of relevant literature showed some concrete similarities with other research as well as presenting new findings. The research proposed that food served as a medium or link between two cultures. It is a field of study that traverses domains of intergenerational knowledge, cultural values, ritual, appreciation and adaptation in new cultural environments. The literature review also identified the importance of the relationship between the verbal and the visual in relation to this research project. Typographic design became visual representation of the verbal word. Therefore, the verbal and the visual components complemented each other, thereby adding a multi sensory dimension to this project.

The research through design phase was the primary mode of research. It drew from the analysis of the information gathered from the research for design phase and produced a typographic banner, a conceptual recipe book and a conceptual DVD in which visual and verbal relationships in food rituals were explained. The semi-structured conversations conducted spanned generations of Sri Lankan New Zealanders and resulted in information that supported both the research for design as well as the research through design process. The research for design process reflected that there were changes that occurred with food traditions brought about by generational memory. Such generational changes should not be considered as discarding one's cultural tradition. Instead, they should be considered as the acceptance of tradition, adapted to suit the time and the environment. The conversations revealed that the older generation of Sri Lankans envisaged ideas related to their cultural identity from watching their mothers and grandmothers conjure up mouth-watering feasts in the kitchen. Reliving and retelling the stories brought about by food gave them a sense of satisfaction,

as it was a way of infusing cultural tradition to the emerging generation of Sri Lankan New Zealanders.

We live in a culturally and spatially transitional stage. For the older generation of Sri Lankans living in New Zealand, the immigration process constantly presented them with possibilities of change and resistance to new habits. Celebrating cultural festivals in New Zealand always proved to be a nostalgic time for them. The preparation of festive food on such occasions was infused with layers of meaning and knowledge to be passed onto future generations. The research revealed that cultural identity was formed and reformed over time by merging cultural and family traditions and remaking new ones through festive food and rituals. The people, clothing, ways of eating and preparing food, festive activities, hospitality and gift giving are all ingredients that make up a whole cultural experience. This experience evoked generational memory and reflected the things that were personally, socially and culturally important. Adapting old recipes and traditions, making and enacting new ones, and cleverly mixing the old and the new, primarily did this (Wright-St Clair et al., 2005, p. 340). While food traditions mostly underpinned how things were done in the past, over time, the older Sri Lankan generation intuitively fused a unique cultural identity for the younger generation. The gathering and interpretation of research in this study revealed how generations made a connection through food related memories. Attias-Donfut and Wolff refer to a gateway between generations:

*For each generation, the historical inheritance from the previous generation is added to the objective current conditions. Within the family, the lifetimes of the generations are not watertight. On the contrary, there are many gateways between them. Each generation has one foot in the history, which formed its predecessor and one in its own history and time. (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2003, p. 13)*

Through the iterative design process both sensory information and content was minimized in order to capture a sense of time and space. Consistent with the research findings, this research argues that food is the gateway between the Sri Lankan past and the New Zealand present as it reveals layers of meaning that symbolize and embody the adaptation of social, cultural and individual identities.

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**DESIGN WORK IN DEVELOPMENT**

## DESIGN WORK IN DEVELOPMENT

**Figure 12:** An experimental typographic exercise that employed both water colour and charcoal. The purpose of the exercise was to get a feel for Sri Lankan festivity and movement through word concepts.

**Figure 13:** Developmental work that considered word concepts as a powerful tool for conveying ideas of adaptation and fusion through expressive typography.

**Figure 14:** More developmental work that considered word concepts as a powerful tool for conveying ideas of cultural adaptation and fusion through expressive typography and vibrant colours.

**Figure 15:** These 2 posters were exhibited at the Crossover exhibition organised by the Wellington City Council in March 2005. They were experimental typographic pieces that looked at the power of word concepts, and their ability to communicate the ideas of generational memory, adaptation and cultural change.

**Figure 16:** This typographic exploration took the power of words one step further by breaking it up into individual letterforms. This was symbolic of individual ingredients working separately and as a whole when combined together.

**Figure 17:** This piece of work considers the same ideas as figure 16 in colour.

**Figure 18:** An experimental design that used a traditional festive Sri Lankan recipe in a contemporary design format. The merging of both traditional and contemporary conveys the idea of cultural fusion.

**Figure 19:** The conversations that I had with the respondents produced some valuable information, vital to both the written and design components of this research. Therefore, this particular typographic piece of design work was the portrayal of the verbal to the visual. The letterforms captured the musicality of the voices of the older generation of Sri Lankans living in New Zealand. The colours captured the festive nature of the project.

**Figure 20:** The second typographic piece in this series of work that portrayed the verbal to the visual. This design considered the concept of cultural and typographic fusion through a recipe, colour and the bringing together of Sinhala and English typography.

**Figure 21:** This piece of work belonged to the verbal to visual series. However, it took on a more formal and structured format. The recipe was changed to suit new environments and taste buds, similar to the adaptation of cultural traditions.

**Figure 22:** The Sinhala word for food (aa-haa-ra) has been used to act as a metaphor for ingredients, generational memories, mixed cultural experiences, cultural adaptation as well as cultural change. The letterforms start out in their original form, unchanged. Yet as the banners merge the letterforms and colours merge. New shapes are formed and colours change. This is symbolic of food habits changing as well as the adaptation of cultural traditions.

**Figure 23:** This typographic piece considers the same ideas as that of figure 22, the only difference being the white letterforms. White seems to be a more appropriate colour as it works as a symbolic representation of rice. Rice is one of the most common meals in Sri Lankan food culture that is passed down from one generation to the next. Its method of preparation may have changed yet its essence stays the same. This is what the merging of typography and colour sets out to do. It represents the merging of cultures, generations and environments.

**Figure 24:** The Sinhala word for food was changed to the Sinhala words for mother (am-maa) and child (la-ma-yaa), as they seemed to convey the ideas of generational change, memories, fusion and adaptation better.

**Figure 25:** The final typographic freeze that consists of 16 squares that portray the ideas mentioned in figures 22 through to 24.



Fig.12. Light, 2004, watercolour and charcoal on paper

Fig.13, Cultural expression through typography, 2005, freehand image

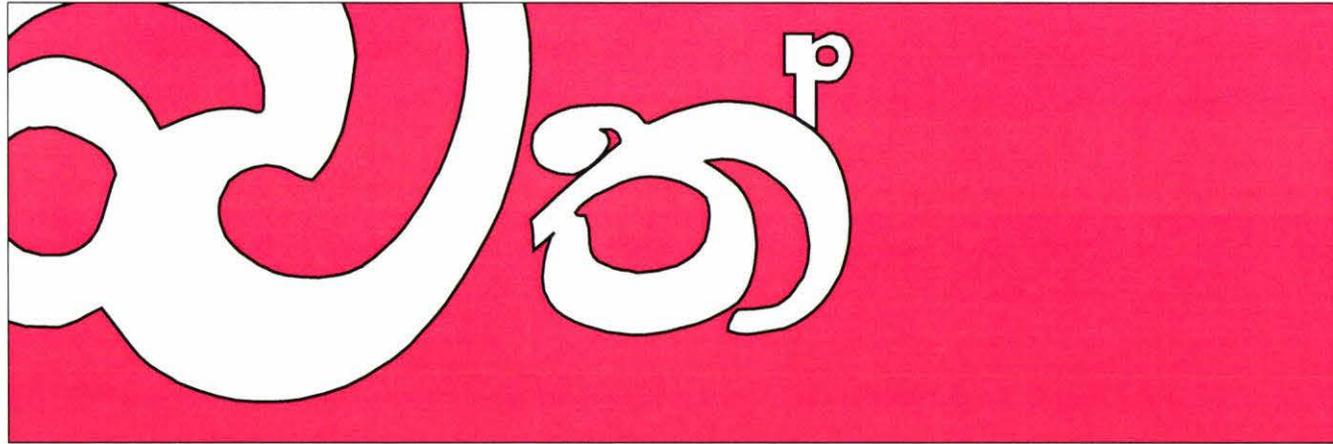
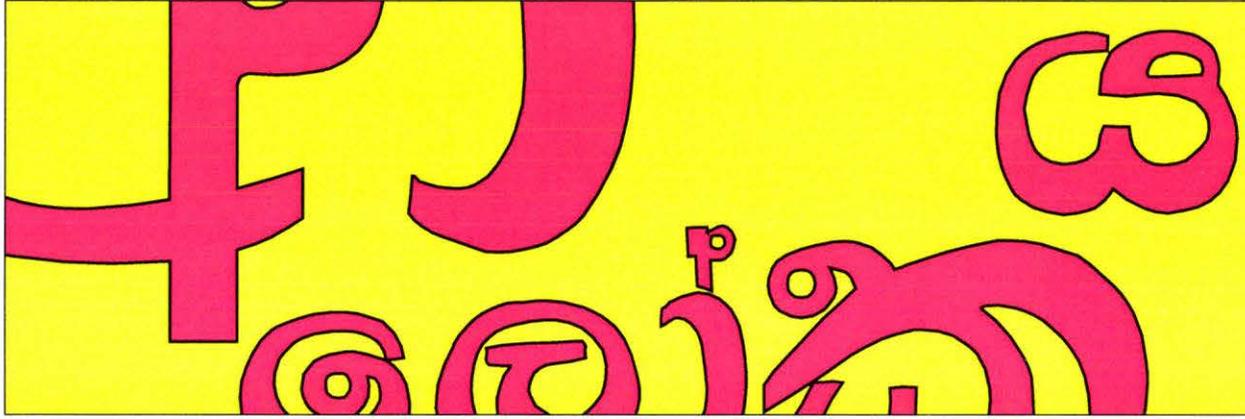


Fig.14, Typography as image, 2005, freehand image

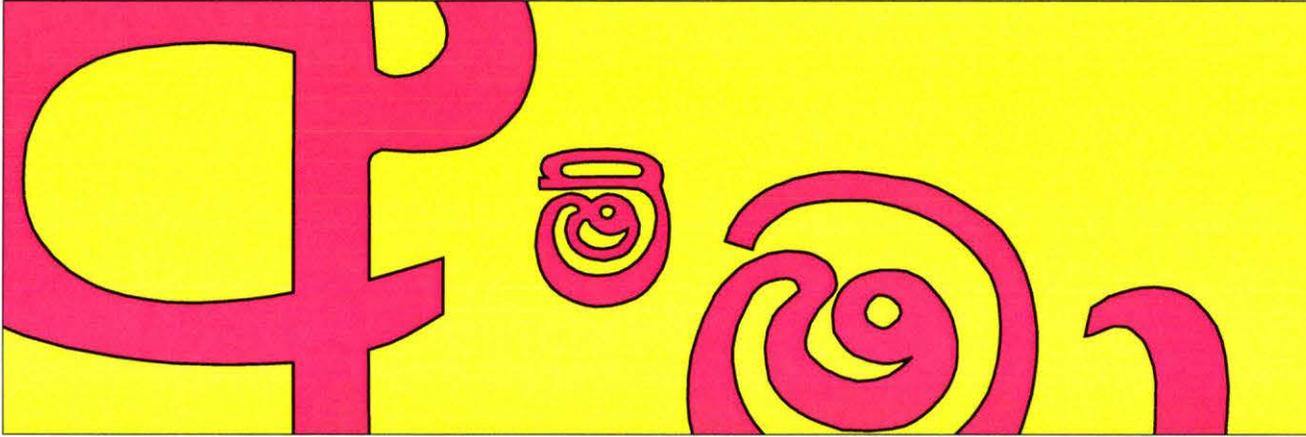


Fig.15, Crossover exhibition, 2005, digital prints on canvas



Fig.16, Wordplay in black and white, 2005, freehand image

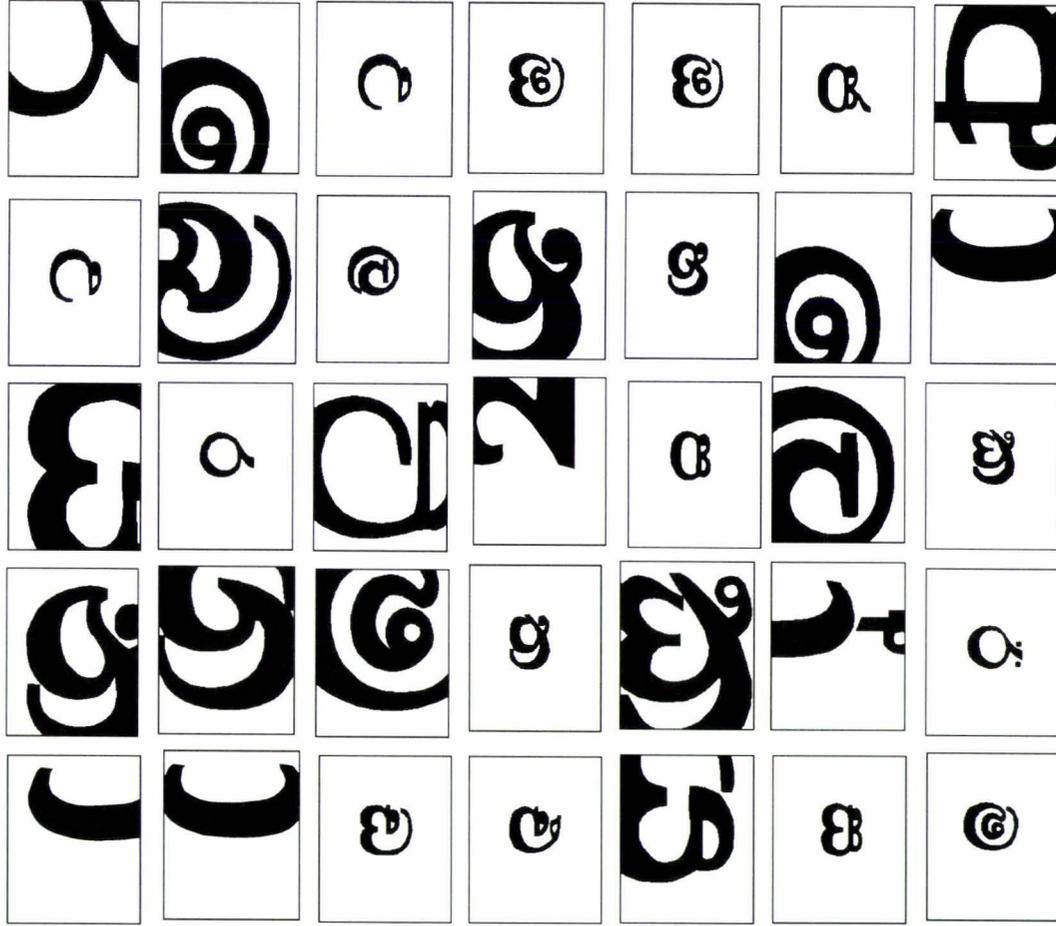


Fig.17, Wordplay in colour, 2005, freehand image

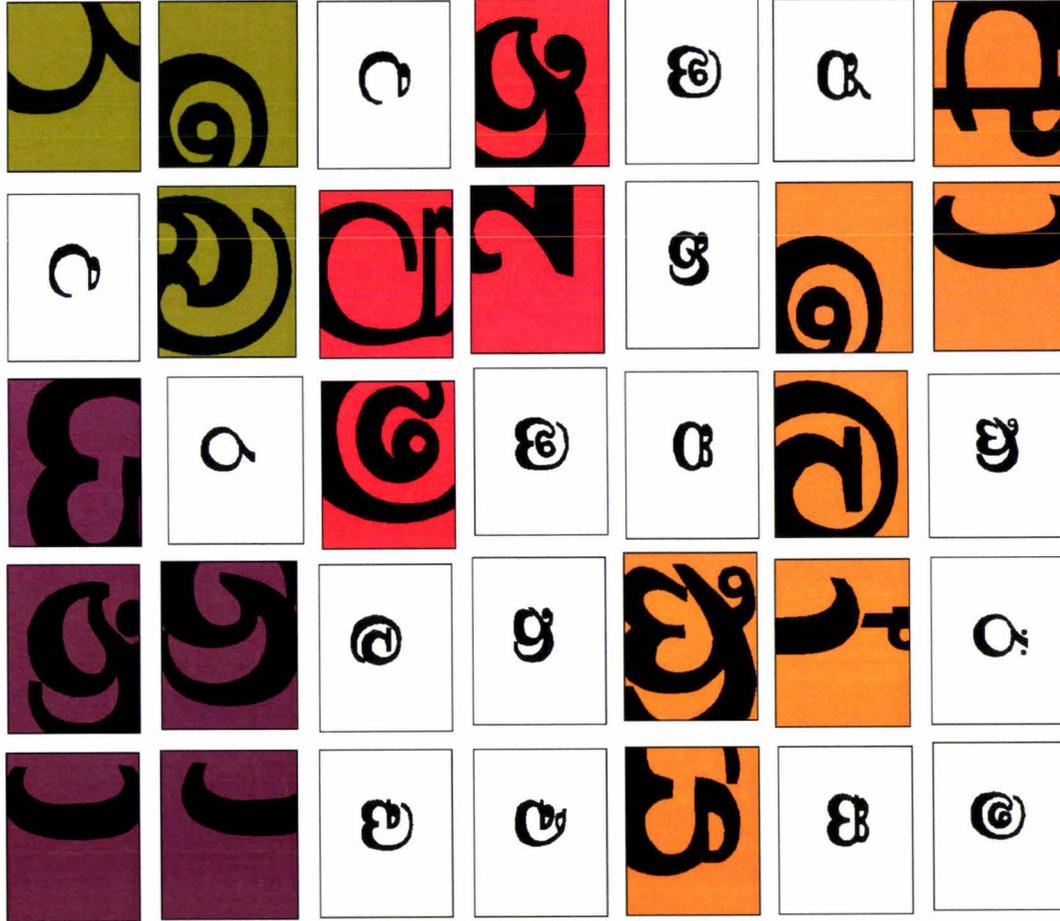


Fig.18, A recipe in New Zealand, 2005, freehand image

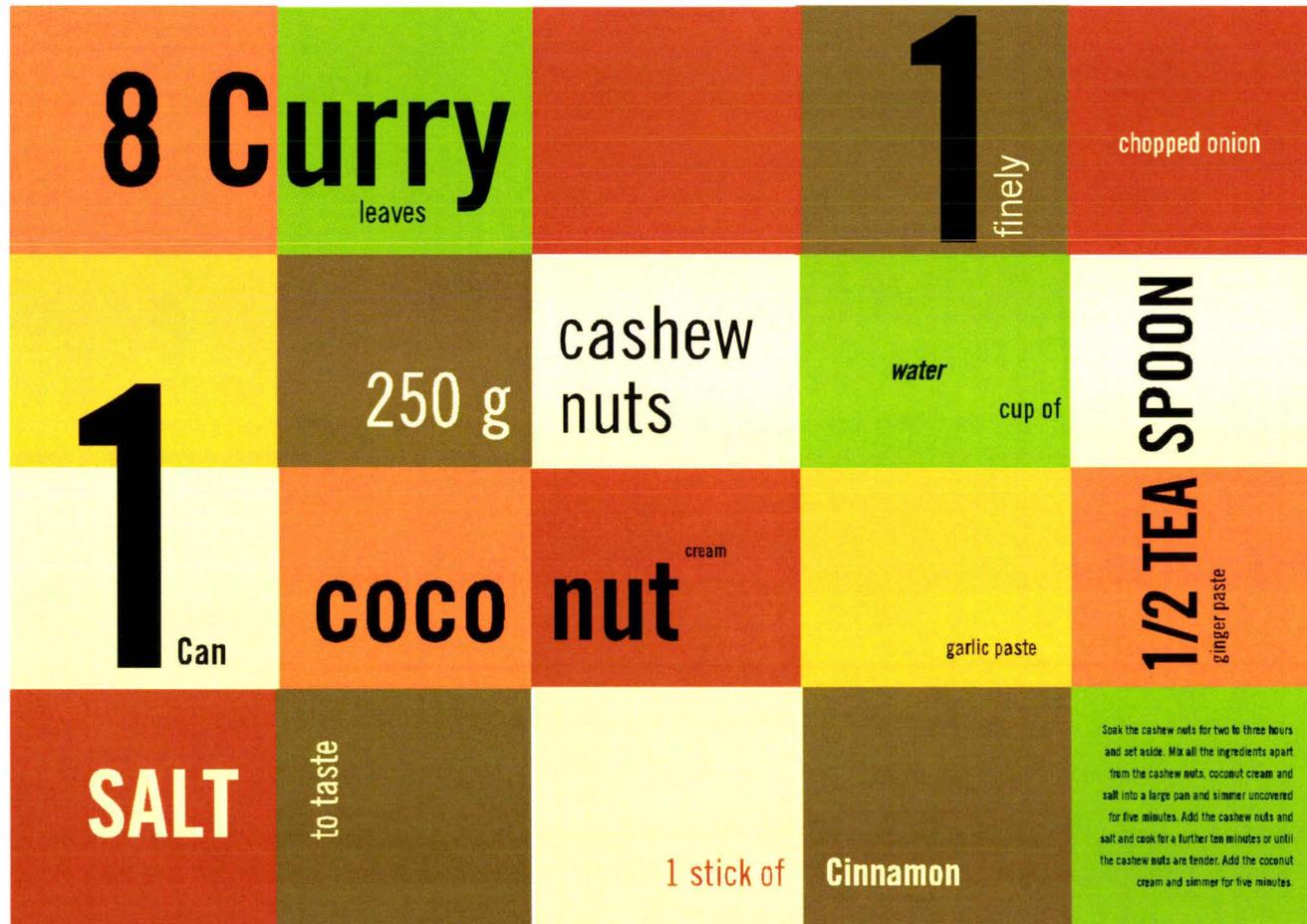


Fig.19, A festive recipe, 2005, freehand image

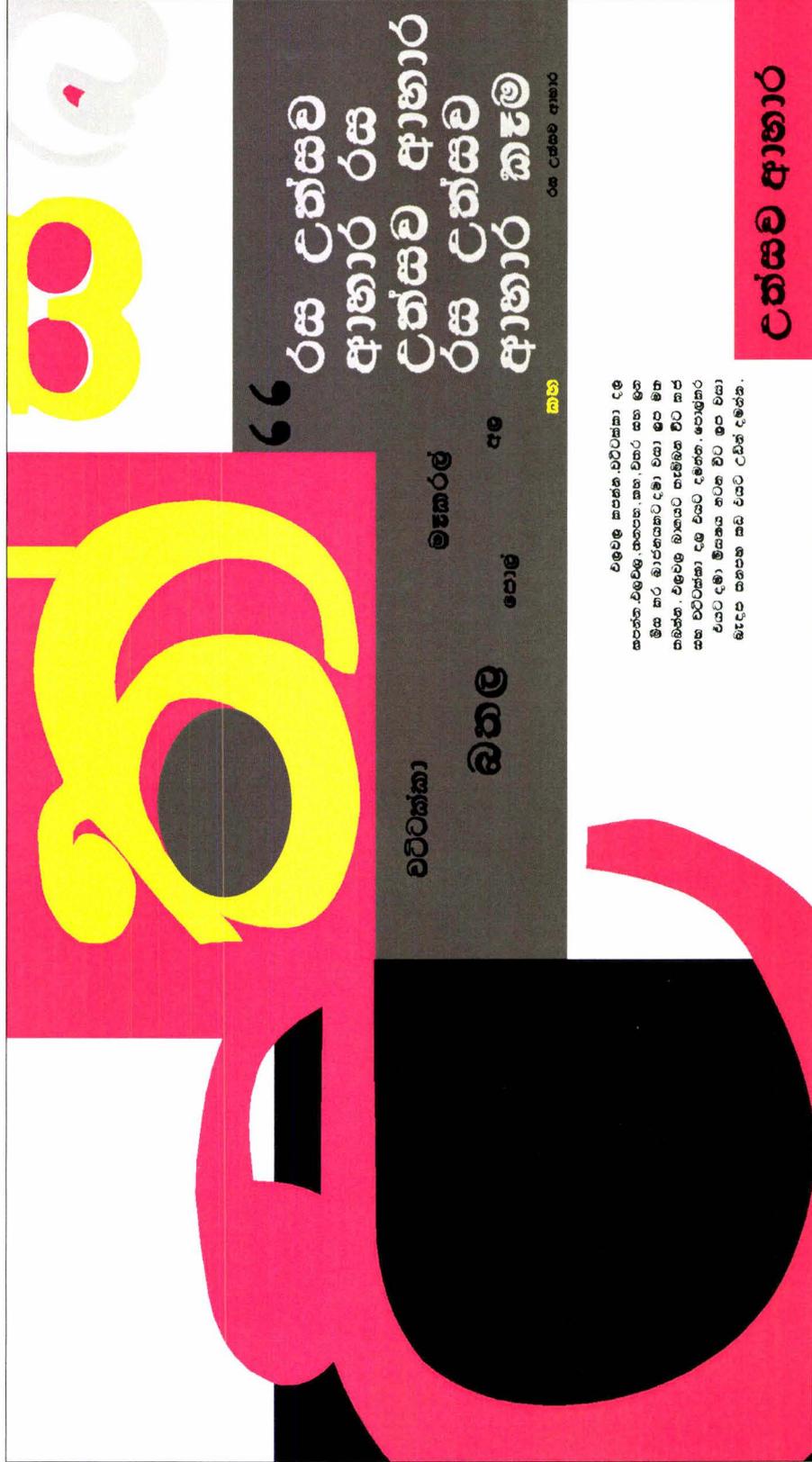


Fig.20, Verbal to visual, 2005, freehand image

**ආ**

**ආ**

*Its still the same but in a different context*

**1. මතල**  
**2. වට්ටක්කා**  
**3. පොල්**  
**4. කහ**

**රස උත්සව ආහාර**

Cut all the vegetables into cubes. Chop the මොංගා leaves into little pieces. Mix the vegetables, curry powder, මා, salt, onion and water and keep on fire. Close with a lid and set aside for a few minutes. Add the almonds and මොංගා leaves. Then pour the milk into the curry and bring to boil. Sprinkle with roasted curry powder.

**5. 50g almonds**  
**6. 50g green beans**  
**7. 50g potatoes**  
**8. 1 cup trim milk**

**a dapt**

Fig.21, A festive recipe, 2005, freehand image

*Its tasty but too time consuming to make here.*

*Almonds, Trim Milk, Potatoes and Green Beans give it a Kiwi flavour*

**Ingredients**

50g Pumpkin  
50g Almonds  
50g Eggplant  
50g Green Beans  
50g Potatoes

50g Kumara  
50g Pumpkin Leaves  
1 Cup Trim Milk

**Festive**

**Food**

1 Tsp Saffron  
1 Tsp Roasted Curry Powder  
Salt to Taste  
1 Small Onion

Cut all the vegetables into cubes. Chop the pumpkin leaves into little pieces. Mix the vegetables, curry powder, saffron, salt, onion and water and keep on fire. Close with a lid and set aside for a few minutes. Add the almonds and pumpkin leaves. Then pour the milk into the curry and bring to boil. Sprinkle with roasted curry powder.

Fig.22, Food and adaptation, 2005, freehand image



Fig.23, Food and adaptation in white, 2005, freehand image



Fig.24, Mother and child, 2005, freehand image

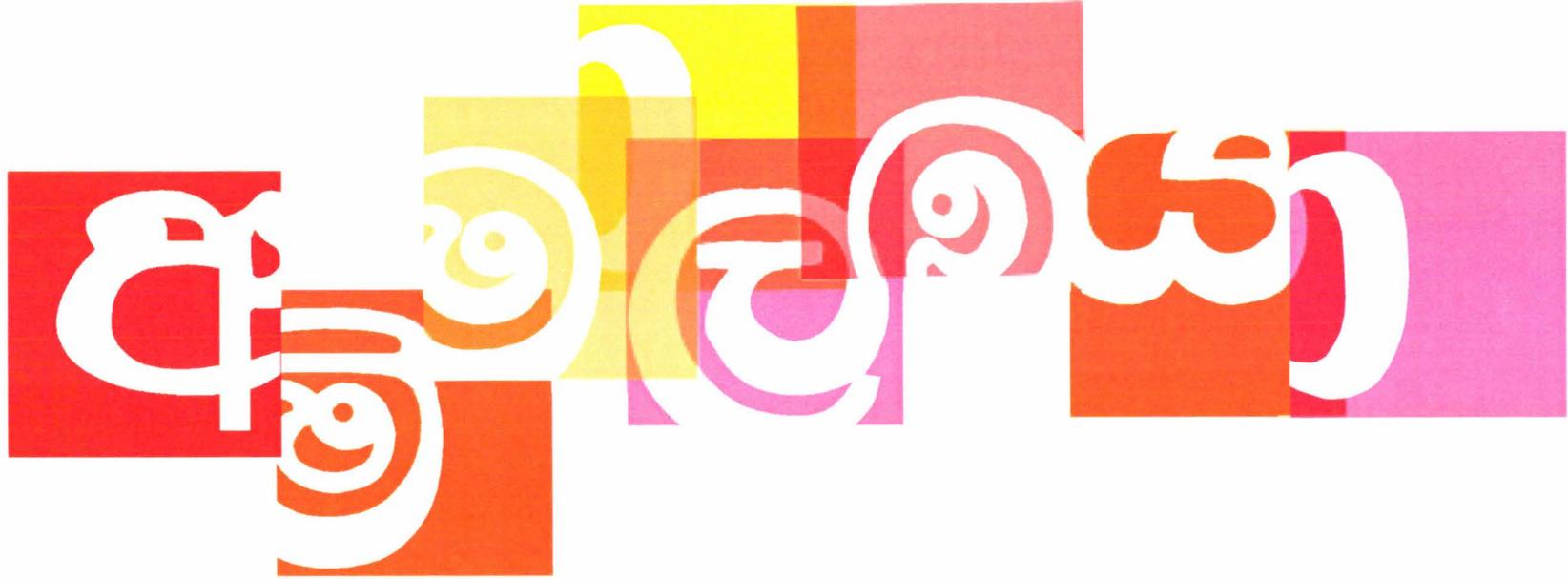


Fig.25, Cultural threads, 2005, freehand image



**APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX

### Interview Transcripts

Interview 1 (23 year old female): 10<sup>th</sup> April 2005

I: Do you think... umm... like you were talking about spicing up this egg and stuff, do you think that sort of thing kind of reminds you of Sri Lanka culture?

R: Yes. I think a lot of Sri Lankans can't eat a lot of bland food just because they need their spices in it. And I think I'm one of those girls who definitely need her spices in it.

I: I remember the last time we made eggs, you put pepper and salt and...

R: Yeah, I need a little zing in my food.

I: Is that something you've been used to?

R: Yeah, because I've grown up that way with spices, they've been part of my...you know. I go to a curry place and some of the food... well they have the spices that make it colourful, but it doesn't have the spices to give it the taste.

I: Do you watch your mum cook?

R: Sometimes... yeah.

I: Does she tell you stories of, like, so and so used to make it like this or this is how we used to eat this when we were kids or stuff like that? Do you find that food makes you think about people and places?

R: Yes. It definitely makes me think about Sri Lanka and I also wonder how my mum... like my mum would say you know "when I was young I would stand by my mother and you know she would show me how to do it and I knew how to cook from a young age", and it would remind me of Sri Lanka. And like when she makes things like pasta or pizza or something...

I: Do you find that it has got a Sri Lankan flavour to it?

R: It does have a Sri Lankan flavour! I don't know how homemade pizza has spices in it!

I: I have a friend who once said that even homemade spaghetti sauce tasted spicy!

R: Yeah...when they make those sorts of food you don't think of anywhere, but when she makes Sri Lankan food it reminds me of Sri Lanka.

I: Do you guys have Sri Lankan food quite often?

R: Yes. We have it almost every day. We have at least one Sri Lankan meal every day. It is very common in our house.

I: Coz I was thinking and came across this thing that said that sometimes food is more of a first language than a person's native tongue. Like especially if we don't practice it or speak it then food is like this constant connecting thing. More than a language. Would you agree?

R: I would agree... because looking at Indian restaurants now, I mean a lot of other people (non-Indian people), like that's the way to communicate. They want to know more about the food, more about the culture, more about the tradition, and what spices you put and how you put it and what do you use and life style and how they live... it kind of gets you know... so like they start realizing. So yeah, it is a language because anyone can relate to food. It is more common than a language. More common than English.

I: Sort of like a universal thing?

R: Yeah it is. Everyone has to have nutrients. You can go without verbally communicating, but things like food everyone needs.

**Interview 2 (24 year old female): 10<sup>th</sup> April 2005**

I: So do you think food is a language?

R: Yes, I do think food is a language, because it is universal. You don't have to understand every word. But it is something everyone appreciates, and everyone needs. And its like sports and music. In a sense they transcend political boundaries.

I: And they can transport us to places?

R: Yeah, like in your own home you can feel like you are in India or you can create that atmosphere with food.

I: When you eat food do you think of people? Like when you made that egg thing this morning you'd definitely think of your mum right?

R: Yes I would. I mean certain tastes you associate with certain people. Like smells or even like my mum is more of a savoury person and my dad is more a sweet person even though he doesn't cook.

I: And now that your are cooking and stuff, you know how your mum gave you lessons

on how to make curry and that sort of thing... Did she tell you stories, like "when I was here I used to make it like this" or "your grandma used to cook like this?"

R: Definitely. Coz when she got married she didn't know how to cook anything. But I could pick up coz I remember when I was at home my mum would do this, like she'd cut it this way. Or she'd remember smells that's the thing.

So she knew what it was meant to smell like and obviously what it was meant to taste like. And I think that's the key.

I mean when you are cooking that's always the hint. Mum was like "if this smells like my curry you know you are doing it right!"

I: Would you agree that food is this linking thing between say in my case the Sri Lankan past and the New Zealand present?

R: Definitely. Because I think these are the recipes my mum brought back. You know they couldn't have been written here. So like yeah, this is what my ancestors did.

I: And even if some ingredients in New Zealand would be substituted, just because of the lack of ingredients or whatever, it would still be that dish wouldn't it?

R: It is still the same. Just in a different context.

Interview 3 (40-45 year old female) 25<sup>th</sup> April 2005

I: What kind of festive food?

R: Like now you would make milk rice for auspicious festivals like little things like the birth of a baby, birthdays, cutting hair and cultural things like the New Year. We have lots of cultural things, even cutting hair, writing the first word, reading the first word are all ceremonies. In a sense it is a ceremony but it is a festive occasion.

I: I wrote down milk rice as well, just to get the colour of the whole meal I put down the accompaniments, because most of the time it is milk rice with coconut or seeni sambal.

R: Umm... milk rice and katta sambal and onions. We call it caramelised onions here. Then people understand it a bit better. Milk rice also has coconut in it, at least the coconut cream in it. So you would have it with that. You would have bananas and you would have something made in oil, like kavum because that's tradition. When there is a festival you will have some kind of kavum.

I: Would you have a curry as well?

R: There is a thing called a hathmaluwa that people in some areas make.

I: Is it like an ambulthiyal?

R: No, hathmaluwa is seven kinds of vegetables cooked together. Especially for New Year they make hathmaluwa.

I: And what colour does it end up being?

R: It is a mixture of colours. Pumpkin leaves, pumpkin, cashew nuts, puhul and sometimes kumara. That depends on what is available. But generally pumpkin leaves and cashew nuts are put into that. So it is a mixture of colour.

I: And would you have jaggery or hakuru?

R: Yes you would.

I: Just thinking of the meal I had a few questions...When preparing this meal would you follow a recipe or does it come quite naturally?

R: It comes naturally. I think it is from mother to daughter and aunts. I have never used a written recipe for Sri Lankan food.

I: So did you learn from your mum?

R: From my mother or from the servants, or you would learn it by discussing. Now I told you how to make hathmaluwa.

I: So its word of mouth?

R: Yeah that's right.

I: So most of the recipes have been acquired from past generations?

R: That's right, yes. If we were making kadala curry (chickpea) at home they would soak it over night and then boil it over the fire for ages. What we now do is we use the pressure cooker. So the method may have changed, but the recipes are almost the same.

I: When you are cooking these things do any specific people or memories come to mind in relation to a festive meal?

R: Yes. I always say "your grandmother made it like that". I mean I tell my children that at home we used to make this out of coconut milk but here since it is not available we use the cream, stuff like that. Sometimes I say "one grandmother makes this like this,

but the other one who is from another area would make it like this". Because in Sri Lanka in different areas they have different ways of cooking.

I: Even the same curry?

R: Yeah.

I: So you would basically change it here?

R: Depending on what is available and the time constraint. Like stuff like pollos, you would cook it overnight. You would put a log into the fire and let it cook through the night. You don't change anything just let the log be there.

I: I remember my mum would make it on a log fire outside in a clay pot and that used to be the tastiest.

R: That's right. So you just leave it overnight till it cooks. But here it is not practical.

I: I guess the taste changes as well.

R: It changes. Especially in the pots, like if you cook it in an aluminium pot and a clay pot the taste is so different.

I: How do you cook in a clay pot here?

R: Because of the gas burner I can keep the clay pot.

I: It has got that distinctive...

R: Unusual, very difficult to explain the taste, but it does have a different taste.

I: With ingredients what would you say would be the most substituted?

R: I think the most common is coconut milk. At home we would scrape the coconut and squeeze it and get the coconut milk. Whereas here, we either use the powder or the coconut cream which is not the same taste. We wouldn't buy a fresh coconut and scrape it here.

I: Too much hassle?

R: It is too much hassle. Even for a special occasion I don't cook with fresh coconut, because it is not worth it. Sometimes I just use milk out of a bottle, because it is much healthier. It has less fat.

I: Yeah, that's what we do as well, because the coconut cream can be quite fatty.

R: Very fatty, yeah.

I: So do you think for the emerging generation here... for them to learn about the festive culture, do you think teaching it through food is a good way?

R: It is a good way. If we practice it at home.

I: You learned from your mum...

R: Yeah, I would expect the children to learn it. And also we have community functions, so they might learn through them also. When they have a speech they will say that this is what we would do at home and this is what we are doing now. We try to make lots of sweet meats and kiribath and stuff for the community meal. I think the children will learn it, but the thing is they might not bother so much because it takes so much time. They might not think it is worth it.

I: What would be a way to make them want to learn?

R: Just giving them the taste I think. If you like to eat something, then you learn how to do it. But it's a hard process I would say because of the time constraint.

I: What would be some other types of festive food?

R: With kiribath you would have katta sambal, seeni sambal, ambul thiyal and you would have kokis, kavum, athirasa...

I: What is athirasa?

R: Athirasa is diagonally shaped. It is a sweet, and there is another sweet called aluwa and mung gedi. You would eat bananas. I can't think of any other fruit that we would have. And because it is a festival you would light a lamp and that would give it some colour. If it were the Sinhala New year you would have bulath leaves on the table.

I: To be eaten?

R: Sometimes the older people do it. It is used for worshipping. It is sort of symbolic to have bulath on the table so that gives the green. Lots of variety.

I: I think Sri Lankan food on the whole is reasonably colourful.

R: Yeah, things like beetroot and carrot and stuff like that, different colours.

I: With the festive food we talked about there is a reasonable range of colour.

R: White, brown and even the rice we would make it out of a grain called kakulu haal. It is a reddish, pinkie shade. Almost all the sweets are shades of brown.

I: Golden brown.

I: that's right.

R: Bananas are yellow, bulath is green.

I: Would you have kiri hodi with it?

R: No, not with kiribath. But if it were lunchtime some areas would make kiribath, but if it were lunchtime you would have yellow rice, maybe some kind of meat, potato curry and pappadams.

I: Do the accompaniments vary depending on the time?

R: Yes, especially if it is lunchtime. You would tend to have those things because people visit you, and you would invite them in for lunch. I mean you don't invite them before hand, but it is spur of the moment, so you would have everything ready. The lunch meal would be colourful.

I: So what would the typical curries be?

R: Usually for Sinhala New Year we would make yellow rice, deep fried vegetables cooked with onions and tomatoes, potato curry, you would have fish or meat curry and pappadam, which is a festive thing.

I: This is all quite colourful in comparison to the breakfast meal?

R: That's right. You would have kiribath because it is a symbolically auspicious thing.

I: Would dinner be similar?

R: One might not cook rice, its not that common. People don't eat a lot of dinner, because not many people come visiting at night.

3  
2  
1

**Cultural Threads**

9 am

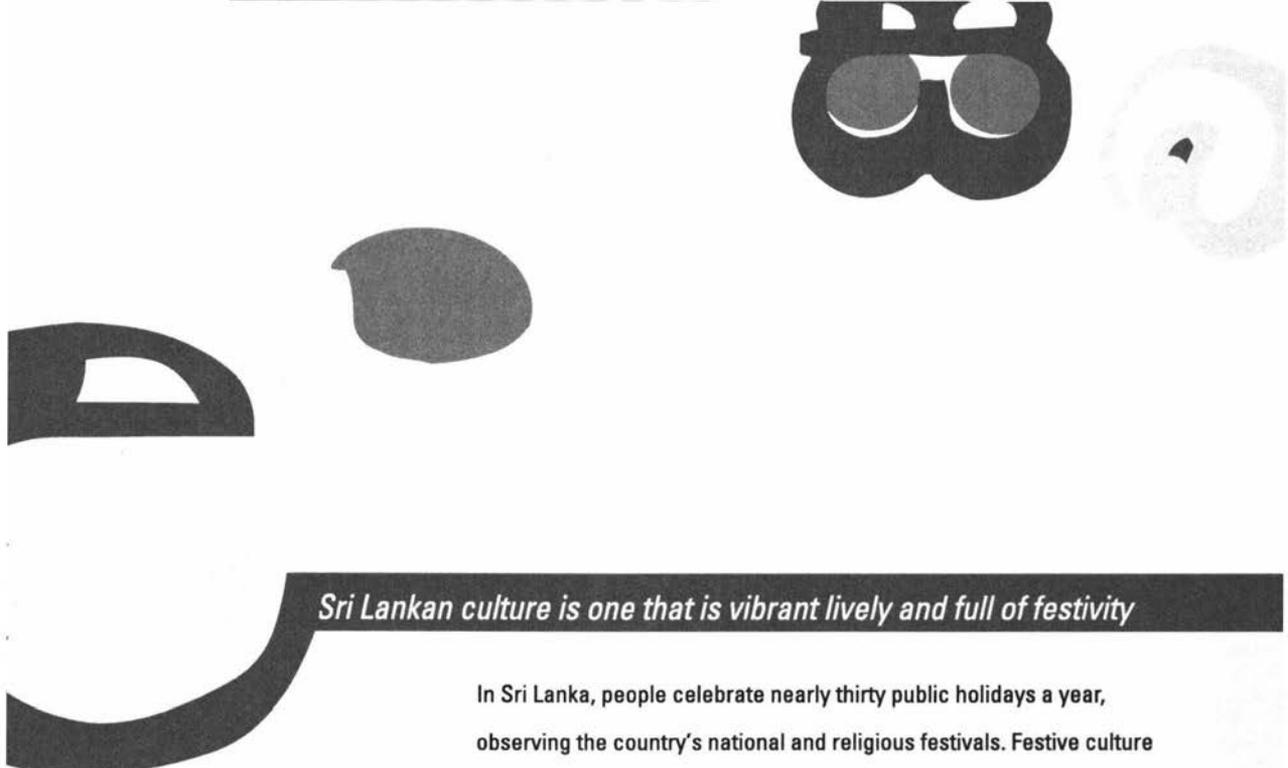
12 noon

3 pm

9 pm

12 midnight

*Everything is done to a specific time in Sri Lankan festive tradition*



*Sri Lankan culture is one that is vibrant lively and full of festivity*

In Sri Lanka, people celebrate nearly thirty public holidays a year, observing the country's national and religious festivals. Festive culture is an important way in which cultural values are kept alive and passed onto the emerging generation of New Zealand born Sri Lankans. If one learns to appreciate the ingredients that make up a festive day in Sri Lanka, then they learn about the culture as well.



There are ceremonies and rituals associated with every part of a Sri Lankan's life. From birth, first solid meal, first lesson, first job, and 'first' anything must be done at the right, and auspicious time known as the *nakath* time. Some of these rituals may only involve a visit to the temple, or a small offering to the Gods, but the major ceremonies, and national festivals are celebrated to the fullest.

### **Milk Rice (Kiribath)**

2 cups short grain white rice

3 cups water

2 cups thick ~~coconut milk~~ *coconut cream*

2 tsp salt

1 stick cinnamon

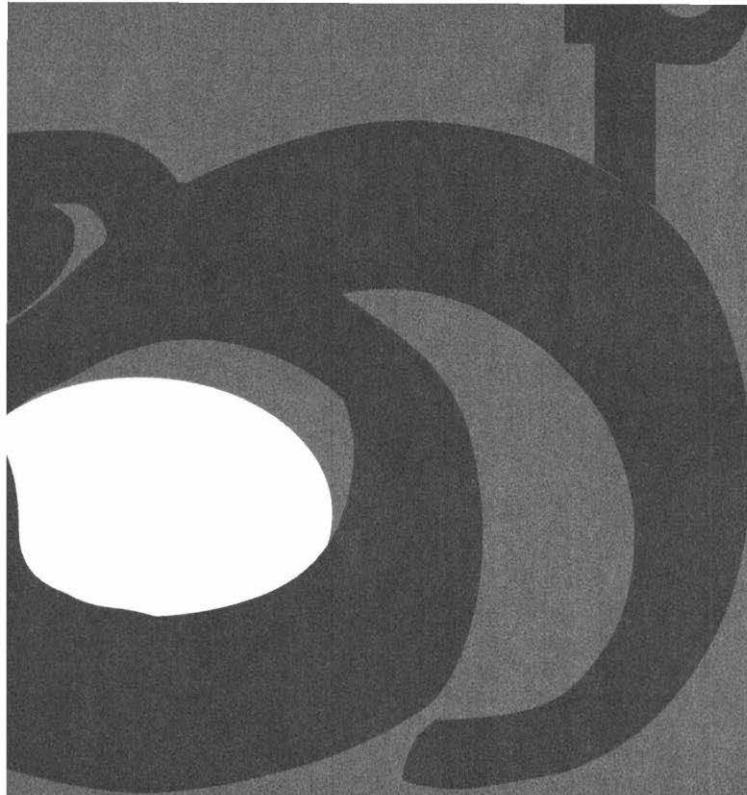
*2 kiwi fruits*

*2 bananas*

Put rice and water into a pan and bring to the boil. Cover and cook for 15 minutes.

Add coconut milk, salt and cinnamon. Stir well with a wooden spoon. Cover pan and cook on low heat for another 10 to 15 minutes. The milk should be absorbed by then. Cool slightly, then turn out on to a flat plate. Mark off in diamond shapes and serve with sliced kiwi fruit and bananas.

Family, relatives and friends play a big role in the festive day. This is a time for the women folk to commence work at their respective homes. For those that follow religious traditions they face the specified direction and light the fires to prepare the traditional *kiribath* also known as milk rice. Prior to this, milk is boiled in a clay pot and allowed to boil over, symbolising prosperity. Afterwards, the women generally gather around in the kitchen to cook up a grand festive meal. The kitchen oozes with heavenly aromas and nostalgia as the women talk about their ancestors and how they came about the recipes. There may not be as many women who gather in the New Zealand kitchens, but this tradition is observed even if it is just mothers and daughters. In between these meals and entertaining guests the rest of the day is spent visiting relatives and friends, enjoying more food and generally having a good time.



Clothes play an important role in Sri lankan festive tradition. In the past, it was after the harvest that a family received new clothes. However, it is still customary for each member of the family to receive at least one set of new clothes to mark the occasion. In Sri Lanka the shops and sidewalks are densely packed with every imaginable item deemed necessary for having a wonderful time during any festive occasion. Most families living in New Zealand stick to tradition by either buying themselves new clothes here, or by having relatives or friends still living in Sri Lanka send over some traditional attire.

New clothes symbolise a new day, new beginnings, prosperity and cleanliness. Sri Lankan fabric and textiles are very vibrant and bold. Traditionally, the women adorn themselves in brightly printed saris or an outfit known as *redda hatte* which consists of a skirt and a top. The men wear a sarong or pants along with a cotton shirt. However, in New Zealand as times have changed fashion changes too. While most of the older generation like sticking to the traditional forms of dress, the younger generation like to improvise and mix in aspects of both the east and the west.

## Women

*cotton, silk or voils*

**Saris**

*Tops and t-shirts are worn instead*

**Redde**

*girls tend to wear skirts or pants*

**Hatte**

**Shalwar kameez (Tunic and pants)**

**Dresses**

*silver and beaded jewellery*

**Gold Jewellery**

*a flower hair clip*

**Accessorise with fresh flowers**

**Leather sandals or slippers**

*foot wear depends on the weather*

*in New Zealand*

## Men

*not very practical to wear here*

**Sarong**

*pants and jeans are acceptable*

**Pants**

*shirts and jerseys*

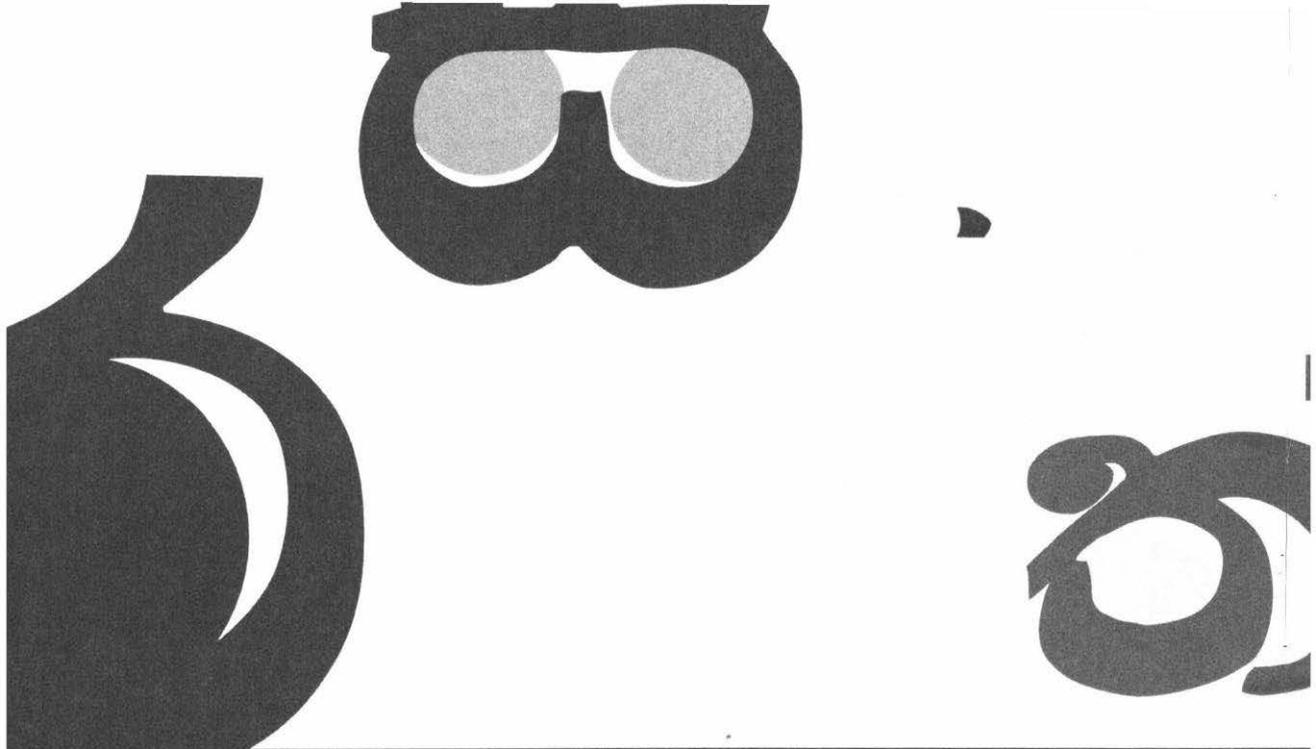
**Cotton shirts**

**Tunics** *a good look with jeans*

**Leather sandals**

*foot wear depends on the weather*

*in New Zealand*



### *How is Sri Lankan food prepared?*

Rice is the most staple dish in Sri Lankan cuisine and can be found at any festive occasion, while spicy curries and accompaniments are served at lunch and dinner time. Traditionally, most curries were cooked on log fires in clay pots. However, most of the Sri Lankan community here have resorted to aluminium and stainless steel pots as they are more practical to use. What sets Sri Lankan food apart from the rest is powerfully tasty food that simply uses the colours and aromas present in the ingredients. Sri Lankan curries are classified by colour. White curries are milder with a more subtle flavour, while black curries are made with spices that have been roasted to create a deep, rich flavour and red curries are made with plenty of chillies. Certain flavours and ingredients are substituted in New Zealand due to the unavailability of ingredients and different taste buds.

## Yellow rice

2 cups rice (basmati)

*boiling water if using the microwave cooker*

3 cups water

1 tsp salt

2 tbs butter or margarine

2 tsp chicken stock *optional*

1 tsp turmeric powder

3 curry leaves *optional*

2 cardamoms

2 cloves

Wash and drain the rice. Add the rice, water and spices into the rice cooker. Put the lid on and cook on high power for 15 minutes. Let it stand for 2 to 3 minutes and stir well.

*salmon or tuna*  
500 g king fish

*coconut cream*  
2 cups coconut milk

3 cups water

1 onion

*mustard paste*  
2 tbsp ~~mustard powder~~

1 tsp turmeric powder

*garlic paste*  
1 tsp ~~crushed garlic~~

*a pinch of cayenne pepper*  
4 ~~tsp red pepper powder~~

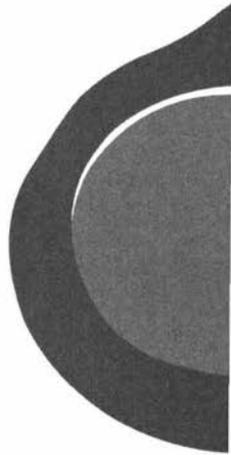
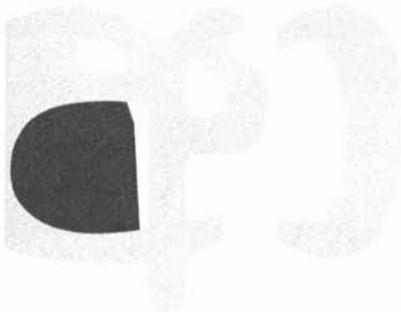
Salt to taste

1 tbsp lime juice

Wash the fish and cut into cubes. Add water, onions, salt, garlic paste, mustard and pepper and cook fish for about 15 minutes. Add the coconut cream and let it stand for a minute. Finally add the lime juice.

## The art of eating Sri Lankan food

Food is served warm (not hot) and is generally placed in the middle of the table with either rice or breads and shared, similar to the social eating patterns of most societies. Traditionally, Sri Lankan food is eaten with the fingers of the right hand as it is considered to be cleaner than the left hand. The hands are normally washed thoroughly before and after any meal. However, in New Zealand as times have changed some seem to have difficulty with mastering the technique of eating with the fingers of the right hand especially when rice is involved and resort to eating with forks and spoons.



### Spicy fried potatoes (Alatheldala)

4 potatoes

1 onion

*cayenne pepper*  
2 tsp hot-pepper-powder

2 tbsp oil

1 clove

*garlic paste*  
1 tsp crushed-garlic

1 tsp salt

1 tsp sugar

*mustard paste*  
1 tsp mustard-powder

2 green-chillies

*2 green peppers*

Boil or bake the potatoes. Peel off skin and cut into cubes. Slice the onions and green peppers. Add oil to a large pan and heat. Then add the onions and fry for a minute. Add the pepper, garlic paste, salt, sugar and mustard and stir in for about 2 minutes. Finally add the potatoes and green peppers into the mixture and cook for 3 minutes.

2 cups grated coconut

1 tsp salt

1 tsp chilli ~~powder~~ *cayenne pepper*

1 medium sized onion (finely chopped)

2 tbsp lime juice

2 tbsp maldive fish  
*if available*

## Coconut Sambal

Combine all the ingredients together in a bowl. For seasoned chilli eaters the amount of chilli powder may be increased. Mix well and serve with rice and curries.

## **Magul Bera**

The blowing of the conch shell is the traditional welcome at the commencement of any function and the drums (bera) are an important part of this ritual dance.

*Traditional music and dance play a big role in Sri Lankan festive culture. The dances of Sri Lanka comprise those that have come down from the very ancient days, to those with the distinct influences of India. In New Zealand, dancing combines western trends with the traditional forms making it more appealing to the younger generation.*

## **Puja Natuma**

This is an opening dance where the dancers offer oil lamps to the guardian deities. It is a form of keeping away all evil.

## **Vannam**

Vannams relate the heroic demeanor of their subjects such as animals and gods. The dancers wear ornate costumes and headgear and engage themselves in a stylized dance. Masks are used in various forms of Sri Lankan dance and theatre.

## Potato Aluwa

1 1/2 cups sugar

1 1/2 cups ~~milk~~ *trim milk*

1/2 cup sweetened condensed milk

125 g butter

1 cup cooked mashed potato

1 cup finely chopped ~~cashew nuts~~ *almonds*

2 tbsp rose water *optional*

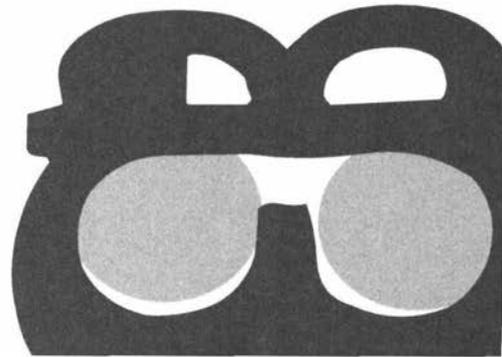
1 tsp ground cardamom *optional*

Put sugar, and milk into a large heated saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture reaches soft ball stage. Remove from heat, add the smoothly mashed potato and beat with a rotary beater until all lumps are gone. Return to heat and cook to soft ball stage once more. Remove from heat, stir in the nuts, rose water and cardamoms and mix well. Pour into a well buttered shallow dish or baking tin. Flatten the surface and set aside to cool. Then cut into diamond shapes.

Music and poetry has always been a part of Sri Lankan festivity. Poetry contests with drummers that accompany the poets are quite common. The drumming is generally done on a *rabana*, a one sided drum, somewhat like an enormous tambourine. There is a wide range of musical tradition in Sri Lanka ranging from folk music to religious chants.

Once the food is prepared, the table is laid with the best china. Vibrant table cloths and table mats adorn the tables. In Sri Lanka, it is customary to have an oil lamp as well as some beetle leaves on the table. That tradition is observed in New Zealand depending on the availability of beetle leaves. The sheeves of beetle are used for traditional offerings and seeking forgiveness from the elders. The oil lamp is lit for prosperity and good luck. Sri Lankan festive culture has been known for its hospitality. Therefore, it is customary to invite all visitors to stay for a meal be it lunch or dinner. Food is generally cooked in large quantities for this reason. There are certain types of festive food that remain on the table at all times such as the milk rice, bananas, and deep fried sweets. Visitors who cannot stay for a meal help themselves to the treats layed out on the table. The main meals are heated up close to meal time and brought to the table together.

*Homes are filled with relatives and friends*



## Devilled Beef

500 gm lean beef diced  
2 tomatoes  
1 large onion  
1 large pepper  
*optional*  
2 to 3 green chillies  
*ginger paste*  
1 tsp crushed-ginger  
*garlic paste*  
1 tsp-garlic-powder  
2 tbsp soy sauce  
3 tbsp sweet chilli sauce  
1 tsp pepper  
2 tbsp vinegar  
*cayenne pepper*  
1 tsp chilli-pieces  
2 tbsp lime juice  
4 tbsp oil for frying  
2 cups water  
Salt

Wash beef well. Add pepper, salt and vinegar and mix well. Add water and boil until cooked. Cube all the vegetables. Chop the green chillies. Heat the oil in a wok or a large fry pan. Add the beef and fry for a few minutes. Add all the vegetables and spices and stir fry for 2 to 3 minutes. Finally, add the tomatoes and take the pan off the stove.

Add salt to taste.

## Vegetable Curry (Hathmaluwa)

50 g pumpkin

50 g potatoes

~~50 g cashew nuts~~ *50 g Almonds*

*50 g spinach*

~~50 g pumpkin leaves~~

~~50 g sweet potato~~ *kumara*

~~50 g snake beans~~ *50 g kidney beans*

1 tsp saffron

2 tsp curry powder

1 tsp roasted curry powder

1/2 cup water

~~1 cup coconut milk~~ *1 cup coconut cream*

Salt to taste

1 small onion

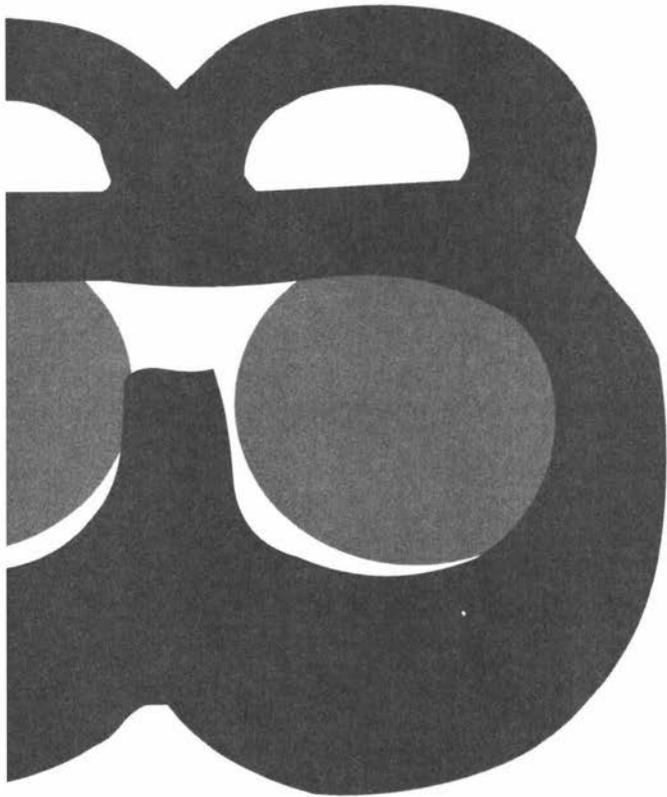
Cut all the vegetables into cubes. Chop the spinach. Mix all the vegetables, curry powder, saffron, salt onion and water and keep on fire. Cover with a lid until the vegetables are almost cooked. Add the almonds and the spinach. Add the coconut cream and bring to the boil.

## *Giving and receiving gifts*

The last few hours of most festive days are spent visiting family and friends. This time is especially exciting for children as they receive gifts from the elders. In Sri Lankan culture it is considered polite to receive gifts and give them with the right hand and when gifts are received it is very impolite to open them at the time. When visiting friends and family one is expected to take a small gift such as a box of chocolates or a cake.

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Cultural traditions are passed on in several ways. These cultural traditions are adapted to suit generational changes as well as environmental changes in New Zealand. Memories evoked by festive rituals, people, clothing, dance, music and most importantly food, have the ability to remind us of the colours, textures, tastes and visual form Sri lankan culture has to offer. Food is a common thread that runs through all the festive ingredients. The recipes have been modified and adapted to suit new environments, the availability of ingredients, generational changes and varying taste buds. Sri Lankan cultural identity continues to live on in New Zealand as food is a key way through which cultural traditions come alive.

## Watalappam (Brown Sugar Pudding)

*coconut cream*  
2 cups thick ~~coconut milk~~  
*brown sugar*  
1/2 lb ~~jaggery~~  
4 eggs  
2 cardamoms  
3 cloves  
A handful of ~~cashew nuts~~ *almonds and raisins*

Beat the eggs in a mixer. Add the coconut cream, brown sugar, cardamoms and cloves to the beaten eggs and mix well. Add the mixture into a pot and steam for 20 minutes. Decorate with almonds and raisins.

*Alternatively the mixture can be added into multiple small aluminium baking foils and then steamed. The time required for steaming is about 5 to 10 minutes.*

A festive Sri Lankan day is generally full of excitement, good food, fun and games and gifts, but is quite tiring at the end of the day as well! Most Sri Lankan families in New Zealand like to sit back with a cup of tea or coffee once they are back home and reflect on the days happenings. There is nothing that compliments a hot drink better than a bowl of rich and creamy watalappam.

Yellow Rice

Fish Curry

Spicy Fried Potatoes

Potato Aluwa

Devilled Beef

Vegetable Curry

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People

Clothes

The Art of Eating

Festive Activities

Hospitality

Recipes are modified slightly to suit those living in New Zealand