

Religion and Immigration

Religion and Immigration: Exploring the role of one religious institution in integrating Kerala
Christian young immigrants in Canada.

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Abstract

The current research investigated religion and immigration by exploring the role of one religious institution in integrating Kerala Christian young immigrants in Canada. This study interviewed three men and three women belonging to six different families who immigrated from Kerala in the last six months to seven years with their families, including young children. They were regular attendees (at least twice a month) of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Two different sampling techniques—purposive sampling and snowball sampling were employed to select the participants who took part in the study. Understanding and interpreting the findings from this study were conducted according to Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model (1977), as well as Bourdieu's notion of Social Capital (1986). For the data collection, content analysis on publicly available resources such as the church website and social media sites were used followed by individual interviews. The framework for coding and examining the findings was thematic analysis. This research made use of In vivo coding without any preconceived themes, thereby ensuring the codes were developed from the words of the participants' rather than previously fixed by the researcher. The results indicated that the religious institution named Holy Family Catholic Church, Halifax with its services and programmes has helped new immigrants and their children from Kerala, India in their integration into the wider Canadian society.

Dedication

I could not have finished this thesis without the valuable support and motivation of many important people. I sincerely appreciate Dr. Fernando Nunes, my supervisor, for the help and advice you provided throughout my research work. Your confidence in my ability to do this assignment has motivated me to work harder and accomplish more than I ever believed possible. Also, I am thankful to my thesis committee member Dr. Shane Theunissen, who provided valuable knowledge and guidance about my study. I extend my sincere gratitude to my better half Mr. Wilston Panjikaran and my beloved children for their patience and understanding throughout my studies. Finally, I am indebted to all my friends for the support and guidance during this journey.

Preamble

Religion has been a significant pillar on which important decisions including emigrating from one country to another are made. Religious institutions also often play a role in the settlement of immigrants in their new lands (Reimer et al., 2016). Due to its significance as a source of identity, support and sharing, religion is important to immigrants, particularly for the Christian population from Kerala, India. Yet, there are few studies which have examined the significance of religious organisation in the settlement of new immigrants and none on the Christian immigrant population from Kerala.

As an international student who immigrated to Canada with a family (including two children, aged eight and six), I have undergone a range of difficulties and troubles while settling into Canadian society. To begin with, a language barrier in communication was one of the first and foremost challenges that I confronted in Canadian society. Though I qualified in an international English language examination before immigrating, I found it hard to comprehend the language because of the difference in accent. Cultural change was another challenge as it was difficult for me to adapt to new customs, social norms, and ways of living. Moreover, high living costs, limited access to credit, and limited employment opportunities posed financial difficulties as well. As an international student from a minority community, I felt socially isolated from the larger Canadian community. Getting familiarised with the health system in Canada was also a challenge for me as a newcomer.

I have also witnessed how participation in religious institutions can influence and support the integration of immigrants in Canada. Even though I have experienced the positive influence of the religious organisation in the integration process of a new immigrant from a minority community, the mechanism of how this occurs is not clearly documented by many researchers. Thus, through this study, I utilized Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

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(Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital to explore the role of one religious' institution in the integration of Keralite Christian families who migrated to Nova Scotia, Canada, along with their young children (aged between 4 years to 12 years). The research examined the distinct contribution of a particular religious organization in helping these immigrants integrate into Canadian society. I aimed to answer two questions: Firstly, how does the Kerala Catholic Church in Halifax, Nova Scotia support and facilitate the integration of young Christian immigrants from Kerala into Canadian society? Secondly, what role do religious rituals and practices play in the integration of Keralite Christian families and their young children into Canadian society.

Introduction

Religion is crucial for immigrants, as it offers a platform for identity, support, and sharing (Otiso, 2020). Finding a venue that brings worshippers together provides comfort, contentment, and a sense of belonging for most people, including Christian immigrants (Otiso, 2020). This is vital for immigrants who want to establish and maintain a connection to their sense of self, spirituality, and beliefs. According to Otiso (2020) many immigrants frequently turn to spiritual groups for support and assistance, whether arriving as students, refugees, asylum seekers, or skilled professionals. Also, religious institutions provide assistance in the form of advice on how to find a job, housing, settlement, language instruction, and social integration, as immigrants adjust to life in a new nation. Lecompte et al., (2017) defines integration as the extent to which an individual maintains their cultural identity while also making efforts to fully engage and become a part of the society in which they reside. However, finding a religious organization into which one can finally fit can be difficult and time-consuming, and the anticipated comfort is not always guaranteed (Woodgate et al., 2017). According to Connor (2014), some immigrants struggle to adhere to cultural reminders like honouring religious festivals and visiting places of worship, while others find it challenging to fit in with religious minority groups as they traverse international borders.

Religion involves more than just holding beliefs; it also entails rituals that give those beliefs a unified meaning. In addition, religion might influence migrants' decisions, particularly regarding the beginning and end of their migration procedure, and their integration into the host community; it all relies on how involved the migrants are in their respective religious institutions. Although there is very little literature on this subject, available studies indicate that religious institutions provide much-needed support for the new immigrants during their time of integration (Otiso, 2020; Simmons & Bourne, 2013). Despite their cultural

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differences, some immigrants often turn to their religious activities as some of their first attempts to connect with the already established immigrants and in order to better integrate into Canadian society (Otiso, 2020). Religion creates a sense of identity and helps immigrants settle more quickly by giving them a sense of belonging and guiding them about residential areas and job prospects (Otiso, 2020). Since religion has an impact on how immigrants integrate into Canada, the above two factors are significant contributors.

This study focused on Keralite Christian families who migrated to Canada, including their young children (aged between 4 to 12 years), and the unique role played by their religious organization in assisting them in integrating into Canadian society. It was particularly important because, like all other immigrant groups, the Kerala Christian community must overcome various obstacles that could hinder their prospects of successfully integrating into their new home nation. In addition, conducting research on young children aged between 4 to 12 years who migrated to Canada with their families was important for several reasons. Firstly, children are often among the most vulnerable members of immigrant communities, and their experiences could significantly influence their long-term development and well-being. Secondly, young children may face unique challenges during the integration process, such as adapting to a new school environment, making friends, and learning a new language. Thirdly, research on this age group could help identify potential gaps in existing support systems and inform the development of effective interventions to help immigrant children and families integrate successfully into Canadian society. Finally, understanding the experiences of young children from specific immigrant communities could help policymakers and service providers develop targeted and culturally appropriate strategies to support these groups.

Significance of the study

Immigration is a significant factor of life in Canada. A little over 1 million immigrants entered Canada between 2011 and 2016, with 18% coming from South Asian nations, according to Statistics Canada (2021). At the same time, Statistics Canada (2022) revealed that 59% of recent immigrants were Christian, 24% were non-Christians, and 17% were unaffiliated. According to Lecompte et al. (2017), South Asian immigrants make up the majority of Canada's visible minority population and commonly immigrate to North America in search of a better life for their families.

Moving to a new nation is a difficult endeavour, and new immigrants confront a variety of demands and obstacles as they adjust to their lives in the country. Migration sometimes involves leaving behind family, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, and other members of the same community, as well as social support networks. The loss of a social and family network and economic difficulties following immigration contributes to the aggravation of migrants' mental health (Chaze et al., 2015). At the same time, immigrants' mental and physical health can also be negatively impacted by various factors, including acculturative stress, relocation stress, economic pressures, social network loss, and changes in gender role standards. All of these factors have been widely connected to anxiety and depression symptoms.

Due to these obstacles and difficulties, settlement services alone do not suffice to cater to the situation. A due attention to integration process should also be promoted to ensure better integration into the host community. Instead of immigration being viewed as the final stage of the process of relocation, the acts of settlement and integration should be perceived as indispensable stages of an ongoing process, and this will be different based on the needs and experiences of each individual. These stages also do not take a specific amount of time to complete. Thus, through the process of settlement and integration, both immigrants as well as

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their children can participate in their host country as respected, valued, and useful members of the host society (Murphy, 2010). Settling and integrating into a new community involves actively working towards inclusivity by recognizing and accepting differences among people. It also means acknowledging and understanding the similarities in people's experiences and goals. This process requires effort and a focus on human development (Murphy, 2010). According to Richmond and Shields (2005), the settlement process lasts the entire life of the people; it does not cease when they have been in Canada for a year or become citizens. Pre-arrival, early reception, intermediate stage, and long-term stage are four broad stages that can be used to conceptualize the settlement process (Richmond and Shields, 2005). For these reasons, it is important to understand this process and, in particular, to find ways to better support it.

As Berry (2018) states, acculturation refers to the phenomenon that happens when groups of people from different cultures interact continuously, leading to alterations in either group's or both groups' original cultural patterns. Meanwhile, the idea of adaptation is how successfully immigrants integrate into their new life. This includes adaptation on a psychological, socio-cultural, and intercultural level. In this respect, Berry & Hou (2019) have argued that the promotion of both Canadian and heritage identities and of a religious identity among immigrants is the best approach which newcomers can adopt, in order to achieve higher levels of psychological well-being in Canada. Thus, studying an individual's acculturation and adaptability is a crucial component of cross-cultural and intercultural psychology (Berry, 2018). Similarly, understanding how cultures (and, by extension, religious cultures and practices) can influence a person's behavioural development is a critical concern in cross-cultural psychology.

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Religion and religious institutions play a role in the settlement and integration of immigrants in Canada. Religion is a regulated, codified set of practices that includes rituals, prayers, and a cultural expression of a metaphysical or supernatural reality that is generally referred to as God (Baksh, 2019). According to Derksen (2021), the involvement of religious organizations in immigrant settlement has various advantages. Firstly, religious organizations offer networks of relationships, friendships, and services that are particular to a religious community (Derksen, 2021). Another advantage is the attitude that religious organizations foster within the host community, which frequently has a moderating effect on public perception toward immigrants and works to foster a welcoming environment within the neighbourhood or region. Religious organizations have a long history of educating, helping, supporting, and advocating for immigrants by providing a platform for socialization through an individual approach (Derksen, 2021).

Religion also has a predominant role in the holistic development of young immigrants. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977), childhood development is influenced by various social, economic, political cultural and environmental contexts, ranging from the immediate environments of home and school to more general societal norms, laws, and values (see section on Theoretical Perspectives). Therefore, to analyse a child's development, it is vital to consider the interaction between the child and its immediate environment and that of the larger environment.

Religion and religious organizations can aid cultural and social assimilation by providing a sense of community. According to Seol and Lee (2012), religious teenagers experienced fewer internalizing and externalizing difficulties and had higher psychological well-being. Also, being a member of a religious group is linked to a higher level of pro-social issues and a lower level of substance abuse (Johnson, 2022). The study by Reimer et al. (2016)

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showed that churches also provide linguistic aid, practical support, and companionship to the new immigrants. Churches are skilled at addressing relational needs, including food, clothing, furniture, transportation, healthcare, housing, and assistance in finding employment.

Unfortunately, there has not been much detailed research on how churches assist in settling and integrating new immigrants in Canada. Reimer's et al. (2016) study was one of the few which explored this role of religious institutions in the settlement of immigrants in Canada. Although earlier research has looked at the role of religion in immigrant integration, there is no comprehensive understanding of how much, and through what mechanisms, religious institution helps or hinders immigrant socioeconomic and cultural integration (Kogan et al., 2019).

While Reimer et al. (2016) conducted a wide and extensive study on a myriad of churches in four different locations all over Canada. The present study intended to focus on an intensive study among a small group of members in Holy Family- Syro Malabar Kerala Catholic church, Halifax. The Holy Family Syro-Malabar Catholic is a parish under Eparchy of Mississauga for Syro-Malabar Catholics living in Nova Scotia, Canada (History of Eparchy, 2022). It is an Eastern Catholic denomination with its headquarters in Kerala, India. The Syro-Malabar Church has self-government under the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and is an independent, particular church in full communion with the Pope and the global Catholic Church, encompassing the 22 Eastern Catholic churches (CCEO) as well as the Latin Church. Major Syro-Malabar Archbishop George Alencherry now serves as the head of the Church, who is canonically convened body that represents the highest authority of the Church. The Syro-Malabar Church is unique for several reasons. Firstly, it is one of the 22 Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with the Pope of Rome, but it retains its own liturgy and traditions, which date back to the early Christian community in India. Secondly, it is the largest of the St.

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Thomas Christian churches in India and has a rich history and cultural heritage. Thirdly, it has a distinctive spiritual and theological tradition, which emphasizes the role of the family, community, and social justice. Finally, the Syro-Malabar Church has a strong missionary and evangelistic tradition, which has helped it to spread to various parts of the world, particularly to the Middle East, Europe, North America, and Australia.

The population growth of immigrants in Canada between 1980 and 2015 and the influx of new Syro-Malabar Catholic immigrants from India were the key factors in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Community's expansion. According to the History of Eparchy (2022), there are roughly 23,000 Syro-Malabar Catholics living in Canada. A migrant group with a strong Catholic heritage, the Syro-Malabar Catholics in Canada are of rich cultural heritage. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in India has maintained contact with them despite their dispersion and settlement across several Canadian provinces and territories. This has allowed them to retain their religious identity and sense of faith despite their limited community connections. Despite this large population, there has been virtually no research conducted on Indian immigrants from Kerala, nor on how they are integrating into Canadian society. The above facts make this study more significant, and the researcher also belongs to this same community, which enhances the relevance of the study.

This research was also significant, in that, it was in the best interests of the Nova Scotia Government to better understand the process by which religious institutions can assist immigrants to integrate into the province's society. Nova Scotia has a problem with the retention of immigrants and any information about how to keep immigrants in this province, by facilitating their integration, would improve the economic and social situation in this province (Tanweer & Reporter, 2021). According to the 2016 Canadian Census, there were 33,265 people who reported Kerala as their place of birth and 39,590 people who reported

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Malayalam as their mother tongue in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Through this study, the role of this religious institution in the integration of Kerala Catholic immigrants in Canada was explored.

Studying about the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in Canada can provide us with a better understanding of the history, culture, and religious practices of the Indian community in Canada, particularly those hailing from Kerala. It can also help gain insights into the challenges faced by immigrant communities in preserving their cultural and religious traditions while adapting to a new country. Additionally, learning about the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church can broaden your knowledge of the diversity of Christian denominations and their rituals and practices. By facilitating their integration, this will improve the economic and social situation in this province.

Unfortunately, virtually there is no research about immigrants from Kerala in Canada. Given all of the above, this research study filled this gap by researching on new immigrants from Kerala, by studying the role of Syro Malabar Catholic Church in promoting the settlement and integration of newly immigrated families with young children from Kerala.

Research Questions

As mentioned, this study attempted to generate an in-depth understanding of the role of one religious institution in Halifax, (named the Holy Family- Syro Malabar Catholic Church), in the integration of newly immigrated Kerala Christian families and their young children. A conscious effort was made to analyse the integration experiences of these families, through the following questions.

1. What is the role of the religious institution in the integration of new Kerala Christian immigrants into Canadian society?
 - What kinds of support (spiritual, financial, social and material) are provided by the religious institution?
 - What activities (religious, social and cultural) are arranged by the religious institution that contributes to the integration of new immigrants into Canadian society?
2. What role do religious rituals and practices play in the integration of Keralite Christian families and their young children into Canadian society?

Literature Review

The Importance of Immigration to Canada

Canada's future depends on immigration; this movement of people accounts for nearly two-thirds of population growth and is expected to reach 90 percent by 2050 (Simmons & Bourne, 2013). As Connor (2014) states, immigrants are defined as people who travel over international borders, sometimes to a country close by and other times halfway around the world. According to the Statistics of Canada (2016), the proportion of foreign-born people in Canada used to be lower, ranging between 14.7 and 16.1 percent until 1991. Between 1991 and 2011, this percentage gradually climbed to 20.6 percent, with an estimated 7,540,830 people having entered Canada through immigration.

To appreciate the current role that immigration has played in the country's population development, Edmonston (2016) argues that knowledge of the lengthy and complex history of immigration is essential. According to Satzewich and Liodakis (2017), there are official, genuine, and ideal reasons why Canada allows immigration. Immigration is essential for the survival of Canada. At the same time, people choose immigration as missionaries, skilled professionals, refugees, or even students. In addition, Canada welcomes immigrants and sees them as an important part of the country's development. These come to this country through multiple opportunities such as employment, business, study, and permanent residence (Satzewich and Liodakis, 2017).

Canada is also one of the most hospitable societies among countries that welcome immigrants and has been ranked top among 38 nations for its anti-discrimination regulations (Prince-St-Amand, 2016). According to the Yearly Report of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2018), Canada is a global leader in managed migration due to its non-

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discriminatory immigration policies, which allow for the evaluation of foreign applicants regardless of their race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, or religion, or gender.

South Asian Immigrants in Canada

South Asian immigrants in Canada are a diverse community in religion, origin, region, and language (Lecompte et al., 2017). According to Statistics Canada (2021), a little over 1 million migrants entered Canada between 2011 and 2016, with 18% coming from South Asian countries. As Lecompte et al. (2017) state, South Asian immigrants make up Canada's largest visible minority population. South Asian immigrants frequently come to North America with high hopes for a better life for themselves and their families.

Immigration from Kerala India is also of tremendous importance due to myriad reasons. Kerala is arguably the most literate state in India with a literacy rate of 94% (Kramer, 2022). Therefore, skilled migration from Kerala is beneficial to the Canadian economy and job market in the future. Christians are a minority community in India constituting 2.3% of the population in the country-at-large but constituting 27% in Kerala (Mitchell, 2022). As mentioned in the History of Eparchy (2022), there are roughly 23,000 Syro-Malabar Catholics living in Canada and most of these are from Kerala. Despite these numbers, virtually no research has been conducted in Canada on the integration of South Asians from Kerala.

South Asian immigrants in North America, especially women, face an increased risk of migration stress, due to the substantial socio-cultural gap between their home and host countries, new social and cultural norms, significant language barriers, and unmet expectations about their new lives after relocating to Canada (Lecompte et al., 2017). Also, the elevated chance of maternal migration stress and mental health disorders produces a significant risk factor for their children's social, psychological, and cognitive growth (Lecompte et al., 2017).

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Reimer & Hiemstra (2018) point out that immigration is altering Canada's religious landscape. Recent immigrants to Canada had a 59 percent Christian, a 24 percent non-Christian, and a 17 percent unaffiliated religious affiliation (Statistics Canada, 2022). Wolfart (2015) also supports the above statement, claiming that immigration has increased religious diversity. Since welcoming immigrants decades ago, Canada's ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity has grown (Wang and Handy, 2013). According to the Immigration Act of 1976, Canada's immigration policy changed from focusing primarily on European nations to a wide range of source countries, leading to a significant diversity of languages and cultures (Reimer & Hiemstra, 2018). Consequently, many new immigrants to Canada also have prior and diverse religious affiliations.

For their part, many newcomers have come to Canada with a positive sense of religion and because of this country's focus on freedom of religion. According to Angus Reid's (2018) survey on religious freedom in Canada, four out of ten immigrants believed Canada outperformed their nation on all three metrics examined- religious freedom, respect for religious minorities, and harmony among religious groups. The survey also revealed that while just over half (55%) of Canadians believed that religion had a positive impact on society, immigrants were more inclined to agree with this statement strongly.

Similarly, the importance of immigration for Canadian religious communities, according to Reimer and Hiemstra (2018), cannot be overstated. According to Connor and Koenig (2013), immigrants in Canada have also been noted for keeping religious practices alive and intact. And the immigrant's individual preference to his/her religious practices is what binds the majority of people in their new country (Connor 2014).

Factors Influencing Integration

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There are various factors that influence how immigrants integrate into their host nation: Language proficiency, familial links, voluntarily joining religious communities, and informational accessibility are all factors that might slow or speed up integration (Wang and Handy, 2013). Though the government of Canada promotes cultural preservation among newcomers and works to ease their absorption into Canadian society, when the newcomers are confronted with the problems of adjusting to a new nation, individuals frequently face disappointment and social isolation (Wang and Handy, 2013). According to Reimer et al., (2016), the necessity to assist immigrants in integrating and settling into Canadian society will continue to be important as long as immigration is a significant factor in Canada's future development. However, the adjustment problems can undermine their integration into the new community and heighten emotions of disempowerment and homesickness for their native country (Chiswick, 2014). According to Reimer et al., (2016), the necessity to assist immigrants in integrating and settling into Canadian society will continue to be important as long as immigration is a significant factor in Canada's future development.

Religion Plays an Important Role in Immigrants' Lives

Connor (2014) notes that the stories of immigrant faith that take place in real-time and in the real world demonstrate the significance that religion can play inside immigrants' lives and that religion can embrace all aspects of immigrants' life rather than just one. McAndrew and Voas (2014) claim that religion can aid in the integration of migrants in three different ways: by fostering a cultural identity that is compatible with a new national identity; facilitating socioeconomic engagement; and reinforcing values that support social order. Religious affiliation is significant when group members share similar values, such that they place greater emphasis on education, the virtue of work, honesty, or other personal characteristics that are rewarded in the labour market. In addition, religious communities and practices are important

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for migrants in helping them deal with the stress, insecurities, and difficulties of migration (Frederiks, 2016).

The Role of Religion in Immigrant Settlement

In this regard, religion and religious institutions often provide a sense of security and belonging to the individual, they assist the relocation process and serve as a beneficial resource for dealing with the changes (Lecompte et al., 2017). Furthermore, the immigrant families' religious feeling of belonging contributes to preserving ethnic identity by encouraging community formation and cross-national connections. Furthermore, religion can help individuals to overcome feelings of loneliness and provide consolation during and after their migration process (Lecompte et al., 2017). According to Baksh (2019), religion offers a structured set of principles and practices and a relationship with God that may inspire new immigrants to get involved in various endeavours that will aid in their successful integration into contemporary society.

The Role of Churches in Immigrant Settlement

Simmons and Bourne (2013) say that various studies so far point to a critical role for churches in immigrant settlement. According to Reimer et al. (2016), congregations play a crucial role in the settlement and integration of immigrants, offering spiritual and social support and networking opportunities. In particular, many Canadian Christian congregations actively work to welcome newcomers into their services and organizational life, with varying degrees of success (Reimer et al., 2016). These congregations help immigrants find employment, build their social capital, develop their skills, and occasionally find a place to preserve their native culture. These congregations have also found that their own migration experiences have given them the ability to support others, as they adjust to life in a new country (Reimer et al., 2016).

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Reimer et al. (2016) conducted a study which illustrated how churches provided linguistic aid, practical support, and companionship to the new immigrants. Reimer's (2016) study was one of the few which explored this role of religious institutions in settlement in Canada. Unfortunately, there has not been much detailed research on how churches assist in settling and integrating new immigrants in this country. Although earlier research has looked at the role of religion in immigrant integration, there is no comprehensive understanding of how much, and through what mechanisms, religious institution helps or hinders immigrant socioeconomic and cultural integration (Kogan et al., 2019). This is especially the case for the younger generations and for immigrant communities from Kerala, which are understudied.

Participation in Religious Activities

Churches and religious institutions provide opportunities for immigrants to participate in activities which call for social interactions and community engagements through voluntary groups and participation in these groups is essential to an immigrant's assimilation into a host country (Wang and Handy, 2013). In addition, Wang and Handy (2013) say that immigrants' participation in religious voluntary services may prevent immigrants from language barriers. However, the immigrants who stay longer in the host nation and have better health and educational levels are more likely to get involved in social activities (Wang and Handy, 2013). The study of Wang and Handy (2013) to determine the factors that influence immigrants' decisions to join voluntary organizations and the types of voluntary activities immigrants engage in Canada revealed that consistent religious attendance promoted a solid spiritual and secular voluntary activity.

Wang and Handy (2013) say that affiliations with religious communities can aid immigrants in regaining social and human capital lost throughout the relocation process. Also, the likelihood of immigrants volunteering for religious organizations is positively correlated

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with social trust, informal and bridge social networks, community attachment, pride or sense of belonging, speaking English or French at home, and religiosity.

The Role of Religion in Supporting Immigrants' Mental Health

For immigrants, mental health difficulties are a major worry. According to Beiser and Mantini (2018), new immigrants must deal with a variety of pre-migration, migration, and post-migration stressors that also puts them at a disproportionate risk of mental health issues compared to their Canadian-born peers. According to Chaze et al. (2015), many immigrants believe that religion and spirituality are significant in their life to understand and cope with their sicknesses, and in the face of prejudice and injustice. They also find spirituality to be a source of support and a coping mechanism. Even though there is a link between religious activity and mental health for a variety of ethnic-racial communities, this association may differ by gender and cultural group (Chaze et al., 2015). The study by Yu (2021) examined how religion affects immigrants' mental health over time in Canada and has discovered a strong correlation between having a religious practice and better mental health. Also, the level of mental health and religiosity varies according to gender. Furthermore, the study reveals that males benefit more from church-based support than women in their self-rated physical and mental health. In addition, religion and religious organizations can help people survive in their new country by giving them access to resources, acceptability, and shelter with spiritual support (Chaze et al., 2015).

Immigrant Children

Immigrant children adjust to the immigration process in diverse ways, and several distinct factors, specifically gender and socioeconomic positions, have been shown to impact the adaptation of immigrant children to their new environment (Pandey et al., 2021). What Statistics Canada designates as “Immigrant children” can be either (1) foreign-born or (2)

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Canadian-born with two foreign-born parents, or (3) Canadian-born born with one Canadian-born parent and one foreign-born parent (Statistics Canada, 2017). According to Lecompte et al. (2017), ethnicity, immigrant age, length of stay of recent immigration, and previous experience moving to another country were also considered important factors that affect the adaptation of new immigrant children in Canada. With the growing number of immigrants in Canada, it is imperative to explore the factors influencing the integration of new immigrant children.

Young Immigrants and their Sense of Belonging

According to Wilkinson (2018), the desire to feel part of a group is known as 'belongingness.' The sense of belonging includes internal forces such as parental or family influences and individual and external influences (Wilkinson, 2018). Some people tend to have an inherent urge to belong to, and be an essential part of, something better than them, whether it is family, friends, co-workers, or religion, and to focus on acquiring the group's approval.

Peers or friendships are also a crucial component of the social support system of young people. Friends are increasingly taking on some of the previous 'parental socialization duties' (Wilson-Forsberg, 2018). Friends help each other cope with life's challenges and developmental transitions by sharing everyday experiences, acting as role models for behaviour, offering emotional and social support, affirming ideas and ambitions, and boosting each other's self-esteem and well-being (Wilson-Forsberg, 2018). Moreover, for teenagers who have recently moved with, or without, their parents to a new society, friends are a vital source of support. After leaving their social networks behind during immigration, new immigrant adolescents rely on new networks of friends, who assist them in accessing and creating connections with people who can help them fit in better in their new environment and achieve their goals as new Canadians (Wilson-Forsberg, 2018). In addition, Wilson-Forsberg (2018)

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say that numerous studies indicate that feelings of belonging in social groups can promote stability, aid in developing a shared social identity, and facilitate the pursuit of group objectives.

Immigrant Parents' Support and External Barriers

In the development of identity in children and teens, according to Costigan and So (2018), parental influences are crucial, and some of the apparent factors influencing identity development include the family's religious affiliation, level of cultural preservation at home, language used at home, socioeconomic situation, parents' education, parents' experiences with discrimination and exclusion, and immigrant status. Also, when language, culture, and religious practices are the prime determinants of identity development, a child's ability to establish a sense of self depends on how much their family tries to protect or reject these identity components (Costigan & So, 2018). Additionally, Costigan and So (2018) asserted that individual influences include personal beliefs, rituals, practices, and religion, language, desire for cultural preservation, education level, emotional and mental health, and political views. In contrast, the external influences include friend and peer networks, experience with discrimination, region of residence, social acceptance, receptivity to school, experience with bullying, trauma experiences, and media use.

The ability of immigrant parents to support their children's emotional growth and development may be compromised by various external constraints in Canadian culture. These obstacles result from systems and regulations that provide some people with uneven access to openings and resources (Costigan and So, 2018). The pattern of immigration is also a significant reason in many cases, according to Costigan and So (2018). Because sometimes one family member migrates initially, they later finance other family members' arrival. These

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family divisions or separations and difficulties associated with moving to a new nation may limit parents' ability to support their children or stifle relationships, affecting family life flow.

Furthermore, Costigan and So (2018) say that immigrant parents are raising the next generation of Canadians. They experience social isolation, difficulties adjusting to a new culture and language, interpersonal belongingness issues, and dealing with racism and prejudice as external threats (Costigan & So, 2018). Furthermore, parent-child relationships sometimes suffer from various stresses that immigrant parents go through as they navigate their process of cultural adjustment (Costigan & So, 2018). Thus, it is crucial to support the health and well-being of immigrants since it significantly impacts their ability to be good parents.

Integration of Christian Immigrants in Canada

Integration, rather than assimilation, or separation, is the preferable goal for immigrant inclusion, as it allows for better adaptability and less marginalization. So, the individuals must devise solutions to deal with the challenges that arise in their daily lives, once they have relocated. These concerns focus on how significant cultural identification and maintenance are in the new community and how involved the individual should be with other cultural groups in the host country (Lecompte et al., 2017). When these two factors are taken into attention simultaneously, the individual is more likely to create an acculturation strategy. Also, a strong ethnic identity can offer support for the immigrants that they need to counteract the negative consequences of the numerous difficulties that can arise during the migration process (Lecompte et al., 2017).

On the other hand, Lecompte et al. (2017) stated that the barriers to assimilating to the host culture may result from cultural and social attitudes against South Asians in Canada, who may be excluded and find it challenging to integrate into mainstream society. As a result, a sense of belonging to both the nation of origin and the host country is an essential component

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in the mental health of South Asian immigrants. The study of Berry and Hou (2019) identify that immigrant and their offspring benefit from having numerous identities based on religious identification, life fulfilment, and mental health. It reveals that having multiple identities raises life satisfaction and mental health levels of new immigrants. In addition to having the identities listed above, having a solid Canadian identity mixed with one other identification has been found to support and enhance immigrants' well-being (Berry & Hou, 2019). Thus, it is important to research the ways in which participation in this religious institution may help, or hinder, the development of this dual identity.

Methodology

This study was conducted through a qualitative research methodology, as well as an analysis of publicly available material on the church website and social media sites. Instead of conducting a macro level study focusing on church leaders and policies, this research relied on first-hand information collected from a focused group of adults, with young children among the active members of the church. Thereby a detailed analysis was conducted on the level of influence played by the Syro Malabar Catholic Church in the integration of the newly migrated families with young children from Kerala, India, into the host community. The focus of this research was participants' opinions, thoughts, and feelings concerning their individual experiences with religion and their religious community. It is crucial to comprehend circumstances and how they differ from one another in the context of a particular interaction, (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

It is also to be noted that, the researcher is the suitable person for gathering and analysing the data as the researcher belongs to Kerala Christian community and was immigrated to Canada with two young children. Additionally, as a fellow parent, I understand the experiences, perspectives, and concerns that comes after immigration with young children. This understanding allowed me to approach the answers provided by other parents with empathy and a deep understanding of the nuances of parenting. Additionally, I had experience in active listening and asking open-ended questions, which allowed me to uncover deeper insights and meaning behind the answers provided by parents. Through my own experiences and skills, I was uniquely qualified to interpret and analyse the answers of other parents in a way that provided valuable insights and understanding. By presenting the data in words rather than figures, the qualitative method enabled the researcher to be fully explicative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

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Since the researcher was interested in the subjective lived experiences of how the participants experience their reality, a phenomenological approach was employed as the framework for this study. This approach emphasized the desire to obtain the truth of matters and to characterize phenomena in a total sense as it expresses themselves to the experiencer (Moran, 2000). Using this strategy, the researcher adopted the stance that everything outside direct experience must be ignored, and the external universe is reduced to personal consciousness (Groenewald, 2004).

Participants

The research interviewed three men and three women belonging to six different families who are immigrated from Kerala in the last six months to seven years with their families, including young children. Also, they were regular attendees (at least twice a month) of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Sampling

This study employed two different sampling techniques— purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgment, selective, or subjective sampling, is a sampling approach where the researcher used his or her own discretion when selecting members of the population to take part in the study (Pickard, 2017). Snowball sampling, as defined by Goodman (2011), is a way of gathering information where someone is interviewed and then they refer the researcher to the other people they know who might also be willing to be interviewed.

Purposive sampling was used to start the analysis. The researcher sought out the assistance of the church priest in recruiting possible interviewees (See Appendix B). The priest was requested to refer potential participants to this study. Those who were interested were then

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instructed to contact the researcher directly. When contacted, the researcher detailed and explained the nature of the research, asked questions related to their alignment with the criteria of the study and gave each one a chance to ask questions concerning their involvement. The researcher chose the participants who met the recruitment criteria mentioned in the Participants section. Those who did not meet the criteria were thanked for their interest and were asked to refer others who might fit the criteria.

The researcher believed that the new immigrant family members who belonged to this church for longer than 6 months could most appropriately express thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions about the role of this religious institution in their integration into a new society. Similarly, snowball sampling entailed identifying a collection of respondents who, in turn, could assist the interviewer in choosing other individuals who could be included in the interview (Agarwal, 2006). The researcher invited each of the first two interviewees to pass on her name and contact information to other members of the congregation who might be interviewed, (not close family or friends). After asking the assistance of the church priest in recruiting possible interviewees (See Appendix B), the researcher outlined the study's goals and procedures verbally to the members who responded to the request. Only the members of the immigrant families who participated at least twice a month in religious services was chosen to take part in the study. This constituted a regular attendance, which should allow a participant enough regular contact with the church in order to establish belonging, social contacts, familiarity and a sense of involvement with the congregation and institution.

Ethical Consent

The University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has approved and confirmed that the research proposal respects the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and Mount Saint Vincent University's policies regarding the ethics of research. (See

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Appendix F). Then participants who met the inclusion criteria was e-mailed a letter of consent (See Appendix C). After receiving the letter requesting consent, they were approached by phone to go through the letter with them and asked if they have any concerns. If the participants had no issue participating in the research, they were asked to sign and return it via e-mail. Once the consent was received, they were informed the date for an interview, either online or offline, according to the convenience of the participants. At the same time, when any interested participants did not meet the study criteria, they were informed by phone why they were not selected. They were thanked by email for expressing interest in participating in the study.

Data collection

The first method of data collection was a content analysis on publicly available resources, such as the church website and social media sites. According to Liva et al. (2008), content analysis is a series of systematic, rule-guided approaches used to examine the informational contents of textual material. This was done as a way to collect publicly available information on church programs, social and spiritual opportunities those were designed to better integrate new immigrants. There were programs that the church provided of which interview respondents were not aware or didn't utilize. This was followed by individual interviews, which allowed the researcher to ask these immigrants about these opportunities.

Following the selection of participants, a date and time was set up for them to participate in one-on-one interviews. According to Skinner (2012), one-on-one interviews take place in person between a single interviewer and the interviewee. These interviews often follow a straightforward framework, which is more in line with what participants anticipate when they are called in for an interview. As part of this interview, all participants received semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix A). Predetermined open-ended questions were used in semi-structured interviews to keep the researcher on track while allowing for honest responses

(Bryman, 2012). Additional probing questions may be asked during the interview, when necessary, even though the open-ended questions served as a framework for the discussion.

This form of interviewing was chosen because the researcher believed it was essential to ask questions which allowed more in-depth answers to the critical research questions and allowed respondents to express their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences. The qualitative focus, and textual data produced by this data collection method was chosen because it combined the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument (Schensul et al., 1999). Nearly 45 to 60 minutes were spent on each interview, and an audio-recording was used to capture the audio of the discussions. The interviews were then transcribed.

Data Analysis

The framework for coding and examining the findings was thematic analysis. It was a qualitative method that focused on finding, analysing, and reporting patterns in a body of data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). Instead of emphasizing quantity, this approach used patterns to try and capture key characteristics of the data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). This method was chosen because the researcher wanted to concentrate on the recurring themes and meaning patterns that appeared in the data. The researcher transcribed all the interviews, and printed the transcript, and read it several times to get familiar with it before starting to code. The analysis was started even before the interviews were finished.

This research made use of In vivo coding without any preconceived themes thereby ensuring the codes were developed from the words of the participants' rather than previously fixed by the researcher (Bryman, 2012). It was chosen because the researcher wished to code the data using participants' expressions, words, and phrases as they shared their perspectives, opinions, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Repeated coding was carried out to ensure that

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the data in step one contained recurring and/or essential information. The codes deemed to be repeated often were kept, while the codes considered to be trivial were discarded. Additionally, one transcript that the researcher had already coded was sent (without coding) to the research supervisor to code and to compare between the two transcripts and determine which codes were common. The goal of this exercise was to increase inter-rater dependability.

Following the coding of the transcripts, the recurrent codes were combined to create higher-level codes, categories, and themes that allowed the researcher to determine whether the data shared any common patterns. This was accomplished by making a table with the names of each participant at the head of each column and the relevant codes for each question listed below (Appendix A). Similar codes were highlighted in the same colour across the table using coloured highlighters to make them stand out. With each transcript, the process was repeated to check whether any recurring themes were appeared or to determine whether the codes corroborated the themes, which were anticipated to be connected to the research topics. A description of the themes was written after that.

Theoretical Framework

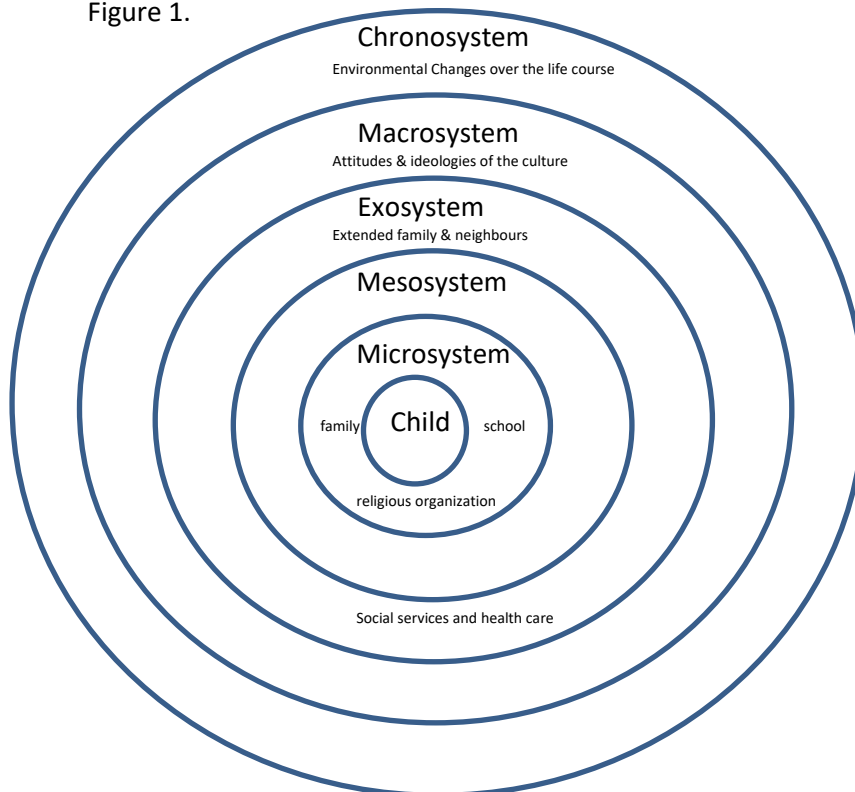
Understanding and interpreting the findings from this study was conducted according to Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), as well as Bourdieu's notion of Social Capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977), a variety of social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental factors, from the proximate environs of home and school to more general societal norms, laws, and values, have an impact on children's development. Bronfenbrenner theorizes that these factors are contained within five separate "systems," which influence an individual child's development: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The microsystem is the

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most critical and direct environmental level, which includes such factors as the child's family, health services, religious organizations, neighbourhood, school and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The illustration in Figure 1 shows the five separate systems of his Ecological Systems Theory, that he conceptualized to categorize the influences in a child's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Figure 1.



Source: Compiled by the author, from information provided in Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979

Within Bronfenbrenner's Theory, when analysing a child's growth, it is vital to take into account both the interaction between the child and their immediate environment, as well as his and her family's interaction with the wider world. As Figure 1 shows, Microsystem interactions are the closest and most intimate to the child. These are essential to promoting and assisting the child's development, especially a close and caring relationship with parents and additional supports from its surrounding community including from religious institutions. In addition, according to Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), the development of a child

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may also be impacted by the mesosystem, or the quality of the relationship between the actors within the microsystem, such as the interactions between a child's parents and teachers. Within this mesosystem, a child's growth will be positively, or negatively impacted, depending on whether their parents and teachers get along and have a good rapport, as opposed to whether they do not (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In other words, a child's development should positively benefit from a strong relationship between their parents and instructors, or between their parents and their religious institution (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Under the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), a child's development will also be affected by such factors as their parent's economic situation, the mass media, the quality of government policies and social services (the Exosystem), as well as the attitudes and ideologies of their culture (the Macrosystem) and finally environmental changes over the child's life course (the Chronosystem). To elaborate, the interconnections between the mesosystem and microsystem can create opportunities for individuals to gain power and influence within their social context. For example, a child who has positive relationships with both their family and school may have more opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities and access resources that promote their learning and development. Similarly, an adult who is involved in multiple community organizations may have more opportunities to network and build social capital, which can translate into greater access to job opportunities or political power.

However, the interconnections between the mesosystem and microsystem can also create challenges for individuals who face conflicting demands or negative experiences across different contexts (Horowitz, 1980). For example, a child who experiences bullying at school may have difficulty building positive relationships with peers and teachers, which can impact their ability to succeed academically and socially. Similarly, an adult who faces discrimination or exclusion within their community may have difficulty accessing resources or building social

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capital, which can limit their opportunities for advancement. Overall, the interconnections between the mesosystem and microsystem highlight the importance of understanding the complex and dynamic ways in which social contexts shape individuals' experiences and opportunities for power and influence. By recognizing and addressing the challenges and opportunities created by these interconnections, individuals and communities can work to promote positive outcomes and reduce social inequality.

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Additionally, this study utilized the Theory of Social Capital propounded by Bourdieu (1986). Social capital refers to the resources that an individual or a group can access through their social network. These resources can be tangible, such as money or goods, or intangible, such as social support or information. Social capital is based on relationships of mutual recognition and acquaintance, which can be formal or informal, and can be maintained through material or symbolic exchanges. The amount of social capital an individual has depends on the size and quality of their social network and the resources possessed by each member of that network. Social capital can have a positive effect on an individual's economic or cultural capital, but it is not completely independent of it. The benefits of social capital include solidarity and access to useful relationships and services. Building a network of connections is a conscious effort that requires investment and institutionalization. Bourdieu argues that social capital, which refers to the resources and benefits that individuals can gain through their social networks, is not evenly distributed across society. Instead, social capital is linked to social class, with individuals from higher social classes having access to greater social capital. This leads to the reproduction of inequality, as those with more social capital are able to use their networks to gain advantages in economic, political, and social arenas, while those with less social capital are at a disadvantage. In this way, social class plays a significant role in the distribution of social capital and the reproduction of inequality.

Results

Content Analysis

The first part of this study was the realization of a content analysis on publicly available resources, such as the church website and social media sites. According to Liva et al. (2008), content analysis is a series of systematic, rule-guided approaches used to examine the informational contents of textual material. The section below details the programs and services that are offered by this church to its congregation and that are mentioned in the church website and social media sites.

Holy Family Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax is the only church for the immigrant believers of the Syro Malabar catholic community, who have immigrated from Kerala, India. The church offers different religious services and programmes for the wellbeing and spiritual upliftment of its members. The spiritual services that are offered by the church, as given in the official church website (Holy Family Catholic Church, n.d.) are as follows.

Programme/ Activity	Day	Time	Description
Holy mass	Monday – Thursday Friday Saturday and Sunday	5.30 pm 5.00 pm 9.30 am	Holy Mass is conducted every day for the members of the church.
Novena of Mother Mary of Perpetual Help	Saturday	After holy mass	Novena is the public devotion in catholic church to obtain special needs.
	Saturday	11.00 am	Confession is the admission of sin to the priest, which is said to

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Confession and Eucharistic adoration			be required to receive divine pardon. Eucharistic adoration is a Eucharistic devotional practice in which the blessed sacrament is adored.
Catechism	Sunday	After holy mass	Catechism classes are organised every Sunday for the children from age 4 to 18 years. It is the process of teaching the Christian faith to children or for those who are new to Christianity.

There are several other activities offered by the church which are available in social media platforms such as Facebook (Holy Family Syro-Malabar Catholic parish, n.d.). and Instagram (Syro-Malabar Halifax, n.d.). The programmes are as follows,

- Pious Association (An organization that practice spiritual and corporal works of mercy for the general population of a parish)
- SMYM (Syro Malabar Youth Movement)
- Mathruvedhi (A platform for mothers with the motto “Mother, the Protector of Life and the Light of Family”. It is aiming at the revival of families through mothers and help raising the community in a life deep routed in Christian faith)
- Pithruvedhi (An organization for the fathers works under the parish pastoral guidance to unite all the fathers in the church)
- Bible Quiz
- Parents Teachers meeting and seminars for the family.
- Holyween celebrations (Instead of Halloween celebrations, the church celebrates holyween day to remember different saints)
- Virtual Seminar for couples and mothers

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- Feast celebration of the holy family
- First holy communion
- Father's Day celebration
- Mother's Day celebration
- Vidyarambham (Ritual ceremony organised by the church to observe the first written words by the children)
- Social services for the church members like flood relief, Wildfire relief and fundraising for different social causes such as collecting money for the treatment of chronic diseases or for funeral service cost for the accidental death among church members.
- Christmas Carol and Onam celebration (Traditional festival of Kerala)

Programmes and assistance which are not publicly advertised by the Church.

Being a member of the church community, the researcher of this project is aware of other spiritual and non-spiritual assistance programmes that are organised by the church, but that are not widely advertised on their websites, or social media pages. These are as follows.

- Annual Retreat
- Financial support
- Material support
- Employment support
- Coffee and mealtime (weekly) to enhance social integration.
- Summer faith camp for children
- Counselling and guidance session for the children

Individual Interviews

This study targeted six spiritually active members of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax who immigrated from Kerala, India, to Canada within last six months to seven years with young children. For ensuring the effectiveness of the research, I selected 3 male and 3 female participants, who are members of Holy Family Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax and regular participants in church activities and rituals. As mentioned in the data collection section, the names and identity of the participants are not disclosed to protect their privacy. The demographic details are as follows.

Participants	Gender	Age	Number of children	Age of children	Length of residence in Canada
Participant 1	Female	40	4	10 years, 8 years, 6 years, and 6 months	4 years
Participant 2	Female	44	2	16 years and 13 years	4 years
Participant 3	Female	37	2	8 years and 5 years	21 months
Participant 4	Male	42	3		4 years

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				12 years, 9 years, and 7 years	
Participant 5	Male	42	3	12 years, 11 years, and 6 years	16 months
Participant 6	Male	45	2	12 years and 9 years	1 years

The findings illustrated that their active participation in the church activities helped them in their integration process into the wider Canadian society. When discussing the level of participation of the participants in the spiritual and nonspiritual activities of the church, all respondents accepted that they had been active members of the church even before their migration to Canada. While some of the participants expressed that their spiritual participation in their home country had been facilitated by their availability of time, two participants said that their participation and association with the church had increased after their immigration to Canada. When asked about the participation in spiritual activities after immigration, participant 4 responded,

It had really gone high I would say. Because back in Kerala, I was only a catechism teacher. I had not gone into the administration of the church. But here in Canada, other than catechism I was the parish president for one year and a member of the parish committee for three years. I am more exposed to different kinds of religious activities here.

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When asked how they became involved in the activities of the church in Halifax, most of the participants responded that they had been looking for community members with whom to connect, after their immigration. Two of them said that they directly contacted the parish priest, and the priest introduced them to the other church community members. Three out of six participants had been in contact with one of the members of the church community and the latter had brought them into the church. Participant 4 recalls the following:

...on reaching here the one who picked me up from the airport took me directly to church president's house and introduced me to the president that I was somebody who was experience in teaching catechism for 12 years and he would be an asset for us. Then the next Sunday, I went to the church with them and found a few good families. They were almost twenty families. After the holy mass the priest and president had an immediate meeting. It was a parish council meeting. They introduced me to the meeting, and they told me that they were actually in search of somebody who could take up Catechism in the parish. Because they did not have an organised form of catechism here. And they appointed me as a catechism teacher and from the next Sunday I started catechism (p. 1).

When asked about the available religious services, all participants showed an awareness of what is offered: Regarding the frequency of rituals and practices at the church, all participants stated that holy mass is conducted every day at the church. There is a special mass conducted on Sundays which is followed by Catechism for the children (Time and information about which are available on the official church website). There is also a Pious Association meeting on the first Sunday of every month.

Regarding the spiritual activities offered by the church for the children of parishioners, all the participants recognized that the church offers Catechism every Sunday for the children.

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Also, the Pious Association (Pious Associations are organizations that practice spiritual and corporal works of mercy for the general population of a parish or church) conducts Bible quizzes and many useful training programmes for the children. As participant 4 said, “I would say, the most helpful church activity for the children is the Bible quiz because children are developing a kind of interest towards reading the Bible and learning Bible verses.”

The church also conducts summer faith camp, counselling and guidance sessions for the children. All the participants were positive about the beneficial effects of such activities on the character development of their children. As noted by Participant 2

The one thing that I would say is the LGBTQ community and the queer rights. My children were not exposed to that kind of things. In the church, they were given proper guidance and classes in regard. Due to the guidance and classes from the church, my kids understand that how they are different from them when they are mingling with such community members. This was a great help for my children to know the new culture and system.

In addition, the church conducts many programmes and spiritual activities for the betterment of families as well. Members are divided according to their area of residence into different Family units. Prayer meetings and gatherings are conducted in these family units on the first Friday of every month (participant 4). There are organisations for the parents like Mathruvedhi (a platform for mothers with the motto “Mother, the Protector of Life and the Light of Family”). It is aiming at the revival of families through mothers and help raising the community in a life deep routed in Christian faith) and Pithruvedhi (an organization for the fathers works under the parish pastoral guidance to unite all the fathers in the church). A family retreat is also organised by the church every year for strengthening the family bond of the members.

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When they were asked about any financial support that had been provided to them by the Church, all the participants responded that they had not been in need of any financial support and hence did not request any support from the church, in that regard. However, some of the participants added that, if any members are in dire need of any financial support, the church may consider their request. On the other hand, half of the participants mentioned that they had received housing or accommodation support, when they first moved to Canada. They all were given assistance and information regarding accommodation through a WhatsApp group run by SMYM (Syro Malabar Youth Movement). The activities of the SMYM organisation are worth special mentioning because most of the participants said that they had received not only housing support but also information and guidance regarding employment through their WhatsApp group. As mentioned by participant 2:

there is a WhatsApp group for our community run by SMYM members, where the newcomers can join and can get any kind of help from that group, like if you need help with a ride or in need of any material support like furniture, winter clothes and so on. The group has helped me especially with the setting up of my home and so on (personal communication, June 30, 2023).

Half of the participants said that they had needed assistance with their accommodation, upon their arrival, which had been given by the community through the WhatsApp group and such similar means. Five out of six participants also did not mention having requested nor received any material support from the Church. However, participant 2 said that she had been assisted with great help in terms of material support during the COVID pandemic. This participant noted

During the COVID, I was laid off from work. Being a student, I did not have a job. So, the church community provided the groceries for us. Only with their help that we

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could save our Guaranteed Investment Certificate money, which is necessary to be maintained by all the international students.

Participants described how the church conducts many programmes and gatherings to promote the social integration of the church members as well as their integration into the wider Canadian society. Different participants identified several programmes and activities as the most helpful in terms of social integration. Participant 2 identified gatherings in family units as more helpful in social integration than all other activities. However, four out of six participants found coffee and snacks time at the church as the most effective for their social integration. As, participant 5 noted “Coffee time after the holy mass gives an opportunity for us to mingle with each other.” However, it is also to be noted that, when discussing their social integration within the wider Canadian community, participant 4 stated that the church invites Canadian people, from the wider community, when they have some social or religious gathering at the church. However, none of the participants mentioned any instances where they had been invited by the Canadian people, to any of the latter’s gatherings.

All of the participants found the church community to be helpful in providing employment support, though only 4 participants mentioned having directly received some kind of support or guidance regarding employment. Participant 1 said that she had “received information and guidance regarding the nursing license.” Participant 2 stated “many people got many job opportunities from the community.” Participant 3 said, “they got reference for their jobs,” while participant 4 also said that his “wife (had) received guidance which helped her career enhancement.”

When asked about programmes and activities to strengthen their family bonds, all of the participants agreed that their association with the programmes offered by the church had cemented their family relationship. Participant 1 found the church’s annual retreat to be “an

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inspiration to build the family bond”. Participant 2 said that “the activities and training for children helped in the positive development of their character. This in turn, brings out a positive family atmosphere. Participant 4 said that “the church priest provided guidance and support in strengthening their family.” At the same time, the annual retreat for the parents, and the Catechism for children were the most helpful programmes for strengthening the family bond as identified by participant 5 and participant 6.

When enquiring about what activities helped in mitigating negative feelings in the host country, some participants expressed the belief that active contact with the community members at the church had helped them in relieving their negative feelings, such as alienation, after the immigration. Moreover, participation in spiritual activities like holy mass gave them mental strength and relieved tension. For instance, participant 1 stated that “every day we go to church for holy mass. As we go every day, it helps us to relieve our tension, stress and everything.” In addition, all of the participants have same opinion about their participation in cultural programmes of their home country, such as the Onam celebration, the traditional festival of Kerala. There are many cultural programmes and events are conducted by church as part of Onam celebration, especially the Onam Sadhya (traditional meal), which creates a feeling of sense of belongingness and helps to mitigate alienation. All the participants agreed that through the participation in the activities and programmes of the church they made better and effective socialisation with the Canadian community.

Similarly, all the participants accepted that their association with the church had helped their social integration and did not hinder that process. With the participation in the church activities most of the participants agreed that they developed a better understanding and acceptance towards the new culture, through the interaction with the members of the church. As noted by some of the participants, there are some members in the church community who have been living in Canada for the last 20-30 years, who are more familiar with Canadian culture and life.

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Interaction with such members has helped the new members heavily to have a deeper understanding and adaptation of the Canadian culture and lifestyle. Their children also get easily exposed to the culture and societal realities of Canada, through their interaction with the elder members as well as their peer group members who were born and raised here. As mentioned by Participant 3:

The children are getting a lot of support. For us it is difficult to send them regularly due to the distance to the church location, but the children are happy in participating in catechism class and they started to mingle with people once they started catechism. My daughter was not comfortable in meeting people. Once she started catechism, she started to mingle with others too.

When requested to describe an instance when their interaction with the community members in the parish had helped them to integrate into Canadian society, participant 1 said she got valuable guidance about how to get licence to practice as a registered nurse and the nature of the job, which was helpful for her career enhancement. Participant number 2 said that she had received different kinds of support such as guidance in getting a social insurance number, getting familiarised with public transportation and so on, during the early phase of immigration. Participant 4 said that since he was in a key position of the church administration, he had been given opportunity to interact with members of different Canadian communities in many matters and that this had helped him to integrate. For instance, “when closely working with the church, I got many chances to mingle with the local communities here which help me a lot in integrating with the larger Canadian community”. Participant 5 noted that the celebration of national days has also helped them to integrate with Canadian people. Meanwhile participant 6 said that existing community groups like the Knights of Columbus have provided opportunities to their children to participate in activities, which has paved their way to better interactions. However such incidents are an exception to the overall reception of the Canadian community members

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as they have not been active in welcoming the immigrants to their homes or gatherings as noted by participant 4.

By analysing all the responses from the participants, it is evident that their active participation and association with the activities of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax has had a positive impact on the integration process of their families, especially their children, into the wider Canadian society. Families found the involvement of church and community activities in their day-to-day life as a source of support in their integration into the new environment. The kind of assistance varies from material helps to spiritual and emotional support to strengthening their relationships and facilitating social integration into the host country.

Discussion

The initial stage of this research was the implementation of a content analysis on publicly accessible materials, such as the church website and social media sites. The only church in Halifax for the Syro Malabar Catholic community's immigrant members, who hail from Kerala, India, is the Holy Family Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax. For the sake of its members' health and spiritual development, the church provides a variety of religious services and programs. The programmes and services that the Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax provides to its members were listed in the Results section of this thesis. Moreover, the activities and services of the church are not limited to religious celebrations but also encompass social and cultural events and programmes. More than a religious institution, the church plays a key role in different forms of settlement services in the lives of the new immigrant members. However, it is noted that some of the programmes and events indirectly and sometimes directly seem to promote the Kerala culture even though there are many other programmes and events organised to promote the integration into the Canadian society. According to Reimer et al. (2016), congregations play a crucial role in the settlement and integration of immigrants, offering spiritual and social support and networking opportunities. The study of Reimer et al. (2016) examined the services offered to immigrants by Canadian Christian churches. It was in general covering different Christian congregations in four sites in Canada namely Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, and Maritimes. However the present research specifically targeted Kerala Christian immigrants who migrated with their young children and who belong to a specific community named the Syro Malabar Catholic Church. Also this study focused on a particular church, Holy Family Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Therefore the findings of the study are more specific when compared to the study of Reimer et al. (2016).

For the interview portions of this research, 6 participants were chosen and were all spiritually active and regular church goers (attending at least twice a month). The participants

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comprised of three males and three females, and their responses were analysed and taken as a research sample which would help us to better understand the role of the religious institution and community, according to some of the members of the community. All of the participants were active church-goers and spiritually-active members of the church community even before their immigration to Canada. With their immigration, they brought their faith and faith-related practices as well to the new country. In the troubles and alienation that they had to face in their new environment, they sought emotional support from the church community, through prayers and participation in the spiritual and non-spiritual activities offered by the church.

The participants acknowledged their identity with their religious organization, and they found the church community to be a source of support, especially during the initial phase of their immigration to their new environment. This finding is similar to the observation of Otiso (2020), who found that religion is crucial for immigrants, as it offers a platform for identity, support, and sharing.

Most of the responses of the participants in the present study, concerning the support that they had received from the church community, suggest that the spiritual programmes that were offered by the church gave them emotional strength to cope with their alienation and emotional difficulties associated with their immigration process. The beliefs and spiritual practices in which these immigrants engaged gave them a great deal of emotional support amid the pressures and alienation in the host country. It was evident from the responses that participation in spiritual activities like Holy Mass gave them mental strength and relieved tension. For instance, participant 1 stated that “every day we go to church for Holy Mass. As we go every day, it helps us to relieve our tension, stress, and everything.” The researcher feels that this may be mainly because the spiritual services like the Holy Mass are observed exactly in the same liturgical pattern unanimously followed by all the Syro Malabar Catholic Churches in Kerala. Since the Holy Mass in the church is conducted as per the liturgy (Syro Malabar

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Catholic rite) followed by the catholic church in Kerala, this seems to be a practice that is promoting the continuity of the culture and traditions of these immigrants from Kerala.

The social support that was received by the participants helped them not only to interact with their own community members but also to become involved in their new society. This finding rightly aligns with the words of Reimer et al. (2016), who found that congregations also play a crucial role in the settlement and integration of immigrants, offering spiritual support and networking opportunities.

The church offers both spiritual and non-spiritual programmes for the immigrants. Some of these are focussed on cultural maintenance. Others are focused on helping them to come closer to the wider community and thereby facilitating their social integration into Canadian society. Such programmes and efforts from the church act as a bridge between the new immigrants and the settled immigrants to mingle with each other. This interaction helps the new immigrants to become active members of their community and society in general, which in turn alleviate their alienation in their foreign land.

Both the advertised and non-advertised activities of the church are received by the members of the community as positive measures to enhance and assert their identity in their new environment. Along with providing help with respect to their social integration, as described by the majority of the participants, all the church programmes and activities helped them to remain close to their community which preserves their traditions and heritage. However, even though participants stated that the church activities aimed at facilitating their integration into the wider Canadian society, the researcher questions how far such efforts are able to meet the objective of integration, when the church also gives importance to activities and cultural celebrations whose main purpose is preserving the Kerala cultural identity. Although there is not an inherent contradiction between ancestral cultural maintenance and cultural integration into the new society, the two purposes are often in tension. For instance, as per the Christian

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tradition in Kerala, women and girls are expected to wear very modest dressing including a head veil when they attend religious services at the church whereas dressing is not a matter of concern in Canadian culture. So, there is the potential possibility for an inherent tension between these two cultures.

However, as per my observation, the church community in Halifax has not enforced nor encouraged any dress code in that matter, which gives the women members the permission to dress as per their discretion when they attend the services. The association with the church promotes the development of a dual identity. On the one hand, the programmes and activities of the church help the new immigrants of the community to understand Canadian culture and be a part of it. At the same time, the church attempts to preserve the cultural heritage of their community and home land through cultural celebrations and so on. For a new immigrant this is very helpful as it can help them feel less alienated as he/she is closely associating with a community which promotes Canadian culture along with preserving their heritage.

According to Chaze et al. (2015), moving to a new nation is a difficult endeavour, and new immigrants confront a variety of demands and obstacles as they adjust to their lives in the country. At the same time, migration sometimes involves leaving behind family, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, and other members of the same community, as well as social support networks (Chaze et al., 2015). The loss of a social and family network and economic difficulties following immigration contribute to the aggravation of migrants' mental health (Chaze et al., 2015). Migration, and the integration which follows after that, are very long processes which involve many stages that can be identified from the experiences shared by the participants. This supports the words of Murphy (2010), which state that instead of immigration being viewed as the final stage of the process of relocation, the acts of settlement and integration should be perceived as indispensable stages of an ongoing process, and that this will be different based on the needs and experiences of each individual. These stages also do

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not take a specific amount of time to complete. Thus, the ideal outcome of the process of settlement and integration is that both immigrants, as well as their children, will be able to participate and be respected, valued and useful in their host society. The words of participant 4 indicates the same, "...back in Kerala, I was only a catechism teacher, I had not gone into the administration of the church....Here in Canada, I am getting opportunities in many other areas of the church other than catechism. I was the parish president for one year and a member of the parish committee for three years. I am open to all kinds of religious activities here." The same participant continued to speak about the opportunities given to his children "My eldest daughter is part of the church choir here. She is also part of the altar servants. In Kerala, she was not part of that because girls are not allowed to be a part of altar servants." It underlines the fact that their association with the church community provided them with better participation, value, and acceptance. Here it can be observed that the inherent traditional practices of the church are broken in favour of the practices of the new country. Also the association with the church community also provided them with protection against the lifestyle of many modern women.

According to Bourdieu's social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986), an association with any community develops a solid social capital for immigrants in their new environment, which has a positive effect on the economic and cultural aspects of their lives. Therefore, the church community can also help in that regard. Social capital is based on relationships of mutual recognition and acquaintance, which can be formal or informal, and can be maintained through material or symbolic exchanges. The amount of social capital that an individual has depends on the size and quality of their social network and the resources possessed by each member of that network (Bourdieu, 1986). The benefits of social capital include solidarity and access to useful relationships and services (Bourdieu, 1986). The association of new immigrants with the existing members of the church community helps them in many ways, from gaining awareness regarding their new culture to receiving financial assistance, employment support

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and guidance. Moreover, the association and interaction with the existing members of the church also help in transitioning new immigrants from traditional practices to those practices that are part of the host country.

The researcher was able to see that the above-mentioned benefits of social capital are met by the association of these immigrants with their church from traditional practices to material and social support. From the responses of the participants, two out of six participants had directly contacted the parish priest and the rest of them had contacted individual members of the church, to get connected with the church community. They mentioned how this acquaintance helped them in getting useful information and assistance in many ways, such as assistance in finding employment, accommodation support and the like. Based on Bourdieu's social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986), it is clear that the new immigrants also sought out their respective communities for the social support, employment opportunities, material and financial assistance, especially during the first phase of their immigration.

Regarding religious rituals and meetings for the younger parishioners, respondents mentioned how their children participated in catechism and pious association activities along with summer faith camp, counselling, and guidance sessions, which these participants said helped their children in their character development and positive behavioural change. Participant 3 recalls "Regarding our children, they were really confused when they migrated to Canada. This church is providing lots of activities like catechism, and pious association activities which play an important role for the formation of faith.... After starting their catechism and pious association activities, they changed for the better in their behaviour with others. They started to express themselves without any hesitation" (p 1, 3).

For the unity and strengthening of families, prayer meetings are conducted in family units. Mathruvedhi, Pithruvedhi and other organisations such as SMYM, and so on also provide opportunities for the participation of the members in the church activities. Participants were

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aware of the time and date of these services from the official website of the church. Even though Canadian organisations like Knights of Columbus have limited contact with the church members, their financial support for the church activities are helpful. However their activities (collecting food for Feed Nova Scotia) fall short of actively promoting the involvement of church members with people in the wider community.

Participants also mentioned about the availability of financial support from the church for their members in need, even though the church does not advertise such financial support on its website or social media groups. This was a very beneficial service from the church to its members especially for newcomers as reported by more than one participant. For instance, Participant 4 notes “Some kind of financial support is also provided to the members on need”. Participant 1 also said the same “Church offers financial support for the members if they are in need of it”. Immigration often involves financial difficulties, and setting up a home along with finding a job in a new country is a strenuous affair, in terms of finances. Therefore, during the initial stages of settlement, getting financial aid from the community is of great value for new immigrant families. According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) children’s development will also be affected by their parent’s economic situation. Therefore, helping a new migrant family with young children and who are facing financial difficulty is also helpful in ensuring the well-being of these children.

Moreover, the church also provides different types of material supports for immigrants, which are very beneficial for new immigrants. Groceries and winter clothes are some of the items that were pointed out by the participants that are provided by the church. During the initial phase of immigration, the immigrants needed various materials and items, some of which are expensive for them to afford, as a newcomer. During these difficult times, the help which they receive from an institution in their own community is of tremendous value.

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Many of the participants also mentioned that they had received support in enhancing their career and employment opportunities. They received job reference and guidance regarding the employment opportunities by interacting with their community members at the church. For an immigrant who is a newcomer, getting an appropriate job in the new country is a difficult process, not only because of the high unemployment rate but also owing to their lack of knowledge about how to enter the Canadian job market. This can be helped to a certain extent with the proper guidance from people who know about their respective fields. In this regard, the help a new immigrant receives from the already settled immigrant members of the community is valuable. This may include job references, assistance in the preparations of a curriculum vitae in the Canadian style, and information about job vacancies. As noted by participant 4 ‘new families get time to talk to the families here regarding their job search. For example, if somebody is looking for a job, or if somebody is working in a particular field where they are professionals, they can talk to each other and maybe a job vacancy would be there.’

The church also has many subgroups for different age groups which operate both online and offline. The groups like SMYM (Syro Malabar Youth Movement) runs a WhatsApp group which was spoken about highly by most of the participants (personal communication, June 30, 2023). Through such online groups, the members help newcomers with assistance regarding housing support, including arranging required furniture and moving from one place to another and so on. This is highly valuable in a foreign country, for the troubles associated with the new immigrant families upon arrival. As mentioned by participant 2

“There is a WhatsApp group for our community run by SMYM members, where the newcomers can join and can get any kind of help from that group, like if you need help with a ride or in need of any material support like furniture, winter clothes and so on. The group has helped me especially with the setting up of my home and so on” (personal communication, June 30, 2023).

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As noted by all of the participants, the church offers many opportunities and programmes to strengthen family relationships of the members. Other than prayer meetings and annual retreat, the church also facilitates the involvement of the parents in organisations like Mathruvedhi and Pithruvedhi. All of these activities with special mention to the annual family retreat help the families to strengthen their bonds as noted by participants 1 and 5. Participant 1 said:

“Once in a year, the church conducts retreat for the adults. Through receiving that kind of programmes, it was really a good thing to improve our family relationships because the thoughts we received from the retreat were really inspiring”.

For a migrant who leaves his roots and home country behind and moves to an entirely new environment, the feeling of loss and alienation is natural. In such situations, the support and security that are provided by the family are priceless. Hence, the spiritual and non-spiritual programmes provided by the church to keep the family relationships intact are very important. In addition to this, another participant said that the association of their children with church activities and their interactions with peer groups of community members at the church is positively influencing the character development of these children. For instance, as noted by Participant 2

The one thing that I would say is the LGBTQ community and the queer rights. My children were not exposed to that kind of things. In the church, they were given proper guidance and classes in regard. Due to the guidance and classes from the church, my kids understand that how they are different from them when they are mingling with such community members. This was a great help for my children to know the new culture and system. This in turn, brings out a positive family atmosphere.

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As per Bronfenbrenner's theory (1977), when analysing a child's growth, it was vital to consider both the interaction between the child and their immediate environment including the church, as well as his and her family's interaction with the wider world. For an immigrant believer who observes the church practices religiously, his/her children also become involved in the church activities, which makes the church community a part of their immediate environment. Along with this, family unit meetings, coffee and snacks time, and participation in spiritual services and cultural celebrations like Onam were noted by the participants as being valuable in promoting social interactions with other members and helpful in mitigating negative feelings arising from immigration. Hence, the opinions of all the participants were that their association with the church community has not hindered their integration into Canadian society but has instead helped them in multiple ways.

In this regard, however, it is worth noting that the church community attempts to facilitate the process of integration of parishioners in Canadian society by celebrating both Kerala's cultural celebrations, as well as Canadian national celebrations for which the natives of the host country are invited to take part. Yet, as participant 4 noted, these migrants are not normally invited by the surrounding community to the latter's homes or celebrations. This lack of reciprocity generates a feeling that the level of effort that is put in by the immigrants in this regard is not being reciprocated by the wider Canadian community. The consequences of this reluctance may result in a slowing the integration process of the migrant community into the Canadian society irrespective of the positive efforts from the church community. However, this may be due to the reservations in the minds of the native Canadians that the church community is attempting to preserve their own cultural identity, even after their immigration, especially because of some practices and programmes which seem to emphasise cultural celebrations of Kerala.

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Overall, the participants were very positive and spoke highly about the church community and the organised way in which it offers different spiritual and non-spiritual services. Participating in the programmes and activities of the church provides opportunities for the members to integrate into Canadian society. As rightly stated by Wang and Handy (2013), churches and religious institutions provide opportunities for immigrants to participate in activities, which call for social interactions and community engagements through voluntary groups and participation in these groups; this is essential to an immigrant's integration into a host country. Therefore, there is a possibility of tensions between practices and programmes of the church to preserve cultural heritage of Kerala and the programmes to improve integration into Canadian society. For instance, celebrations like Onam (traditional festival of Kerala) aim at preserving and continuing the heritage of Kerala. This might lead to conflicting objectives and tensions between two cultures.

However, the researcher noticed that other than the main religious services like Holy Mass, Eucharistic adoration, Novena, and catechism, most of the other spiritual and non-spiritual programmes are not listed either in the official website of the church or in social media sites. This makes it difficult and confusing for the members, especially the new members to have a clear awareness or understanding about all the programmes and opportunities that are provided by the church. This may not be that helpful to many new participants, as not all of them may be spending time interacting with other members. This may take away their opportunity to avail themselves of the benefits of such programmes and assistance.

In addition, most of the participants found coffee time and mealtime as the most beneficial among all the activities that were offered by the church. Paradoxically, these events are also not mentioned in the church website, or in social media. In addition, as already discussed above, the available material and financial support from the church for needy members are also not

listed anywhere officially. This might make these opportunities less known and available for new members.

Limitations of the study

Analysing these results and findings helped to develop an overview of how an association with their church community can help parishioners from this Kerala church in their process of integration. However, the findings from this study are also subject to certain limitations.

Firstly, official statistics or records for Kerala immigrant families in Canada were not readily available, which necessitated the reliance on gathering information on fundamental demographics, such as population numbers, from secondary sources. Secondly, some aspects of the lives of these participants, such as family conflicts, mental health challenges, or experiences of discrimination, might have been considered by these to be sensitive topics. Participants could have been hesitant to discuss these matters openly, thus impacting the depth and accuracy of the collected data. Thirdly, the qualitative nature of the study, as well as the limited size of the sample, made it impossible to thoroughly explore the larger contextual elements that might affect family dynamics and integration of these immigrants. Immigrants' experiences can be strongly influenced by socioeconomic factors, their legal status, community support, and their historical contexts. Moreover, there is only one Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax. In this regard, a quantitative study on immigrants from Kerala in Canada might provide a clearer picture of how this particular group of immigrants is integrating into Canadian society.

Conclusion

The experience of a new immigrant in a foreign land is a complex journey filled with challenges and difficulties. This research targeted immigrants who migrated from Kerala, India to Canada in the last six months to seven years with young children aged between 4 to 12. It focused on participants who belonged to the Syro Malabar Catholic Community in Halifax and studied how the Holy Family Syro Malabar Catholic Church in Halifax assisted their integration into Canadian society. The researcher attempted to address two questions namely, how does the Kerala Catholic Church in Halifax, Nova Scotia support the Christian immigrants and what are the roles their religious rituals and practices play in the integration of Kerala Christian families and their young children into Canadian society.

For the successful completion of the study the researcher depended on a content analysis of the church website and social media posts, first-hand information through personal interviews and secondary data available from various sources related to the subject of the study.

An immigrant might face the feelings of isolation and homesickness as they leave the comfort of their home country and the support of family and friends. Adapting to a new way of life in the host country requires learning and adjusting to local customs, social dynamics, and work environments. There are difficulties in finding accommodation, suitable employment, and accessing essential services. Moreover, the young children of the migrant families also face problems upon immigration, as they are in the growing period where their character and personality are moulded. In this phase, the support from their community members is of tremendous significance. This can not only alleviate the sense of alienation but also ensure a faster integration into the new environment.

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Religious organizations play a significant role in facilitating the integration of immigrants into Canadian society, and this has successfully been shown by the Syro Malabar Catholic Church community in Halifax under the Holy Family Syro Malabar Catholic Church.

Even though there exist organisations in Halifax, like ISANS and YMCA, which provide settlement services for the sake of new immigrants, most of these organizations are not aware of the programs that are provided by this church. This is an observation made by the researcher from her own personal experience, as a new immigrant with young children who also belongs to the same church community. This unfortunate situation can be remedied by a more effective and greater communication between the church and organisations like ISANS as the church would be one of the most viable sources to connect with the new Catholic immigrants from Kerala. Without the absence of a coordinated effort from the church and settlement organisations, the expected outcomes of such operations may not be met.

Also, in terms of financial support, the church cannot provide huge financial assistance to its members as it is a growing community with fewer financial resources. However, to a great extent, the interaction with church community members most likely provide new immigrants with all kinds of valuable information related to their integration during the initial phase of their immigration. The researcher feels that since the church faces financial challenges as it is in the developmental phase, government support to the church would be able to make the efforts of the church in the settlement of the immigrants in the community more fruitful.

Through the participation in church activities, immigrants build relationships with locals, improve their employment, and career opportunities and gain a better understanding of Canadian culture and customs from the already settled members of the community. However, even though all the participants agreed that their association with the church only helped their integration process, the researcher observed that members of the community find the

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association with the church also as a source to satisfy their longing to maintain their cultural heritage. This may lead to tensions between practices that are meant to maintain the traditional culture and those that are meant to promote integration into Canadian cultural practices. Overall, the church community provided a welcoming and inclusive environment that helps newcomers feel accepted and valued, making the process of integration smoother and more successful.

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Appendix A

Interview questions to participants:

1. How long have you been living in Canada.?
2. How old are you?
3. How many children do you have?
4. What are their ages?
5. Were you an active member of a religious organization, before your immigration to Canada?
6. How did you become involved in the activities of the Syro Malabar Church in Halifax?
7. Describe the kinds of activities that are provided from this church, for your family members?
 - a. Describe the kinds of activities that are specifically provided for your child/children?
8. Can you explain how often religious meetings and rituals are offered? (For example: Mass, etc.)
 - a. What kinds of religious activities (if any) are provided by the church for children or youth? (For example: Catechism for children, etc.)
9. What types of financial support (if any) has your family received from the church?
10. What types of help in finding accommodation or housing support (if any) has your family received from the church?
11. What types of material support (if any) has your family received from the church for such things as groceries, winter clothes, and school material for children?
12. What types of support has your church provided, to help you to integrate socially (ex. events such as coffee socials, mealtimes, etc)?

Religion and Immigration

13. Besides social, financial, and spiritual accommodations, has your religious institution provided you with any other kind of support?
 - a. For example, have you ever received any kind of support from your religious community to improve your employment opportunities?
 - b. Similarly, have you ever received any kind of support from your religious community to improve your family relationship?
14. What kind of church activities or practices have helped you to mitigate the any negative feelings which you might have experienced in the new environment?
15. Through the participation in the religious activities and programs did you happen to make better socialization with the Canadian community? If yes, please specify?
16. Describe to me how your religious rituals and practices have helped or hindered your integration into Canadian society?
 - a. How have these religious rituals and practices affected your children's ability to integrate into Canadian society?
17. Have you ever taken part in the cultural celebrations of your home country after immigration? Could you please share your experience briefly?
18. How would you describe your participation in spiritual activities after your immigration?
19. How have social gatherings and programs in your church helped your children in the process of cultural transition to the host country?
20. In your opinion, what is the activity that your church provides, that has helped your family the most with integration?
21. Describe any instance where your social connections with the people in this parish community helped you to integrate into Canadian society?

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22. Given that your church is predominantly composed of people from Kerala, do you feel that the church has helped, or hindered, your integration into the wider Canadian society?
23. Is there any other aspect of your participation in the Syro Malabar Church in Halifax, that has helped you to integrate, but that I have not mentioned?

Appendix B

Request to Access Church Members

Dear Father,

I am Jeema Thomas, a graduate student in the Department of Child and Youth Study, Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of the requirements for completing a Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study, I must conduct an original research study on a particular topic, and I have decided to focus on Religion and Immigration: Exploring the role of the religious institution in integrating Kerala Christian young immigrants in Canada. As a part of this research, I will interview three men and three women belonging to six different families who are immigrated from Kerala with their families including young children between the last six months to seven years. Also, they must be fluent in English and regular attendees (at least twice a month) of the Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Through this e-mail, I am seeking your permission and assistance in recruiting prospective participants meeting the above-mentioned conditions, and those who will be willing to express their experiences and opinions on the role of religious institutions in promoting their integration into a new society. This session will take place online or in person format and will last between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio-recorded to improve data accuracy and significant efforts will be made to keep their information as confidential as possible.

I am asking your assistance in recruiting participants for the interview, whom you feel may be suitable and interested in participating in my study. I would ask that you pass my contact information to those members of your congregation whom you feel may meet the requirements of this study.

Religion and Immigration

They may contact me directly at Jeema.thomas5@msvu.ca or XXX-XXX-XXXX. My research supervisor, Dr Fernando Nunes, can also be contacted at fernando.nunes@msvu.ca. or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

This research has been reviewed by the Ethics Review Board of Mount Saint Vincent University and conforms to the standards of the guidelines of the Canadian Tri-Council on Research Ethics.

I look forward to your favourable response.

Thank you,

Jeema Thomas

Appendix C



Letter of Consent

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Jeema Thomas, a graduate student in the Department of Child and Youth Study, Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of the requirements for completing a Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study, I must conduct original research on a particular topic. I have decided to focus on the role that is played by the Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Halifax, Nova Scotia in integrating new and young immigrants (aged between 4 years to 12 years) in Canada. As a part of this research, I will interview you, on your experiences in this church, which may have impacted your religious practices, sense of identity and the way in which you and your children have integrated into this country. You must be fluent in English to participate in this interview. I will be asking you questions about your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions about the role of this religious institution in fostering integration into your new society. This session will be conducted face to face, or online, through Skype, based on your convenience, and will last between 45 to 60 minutes. You will receive a Sobeys gift card for the amount of \$15.00 as gratitude for your participation. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into a written form to ensure data accuracy and the recordings will be safely kept in a password protected cloud storage. The results will be transmitted in the final thesis, and you can withdraw from the research up to three weeks after the interview. The data from this interview will appear in my final thesis and may also be disseminated in a future conference presentation and possibly a future scholarly article, arising from the thesis.

Religion and Immigration

Your confidentiality will be maintained to the fullest extent possible. Your identity will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research (you will be given a pseudonym). No part of the final data arising from this research will provide any identifying information. In addition, all information that you supply during the interview will also remain confidential and any details that you provide which may be used to identify you will be altered. Unfortunately, given the limited size of the community in this Church, it will be impossible to completely guarantee your anonymity.

The transcripts and recordings from this interview will be safely stored in a password-protected computer. Only I, the Principal Researcher and my Thesis Supervisor will have access to this information. Furthermore, all recordings and transcripts of interviews will be destroyed five years after the end of this study.

I do not foresee expect any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you are not required to answer any question which you do not want to answer. In addition, your participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw freely from this study up to three weeks after the interview and your data will be removed. Furthermore, you will receive a small gift in return to your participation.

If you have questions or comments regarding this study, please contact my Supervisor, Dr. Fernando Nunes, Department of Child and Youth Study, Mount Saint Vincent University at fernando.nunes@msvu.ca, or at (902) 457-6424.

This research has been reviewed by the Ethics Review Board of Mount Saint Vincent University and confirms to the standards of the guidelines of the Canadian Tri-Council on Research Ethics. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have complaints or concerns about this research, you may contact my Supervisor Dr.

Religion and Immigration

Fernando Nunes, at Fernando.nunes@msvu.ca , or 902-457-6424, or Brenda Gagne, Research Ethics Coordinator, at Brenda.gagne@msvu.ca or 902-457-6350.

I, have read and understood the above description of this current research project and I am willing to participate and to have my interview audio recorded.

Interviewee's Signature Date.....

Interviewer's Name

Interviewer's Signature..... Date.....

Appendix D

Details for Mental Health Support


This research may pose a slight risk of triggering negative emotions, if immigrants recall difficult experiences. In the event that participants experience distress while their interview, the researcher will pause the data collection and direct them for mental health support. The supporting agencies are as follows.

1. Good2Talk 833 292 3698
2. Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team 902 429 8167
3. ISANS 902 423 3607

Appendix E

**PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS**
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE 2022



Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Jeema Thomas

*successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on
the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research
Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)*

Certificate # 0000864182 **4 October, 2022**

Appendix F



University Research Ethics Board (UREB)

Certificate of Research Ethics Clearance

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clearance	<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Data Clearance	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> Modification	<input type="checkbox"/> Change to Study Personnel
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Effective Date	June 13, 2023	Expiry Date	June 12, 2024
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File #:	2022-285
Title of project:	Religion and Immigration: Exploring the role of the religious institution in the integration of Kerala Christian young immigrants in Canada.
Researcher(s):	Jeema Thomas
Supervisor (if applicable):	Fernando Nunes
Co-Investigators:	n/a
Version :	1

The University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has reviewed the above-named research proposal and confirms that it respects the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and Mount Saint Vincent University’s policies, procedures and guidelines regarding the ethics of research involving human participants. This certificate of research ethics clearance is valid for a period of **one year** from the date of issue.

Researchers are reminded of the following requirements:	
Modification to Protocol	Any changes to approved protocol must be reviewed <u>and</u> approved by the UREB prior to their implementation. Form: REB.FORM.002 Info: REB.SOP.404 Policy: REB.POL.003
Changes to Research Personnel	Any changes to approved persons with access to research data must be reported to the UREB immediately. Form: REB.FORM.002 Info: REB.SOP.404 Policy: REB.POL.003
Annual Renewal	Annual renewals are contingent upon an annual report submitted to the UREB prior to the expiry date as listed above. You may renew up to four times, at which point the file must be closed and a new application submitted for review. Form: REB.FORM.003 Info: REB.SOP.405 Policy: REB.POL.003