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# People of Sri Lanka

*"Sri Lankan" - our Identity*



*"Diversity" - our Strength*

**Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue  
and Official Languages**

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“Diversity” - Our Strength

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### **Message from the Hon. President**

**H**uman being is a beautiful manifestation of unity within diversity. It is the extraordinary capacity of the human being to transcend individualism to embrace the values of greater good of humanity, that paved the way for many victories in the long journey of the human evolution.

A country can reach its true potential, when its masses set themselves to accomplish a collective dream. The reality that some may not comprehend is that a country, where its citizens try remain in division and disregard their neighbours, will itself be an isolated land.

We will reap the bountiful harvest of reconciliation and equity, when we sow the seeds of coexistence with a perceptive mind and an inclusive vision.

It should be our life pledge to uphold and build equality among all citizens in our Motherland,

where they live with mutual respect and trust, fostering fairness for all.

All our endeavors aim at achieving those noble objectives. It should be our life pledge to uphold and achieve equity and inclusivity among all citizens in our Motherland.

For this purpose, publishing relevant research is an appreciable task. I commend all the intellectuals who contributed, and the Minister of National Co-existence, Dialogue and Official Languages and the staff of the Ministry for undertaking this noble task.

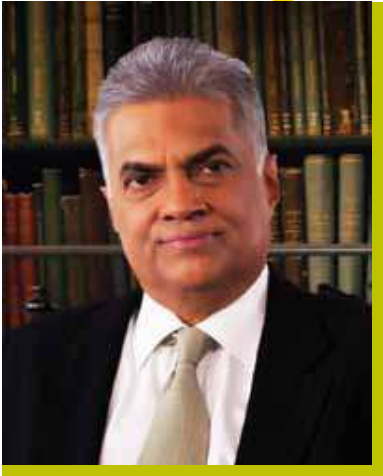
**Maithripala Sirisena**

President

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka







### **Message from the Hon. Prime Minister**

As a nation committed to sustainable principles of social, economic, political and developmental mechanisms, the government has undertaken a commendable effort of nation building, one that has been recognised by the international community and feted globally for its capacity to include all Sri Lankans.

Our future lies in our indentity as a multi-religious, multi-ethnic nation that recognizes the right of all communities to exist in peace and harmony. It would also enable us to face the future with confidence and with a greater sense of awareness.

We have the obligation to set the stage for a nation that acknowledges the heritage of all of its people ; the compilation of a research volume that includes the information pertaining to all Sri Lankans, depicting their uniqueness and diversity

yet united on one strand as one nation, is therefore a task that must be commendable indeed.

I am grateful to the Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages for its commitment to this significant endeavour. All Sri Lankans, from school children to students of higher education, would benefit from a documentation such as this that outlines the heritage of all Sri Lankans on an equal footing.

It is my wish that this would be the beginning of a journey of self-discovery for a multi-diverse nation that Sri Lanka is. May it stir our hearts to discover our distinctive legacy afresh.

**Ranil Wickremesinghe**

Prime Minister

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka







## Message from the Hon. Minister

I have a dream. It is the Srilankan Dream.

*“SRILANKAN, our identity; DIVERSITY, our strength”* is the dictum of my Srilankan dream. This dream demands that we Srilankans need to understand each other and recognize the diverse nature of our society to start building the Srilankan nation.

Roger Ebert said that *“Parents and schools should place great emphasis on the idea that it is all right to be different. Racism and all the other ‘isms’ grow from primitive tribalism, the instinctive hostility against those of another tribe, race, religion, nationality, class or whatever. You are a lucky child if your parents taught you to accept diversity”*. Max de Pree said that *“We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion”*.

Father of our nation prime minister D.S. Senanayake, when addressing the nation on 1948 February 10th from the independence square said that *“our country is made of numerous linguistic,*

*ethnic and religious communities. We have to get the best out of all, blend and march forward as a nation and reach the world communities”*.

It’s our own wonderful very local statement of diversity. But somewhere along the road, we missed direction given by the father of the nation and picked the line of isolation from each other’s ethnic, religious and linguistic identities in Sri Lanka. We permitted our children to grow in an environment that considered the diverse nature as rivalry and weakness. We also started looking at the world communities with annoyance.

Today, we have learned from our past mistakes. We consider our colorful diverse nature not as weakness but our great strength. We have started looking at the world communities as our friends and contributors to our successes.

This book is the formal beginning of the learning process of own diverse nature. As the minister of national coexistence dialogue and official languages, I am considering this endeavor as an act of dialogue between communities and identities of Sri Lanka, in-line with my mandate. This is the first time that a book of this kind is

published gathering together social, cultural, economic and other information of all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka including the low-density ethnic groups as well. In publication of this book, my ministry worked with the motive of fulfilling a national task and it will broaden the people's understanding much needed for ensuring equality and mutual respect towards all communities living in the country. This book will also pave the way for conservation, appreciation and fostering of this diversity and giving the international community and understanding of the diverse communities living in Sri Lanka.

I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all eminent writers, staff of my ministry, the UNDP-SELAJSI who provided the logistical support and all who dedicated themselves towards publication of this remarkable book.

## **Mano Ganesan**

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### **Message from the Secretary**

It is with much pleasure the Ministry of National Co-existence, Dialogue & Official Languages (MNCDOOL) has launched “People of Sri Lanka” publication compiling highly informative articles encompassing many aspects of Sri Lankan Ethnic groups, their identity, their contribution towards national development and most importantly their binding enthusiasm for social integration and co-existence.

The publication is a testimony to the unreserved commitment and untiring efforts of the Hon. Minister Mano Ganesan for fostering a culture of peaceful co-existence in all sections of the Sri Lankan society. With his visionary approach and guidance this exercise became a success as the first ever national effort in search of Sri Lankan ethnic groups and their diversity.

The recently released report of the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues on her mission to Sri Lanka in January 2017 has referred to “lack of detailed information available regarding the situation of smaller minorities”. This publication contains ample evidence that this fact does not fully reflect the reality on the ground and that the

Government of Sri Lanka has not unattended or neglected this particular responsibility.

I take this opportunity to commend the untiring efforts of the editorial board of the Publication, namely Professors Malani Endagama, S.Pathmanathan, Tudor Silva and Dr.B.A. Hussainmiya for accomplishing this timely needed task under the close supervision of former Secretary, Mr. Vajira Narampanawa.

I also wish to recognize with sincere appreciation, the sponsors of the publication, the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP’s) – Strengthening Enforcement of Law Access to Justice and Social Integration (SELAJSI) Project.

My sincere thanks also go to the associations of the respective ethnic groups, officials of the MNCDOOL for their valued inputs and support extended for making this publication a reality.

**Ranjith Uyangoda**

Secretary  
Ministry of National Coexistence,  
Dialogue and Official Languages





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# Introduction

This volume is a compilation of articles on the communities living in Sri Lanka. Some of them are large with a history of over a period of 2500 years while many of the small communities are of recent origin. All of them have a passionate attachment to their respective cultural identities while at the same time they have identified strongly with the community of their domicile. Patriotism as an emotive experience and feeling cannot be considered as a monopoly of any one of these segments of the population.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of the Sri Lankan populations is a deeply rooted history. Presently, Sri Lanka is the home of not less than twenty ethnic groups. Some of them are too small and in political affairs they have no influence as they cannot secure representation in parliament or the provincial councils. Nevertheless, they have contributed to the diversity of Sri Lankan society and to the economic and cultural developments in varying degrees. Their existence is seldom known here and abroad except in the case of sociologists and academics. A peasant from Maho of Karativu may not be aware of Sindhis, Parsis or even Malays because they are settled only in Colombo and their presence beyond that metropolis is rather insignificant. Even in school text books on history there are no references to them. Every citizen in this country should be aware of the multi ethnic and multicultural character of the Sri Lankan society. Such awareness is of vital importance in promoting and sustaining the values of tolerance and harmony.

The government of Sri Lanka, have accepted the historical and demographic reality of diversity in Sri Lankan society and have declared their avowed objective of promoting

peace and harmony among diverse communities on the principles of co-existence and human rights. Such an approach is of vital importance for the preservation and development of a united Sri Lankan nation on the basis of democratic values and traditions.

The geographical location of Sri Lanka and historical processes have contributed to her ethnic and cultural diversity. The proximity to India and its location in the center of Indian Ocean, which was a point of convergence of the routes of international sea borne trade, had a decisive influence on Sri Lankan history, society and culture. Sri Lanka and South India formed a single trading unit that was one of the three such major units in South Asia since the Proto Historic Period. The first four of the largest communities, the Sinhalese, the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Muslims and the Tamils of Indian origin were deeply rooted in the close interaction between the two countries of South Asia, India and Sri Lanka. The Prakrit language that was adopted by the elite because of the spread of Buddhism had a dominant influence in the development of the Sinhalese language, which is presently spoken by approximately 74% of the population.

It is seldom realized that the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils have a close kinship connection similar to that between the Franks of ancient Gaul and the Allimanni who occupied the lands east of the river Rhine. As explained elsewhere in this volume, the ancestors of the Sinhalese and Tamils had their origins in the intermixture of the peoples of the Mesolithic and Early Iron Age (Megalithic) cultures. They are differentiated by the languages they speak. Sinhalese is derived from Prakrit of the Magadhan variety that had spread among the Yakkhas and Nagas,

principally after the introduction of Buddhism in the third century B.C. The entire range of early Buddhist literature was in Prakrit. Selections from this corpus were read and then explained to the audiences with commentaries by monks. Prakrit, which became a link language, displaced the languages that were spoken in the Island before the introduction of Buddhism, over a major part of the island.

Sri Lanka occupies a unique position in the history of Buddhism. It was here that Buddhism in its ancient form was preserved with an unbroken continuity with the support of dynastic power. The Mahavihara, which was established by Thera Mahinda with the support of King Devanampiya Tissa, had an unbroken continuity. Yet the flow of innovative ideas from India led to a split in the Monastic organization.

The Sanghabedha that occurred in the reign of Vatthagamani Abhaya eventually led to the formation of three Nikayas or schools with vast establishments. The entire range of early Buddhist literature was preserved here as an oral tradition and later committed to writing on palm-leaves. This is said to have been accomplished in the reign of Vatthagamani Abhaya. The Sri Lankan monasteries were vast complexes with many component parts : the Sangharama or abode of monks, the Cetiya or temple of worship, the Bodhanaghara or preaching halls and libraries containing manuscripts. As early Buddhism lost grounds in India because of political upheavals, disunity in the Sangha on matters of doctrine and discipline and the rise of Mahayana the monasteries of Sri Lanka gained a reputation in the Buddhist world as the center of learning. The large commentarial literature on the Tripitaka by the renowned scholars of the caliber of Buddhadatta and

Buddhaghosha were based on the Sri Lankan monastic tradition. Close relations were established with the Sri Lankan monasteries and those of China and Southeast Asia. Fa-Hsien's visit to Anuradhapura in early years of the Fifth century is in many ways a landmark in the history of such development. He stayed at Anuradhapura for two years, visited the monasteries of all sects, studied and copied manuscripts and acquired samples of miniature images which he had taken home on his return journey. The greatest achievement of the monastic order of Anuradhapura was the Mahavamsa, a chronicle of dynastic history, which is unique as a work of its kind in the whole of South and Southeast Asia.

Buddhism was the source of inspiration for remarkable developments in art and architecture. Some of the temples such as the Jethavanarama of Mahasena, the Thuparama and the Lankathilaka are of stupendous proportions. The port of Sigiriya is a remarkable feat of architectural engineering. The frescoes there are of a standard of excellence. Sigiriya was occupied by King Kassapa I.

Irrigation technology was another area in which the Sinhalese monarchies achieved spectacular developments. It was based on the foundations laid by the Nagas in the early Historic period and developed in gradual stages. The Parakramasamudra created by Parakramabahu in Polonnaruwa is reckoned as the second largest reservoir in the world in pre-modern times.

Since the introduction of territorially based representative government, the Sinhalese have secured a position of predominance in the government and administration of the whole island. In the days of the monarchy government

was conducted through a hierarchy of chieftains some of whom were Tamils. The king's outlook transcended ethnic and sectarian barriers. In that set up there was peace and harmony, co-existence and a measure of partnership among the two major communities.

The areas of Tamil habitation were mainly confined to the Northern and Eastern provinces until the 19th century when professionally qualified persons and traders moved out to Colombo and other towns in the South because of employment opportunities and the development of the plantation economy. In the Proto Historic period the Tamil speaking Nagas had ended the stone age and introduced a mode of production that provided the basis of a civilization that was characteristic of Sri Lanka. They cleared the jungles, created fields and gardens for cultivation and laid the foundations for the development of art and architecture.

It is also noteworthy that some of their archeological monuments are located along the banks of some tanks.

In ancient times the Tamils had a major share in trade between Sri Lanka and South India. The chiefdoms established by the Nagas had a long and continuous history until the period of British occupation. In the 13th century they were designated as Vanniyar. In the Eastern littoral they had steadfastly fought against the Portuguese and the Dutch on behalf of the King of Kandy.

In the Early Historic period the Tamils had played a leading role in promoting the cause of Buddhism. There are a large number of Buddhist monuments bearing Tamil inscriptions. Besides, they also introduced and developed

Saivism and the oldest and reputed Saiva temples were established in the Early Historic period. Hinduism had co-existed with Buddhism and exerted a strong influence on kingship and the culture of the royal court over a long period of 2000 years until recently there was a special relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Muslims and the Tamils of Indian origin also speak the Tamil language. Traditionally, the Muslims were associated with trade and commerce. There is a remarkable diversity of the origin of the Muslims. There are epigraphic notices on the settlement of Muslim Arabs in the Colombo during the eighth and ninth centuries. The second stage in the activities of Muslims is associated with the Persian traders. In the 13th century they were overwhelmed by the "Coastal Moors" from South who secured a monopoly of the internal trade and that between South India and Sri Lanka. The origin of the Coastal Moors could be traced from Kayalpattinam, Quilon and Calicut.

When the Portuguese arrived here in 1505 they found that the Muslims were in control of the island's trade and had a monopoly of the Cinnamon trade. Therefore, the Portuguese activities initially directed against the Muslims. On the insistence of the Portuguese conquistadors, King Bhuwanekabahu VII expelled the coastal Moors from his kingdom. Nevertheless, they moved out and settled in the land of Sri Lanka and Kandy. At this time there were Muslim settlements of considerable size in the coastal towns in the Eastern littoral where a considerable number of the natives were converted to Islam. There was a similar phenomenon on the northwestern coast.

Under the Dutch government the relationship with the

Muslims alternated between open hostility and tolerance. Under the first two colonial powers, despite severe restrictions and adverse circumstances the Muslims maintained their hold over the trade between South India and Sri Lanka. Under the British all restrictions against Muslims were withdrawn and they carried on their mercantile enterprises with a high degree of success. Because of their, conservative ways the Muslims could not take advantage of the avenues for change and modernization. During the early 19th century, the Protestant missionaries were the pioneers of English education but the Muslims had refrained from sending their children to Christian schools. There is no record of the conversion of even a single Muslim to Christianity in the island. In the late 19th century, because of attitudinal changes within the Muslim community there was a steady progress in education. Wealthy and influential Muslims established schools and colleges where instruction was provided in the English medium. In the last quarter of the 20th century, the Muslims were no longer a community of traders. The establishment of state trading co-operation some decades earlier had led to an erosion of the Muslim monopoly of trade within the country. Nowadays, a large proportion of them are in the professions and others are employed in the public and private sectors.

There is among the Muslims a strong tendency to identify themselves with West Asia although they are a South Asian society and such an attitude has the prospect of provoking hostility of non-Muslim communities.

Compared to other major communities the Tamils of Indian descent had a recent origin. The bulk of them are the descendants of plantation workers brought from South

India on indentured labour. The process began with the opening up of Coffee and later Tea plantations. They were paid low wages and settled in lines which had no minimal facilities for a decent living.

Under the Donoughmore Reforms they were conferred civil and voting rights. At the general elections of 1947, the Indian Workers Congress had secured seven seats. In many other electorates the L.S.S.P. candidates had won with the support of plantation workers. However, the U.N.P. government under D.S. Senanayake passed the Indian and Pakistani citizenship bills in Parliament. The conditions for eligibility were so stringent that the workers could not meet them. They were consequently classified as a stateless people. Further the Sirimavo – Shastri pact made provisions for the repatriation of about 50% of workers. Later, S.Thondaman, the C.W.C. leader with sagacity negotiated with the government to obtain citizenship to all those who remained in the island. C.W.C. was in a position to bargain for ministerial positions and increased representation under every successive government under the Executive Presidency. There was a middle class of businessmen and other entrepreneurs among the persons of Indian origin who had managed to survive in the towns of the hill country despite emigrations after the riots of 1977 and 1983. There is considerable progress in education and nowadays the youth in the plantations have no inclination to work in the estates. Substantial proportions are employed in the in the public and private sectors in Colombo and elsewhere. The people of Indian origin have identified themselves with Sri Lanka.

The Burghers are of two categories: Portuguese Burghers and Dutch Burghers. There are marked differences

between the two groups. The language they speak and the religion they profess are different. The ancestry of the Portuguese Burghers could be traced from a mixture of Portuguese and natives. They are mostly Roman Catholics. In Batticaloa where there is a substantial number of Portuguese Burghers they speak in Creole at home. The children are educated in Tamil and most of their parents could communicate in English.

The Dutch Burghers are of European descent. Their descent could be traced from the Dutch settlers who opted to remain in the island after the Dutch possessions were handed over to the British during the Napoleonic wars in Europe. They soon adopted English as the language of education. And because of that reason the Dutch Burghers developed as the most advanced community. They held key positions in the professions, particularly in law and medicine. It may not be an exaggeration to say that they laid the foundation for the development of the health and transport services. The Dutch Burghers have mostly migrated to Australia and other countries in stages during the past sixty years. Nowadays, they are not seen in busses and trains or universities. It is sad to reflect on decline of this enterprising community which has contributed to the development and modernization of Sri Lanka, far out of proportion to its numerical strength. The Malays who have a history of nearly four hundred years in this country attract our attention because of other reasons. Their cuisine and patterns of dress are sources of enrichment and variety.

The brief articles of introduction on the various communities found in this publication vouch to the fact that there are nearly twenty different such communities both large and small within the Sri Lankan Nation and

that they display a wide variety of diversity in respect of many fields like social, economic, cultural, religious, etc. However it is crystal clear that they are living in unity as one nation of Sri Lankans. For a group of people to be introduced as a “Nation” it is accepted that “they must basically have for a long period of time been living within a definite geographical unit under a single system of government as partners of a single socio-economic system and building up in unison a civilization or a historical heritage.”

Accordingly, although more than 20 communities living in the country do display wide differences among them as human types principally they have had joined themselves into the geographical entity called Sri Lanka at various times. They had been performing their roles to build up the over 3000 years old historical flow of Sri Lanka and live as partners of a single system of government and actively participating in one single socio-economic system. The proofs to justify this assumption are abundant in these brief articles. Therefore they have all the justification to be introduced as Sri Lankans.

Although among such Nations there can exist various divisions based on religion or language or any other basis, yet it is universally accepted that they should live in peace and amity with clear mutual understanding about each other. The majority of the modern nations, big or small, can be shown as clear examples of such developments.

Sri Lanka as well from the pre-Christian era almost up to about the sixteenth century experienced how all the different communities in the country while safeguarding their own religious and language identities co-existed in

peace and harmony contributing towards the building of the Sri Lankan civilization. The situation changed since the 16th century with the subjugation of the country by the Western imperialism. As a result of resorting to the policy of 'Divide and Rule' the Imperialists manipulated to create dissensions and divisions among the different communities. Hence it was unavoidable that disunity was brought into the Sri Lankan society which had been thriving very strongly up to then as a single Nation.

However, since the departure of the imperial powers from this country in 1948 there was no constitutional barriers or any other social, economic, cultural, religious obstacles preventing the different communities to stand up in unity as a Sri Lankan Nation. Unfortunately it has not materialized.

Hence the present Government which has realized the urgent need to rebuild the national peace and harmony that had existed in this country prior to the 16th century has created a separate Ministry to achieve this objective and entrusted the Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages with the heavy responsibility of fulfilling this national aspiration through a broad scheme of activities. Therefore as a positive step of executing the responsibility entrusted, the Ministry has undertaken to bring out this publication with several laudable objectives to be achieved namely,

1. To highlight the contributions made by not less than twenty different communities described here towards building up of the internationally acclaimed Sri Lankan History and civilization by adding their own share to swell the diversity.
2. To Make aware of the manner in which these various groups entered the main Sri Lankan civilization as partners and how they with the addition of their own languages, religions, social customs and practices etc added colour and glamour into the ultimate Sri Lankan Civilization to win the fame among the international community.
3. To make aware of the impacts of western forces that manipulated for sometime in breaking up of the national integrity of the country by creating conflicts and confrontations among the communities Hence the need is there to make the citizens and all others concerned aware of the fact that during the last 25 centuries long Sri Lankan history, there were never such rivalries between the fellow communities in the society. Instead there was always peace and close harmony among the fellow citizens who had an excellent mutual understanding until outside invaders intervened to break the peace to gain the supremacy. This hard truth is deserved to be made known to one and all in the country.
4. To fulfill the urgent and absolutely essential necessity that all sincere and innocent citizens be made aware of the inescapable necessity to rebuild the greatness of the past for the sake of the future and at the same time it must be emphasized to them that all the necessary live potentials and the conducive environment required for the achievement of such rebuilding are available within our own country.
5. To make aware of the commitment of the new Government as displayed by the assumption with



absolute certainty of the responsibility of resurrecting the national co-existence is seen as a major positive step by the establishment of a separate Ministry as well for the said purpose and guaranteeing its readiness to provide all the necessary State patronage to achieve this objective.

It has become our full responsibility to ensure that the different communities get a better and a broader understanding of the history of the country and draw inspiration out of it. Then only they would commit themselves to learn correct lessons from their history and cultivate qualities of patience and appreciation thus becoming true patriotic citizens ready for any and every eventuality.

In the hope of achieving these objectives and beneficial results as early as possible, the Ministry intends to make this publication available to the public at the earliest possible. Ministry hopes that would be most useful to the politicians, budding politicians, University communities, school children, general citizens, NGOs and even foreign tourists interested about Sri Lankan affairs.

Since at present National reconciliation has become a popular subject among the politicians, this would help them to lead the people on the correct lines when explaining the ethnic issues. Hence it will show them how they would be able to take the people out of the death shells into the shells of hopes and fortune.

Both University community as well as the school children will find it very important to understand that our national heritage is more the living in peace and harmony rather than fighting with each other for no fruitful reason and

hence will learn to despise and reject rivalry of any sort. Instead they would learn to appreciate the unlimited value of diversity as a means of achieving integration and the immediate benefits of unity against the disunity.

They would be motivated not only to dig the past and learn the correct history but they would volunteer to get involved in the social, political, religious ceremonies, festivals, rituals etc that would prove to them how close and akin they happen to be when their common activities, pastimes etc are taken into consideration. That would help them to learn much lessons their predecessors may have missed forever.

Publishing this in English language undoubtedly is beneficial since the truth about the country deserve to be known by the English speaking foreign nationals in order to do justice to the country. Wrong impressions created about our country in the foreign countries need be corrected as early as possible before the anti-Sri Lankans try to cash in on them.

However the Ministry has not lost foresight to realize both the need and the duty to make it available for the local reader. Hence action is been already taken to publish in both Sinhala and Tamil without much delay. In the face of the swiftly developing technological era one cannot be blind to the new avenues created in the field of communication, in this instance the E Book system resorted to by many computer users. Therefore action will be taken to make this publication available for the E Book readers as well.

**Prof. S. Pathmanathan**  
**Prof. Malani Endagama**





# Foreword

We, the citizens of a multi-ethnic country can assert ourselves with dignity as a united Sri Lankan Nation among other nations of the world, only if we consider our ethnic diversity an asset. It is the foundation of national and international achievements of this country. Therefore, we should as much be familiar with the other communities living in the country as you and I are familiar with our own communities. Only from this background will flourish a coexistence society full of mutual respect and recognition, and strengthened with mutual bond. It is with pleasure and as a fulfillment of a national requirement that the Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages present to you all Sri Lankans this book which will greatly contribute towards building the desired coexistence society in the country. Publishing of this book is a particularly significant accomplishment of this Ministry which has undertaken various initiatives towards establishing national coexistence.

I wish to first express my gratitude to Hon. Mano Ganesan, Minister of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official languages for his guidance and advice to make this task a success and I thank him for identifying the need for a book of this kind and providing all necessary facilities for completing the work.

I would like to pay my respect to the members of the editorial board, Professor Malani Endagama, Professor S.Pathmanathan, Professor Tudor Silva and Dr.B.A. Hussainmiya for accomplishing the task of editing the

articles compiled by the writers selected on the respective ethnic groups, and the writers who contributed to make this book an eclectic work by providing articles on nineteen ethnic groups.

Financial contribution for publishing this book was made by the UNDP – SELAJSI project. Therefore, I wish to take this opportunity to appreciate the service of the UNDP – SELAJSI project and its officers and I express my heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Shihara Rajakaruna, Technical Coordinator of the project for the cooperation extended towards this work.

I also express my appreciation and thanks to the associations of the respective ethnic groups for providing necessary information, Mrs. W.A.Chandrika Rupasinghe who dedicated herself to this task treating it as a priority matter, Mr. M.K.Muhais, Senior Assistant Secretary, Mr. S.L.M. Hazeem, Senior Assistant Secretary, Mrs. S.M.F. Zeena, Assistant Secretary, Miss. R.K.T. Prasadini and other staff of the Coexistence Division. Finally, I express my gratitude on behalf of the Ministry to the Selasine institution for the attractive page setting and printing of the book, and all others who extended their cooperation in various ways.

## **Vajira Narampanawa**

(Secretary at the time of compilation of this book)

Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages





# The Sinhala Community

Prof. Malani Endagama

## Beginning of the Sinhala Community

The exact period of origin of Sinhalas is difficult to be determined. It is narrated in the chronicles written in the 4th and 5th centuries AD and copied in most of the subsequent sources that Vijaya was the leader of the first ever team of immigrants speaking the Aryan dialect to have landed in this country. His father, Sinhabahu happened to be a lion [he was not an animal but a member

of the tribe with the Lion symbol] (**The story of Sinhalese. John.M. Seneviratna**) and is believed to have lived with his twin sister Sinhasivali having taken her as his consort. Vijaya happened to be the eldest son of this Royal family.

It is further stated that Vijaya, came with a retinue of 700 followers and landed in Lakdiva on the

very day that Lord Buddha passed away in the city of Kushinara. The actions taken by Vijaya and his retinue to establish settlements in their own names in and around the present day Anuradhapura and the birth of two children to Kuveni by Vijaya explain the beginning of the relationships between the immigrants of Aryan stock and the indigenous tribal people. Therefore it is generally accepted that in and around the 6th century BC the origin of the Sinhala community in this country had taken place with the inter-mixing of the indigenous tribal people of *Siv-helas* composed of Yaksha, Raksha, Naga and Deva with the immigrant stock of people headed by Vijaya.

It is also believed that with the identification of the Sinhala as Helas, and Sinhala-dweepa as *Heladiva* later on, the community of people that had come to be known as Sinhala at present, have originated from the mixture of the Aryan immigrants from India and the indigenous tribal communities. (**The People of Ceylon- Dr N.D. Wijesekara.** Colombo.1987).

The next important landmark in the evolution and the spread of the Sinhala community comes with the establishment of Buddhist dispensation in this country by the mission led by Arahant Mahinda Thero and Ven. Sangamitta Theri who visited this island in the 3rd century BC as an outcome of the close relationship King DevanampiyaTissa had maintained with the Indian Emperor Asoka. Through this means Sinhala - dweepa was blessed with an organized religion in addition to the laying of the foundation for the building of the Sinhala-Buddhist culture that is unique to this country and a highly valued treasure gifted to the World Heritage from this country.

As authenticated by inscriptional evidences that

can be found spread island wide (Paranavithana.S. Inscriptions of Ceylon.1970) Buddhism spread out soon in the entire country. Therefore, the civilization that was developing from about the 6th century BC as a result of the mixing up of the communities of Aryans and the indigenous tribes, thrived under the best inspiration received from the Buddhist teachings. As a result, there came to be a stupendous development in the fields of Arts, Architecture, Education and educational practices, Curriculum, Literature and in all the cultural fields followed by an equally swift expansion of it in the country.

The bringing of the sacred Bo-Sapling a most valuable live symbol of Lord Buddha from India and its planting in Anuradhapura to be venerated and respected up to date can be considered as an utmost important event in the history of Buddhist culture in this country. In addition, here is the firm belief that it is the oldest historical tree in the world. The accompaniment of people belonging to the 18 guilds of arts and crafts mainly associated with the rituals connected with the sacred Bo-tree can be considered as another very important milestone in the development and the propagation of Buddhism in the country since it is the beginning of the great heritage of arts and crafts that thrived in this country under the shade of Buddhist principles and teachings.

Thus the Sinhala race that originated in the 6th century BC and the Buddhist dispensation that was established here in the 3rd century BC co-existed and thrived up to about the 16th century as the principal ethnic group and the principal religion in the country without a challenge despite intermittent invasions from South India in the main. Within that nearly 2500 years long period, where ethnic conflicts and religious rivalries



were almost unknown in the country, over 200 benevolent native rulers with the utmost support from the citizens were able to ward off even the strongest invasions directed by the Cholas, Kalinga Magha etc. until 1815 when the British through the signing of the 1815 Kandyan Convention that was never respected, took over the Kingdom of Sinhale under their rule.

The great patriotism and the deep respect for the humanity displayed by King Dutugemunu at the death of Elara, the invader, as can be seen from the highest respect the dead king was given which

was considered to be equivalent to the respect that was due to a *Chakrawartha* King (King of Kings). This crystal clearly proves how well mannered he had been to be so concerned about the dignity of even the worst of enemy. This unique event is fully narrated in the chronicle Mahavansa. (Geiger.M.V. 25:71-75). Achievement of unity and reconciliation in the present day appears to be facilitated since the way for it is already written in the history of our own country and it is our duty to gain from the experiences of the past.

## The Sinhala Community Under the Imperial Rule

The Sinhala-Buddhist culture that was built up thus through a period of over 2500 years by the people who lived in harmony and reconciliation was confronted for the first time from the beginning of the 16th century with a new type of challenge. It was none other than the Western imperialism. It was most difficult especially for the Sinhala Buddhists and the Tamil Hindus to face their challenges with any success. *Rajawaliya* (A.V.Suraweera ed. p.223) narrates how strange the behavior of the Portuguese had been to the Sinhala-Buddhists.

The Portuguese who enjoyed all the benevolence of the local king acquired only a small area from the coastal zone of the Island of Lanka but subsequently waged several severe wars against the Independent Sinhala Kingdom that was centered round Upcountry region of the country. These battles, namely the Danture Battle (1594), Balana Battle (1602), Randeniwela Battle (1630) and Gannoruwa Battle (1636) were all totally crushed and the gallant Sinhala Kings were able to annihilate the enemy reminding

all, the fate that can befall on the ungrateful ones. The Dutch who followed the Portuguese and continued to do the same as what the Portuguese had attempted to do, too were equally defeated by the Sinhala Kings of the Kanda Udarata.

Dutch were followed by the English Imperialists. They too were forced to have a grim taste of defeat by the Sinhala heroes at the battle of Kandy in 1802-03 when the enemies were literary annihilated. However, the English were not discouraged. They used the worst war tactics and it helped them in 1815 to capture the king and annex the Kingdom of the undefeated Sinhale by intruding into the domains of the Kandyan royal courts and dwellings of the chieftains, temples and the ordinary people and spreading disunity by setting one against the other and ultimately aggravating the whole situation through the strategy of spying. Ultimate result was the banishment of the King and a large number of others and the annexation of the country by the British Imperialists in 1815.

Subsequently, dawned the era when the English imperialists, contrary to the promises given, subjected the Sinhala-Buddhist culture into a broad and destructive overhauling in every possible direction. Accordingly, in place of the traditional system of King's government which had evolved over a period of several centuries as the best way to achieve the objectives of the native Sinhala- Buddhist social system a system of government that had been evolved to suit the requirements of England namely the Parliamentary system of government was implanted here. As a result, in place of the decentralized provincial and village based ruling bodies which enjoyed much independence in deciding their affairs, a system of Government activated on the basis of party system and operated through a civil service system where a hierarchical line of officials, who were a complete strangers to the people and their villages was introduced.

Furthermore, the Parliamentary system resulted in breaking down the exemplary unity and reconciliation that prevailed for centuries through the long history of this country. In its place came the numerous political parties which were based on different ideologies and social forces bringing up a situation of divisive political struggle based not only on the political, social, economic and cultural issues but even on ethnic and religious issues as well thus bringing about a complete disaster through the divisive and eternal quarrelsome politics encouraged by the system.

The disastrous consequences brought about by them made the local intelligentsia angry. Not only the Buddhist monks led by Most Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thero and including Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero and other Monks but also the lay Buddhist leaders like Anagarika Dhammapala, Walisinghe Harischandra etc. Tamil-Hindu leaders including Arumuga Nawalar and

Ponnambalam Ramanadan and Muslim leaders headed by Siddilebbe took the leadership in this movement and they also highlighted the urgency of initiating a campaign aimed at getting this country rid of the British colonialism. Subsequently leaders of all these ethnic groups organized themselves as a united front to fight against the domination of the British colonialists

The Constitutional Reforms of 1910-1912 provided for the educated Sri Lankans the right to elect their representative to the Legislative Council. Although the majority of the eligible voters happened to be Sinhalas they with the support of the other groups managed to elect Ponnambalam Ramanathan as their choice thus informing all that they were not divided ethnically or otherwise. Reconciliation was in operation at its best.

In 1919 Ponnambalam Arunachalam came forward to establish the National Congress and to take on the leadership to the Movement. His brother, Ponnambalam Ramanathan fought not only inside the Legislative Council but also went to England and took measures to make the English M.Ps aware of the things happening here thus taking the lead role to rise against the highhanded measures adopted by the English government in the Colony. Along with them, the Senanayake brothers, Arthur V.Dias, D.B.Jayathilake, E.W. Perera etc , the Sinhala-Buddhists, Tamil-Hindus, Sinhalese Christians, Muslims and all, without any ethnic or religious distinction worked in such brotherly unison that they displayed and proved that the peace and harmony which promoted reconciliation was a whole-mark of the Sinhala Nation throughout the long history of the country was still surviving unhindered even by the beginning of the 20th century in this country.

## Population

From the inception of the Nation up to now the vast majority of the population had been Sinhals or the Sinhalese. From the Anuradhapura period there had been intermittent visits by foreigners like Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Persians specially for trade purposes while South Indians made it both as invaders and immigrants thus adding various other groups of people of foreign origin as well into the population of the country. With the spread of Islam from around 7th century Muslims too made it to this country and engaged in local and foreign trade activities. Since they had not brought women with them they married local women and this swelled their numbers in the country.

Since the 16th century, Portuguese, Dutch and British communities too added their numbers to the population of this country and through the marriages between the Europeans and Sinhala women, a yet another special community of Europeans known as Burghers got added in to the population. The off-springs of these mixed marriages have adopted themselves according to the European culture and hence had grown up quite in contrast with the Sinhala communities. But it must not be forgotten that in the origin and the expansion of the Burghers, Sinhala women had been contributing a great share.

In addition to all these new introductions to the ethnic composition there were the introduction of various other communities of people who were brought here as slaves, hired labour, plantation workers etc by the European masters to serve in their various specialized areas. Among them are the Malays, Kaffirs, and Tamils from South India. However, when taking into consideration the development of special intrinsic features in the political, social, economic fields and the Kings who ruled the country, the distinguished leaders etc it would be seen that from the very inception, the Sinhals have been not only the vast majority of the population of the country they have been also the pioneers in the building of the country's culture.

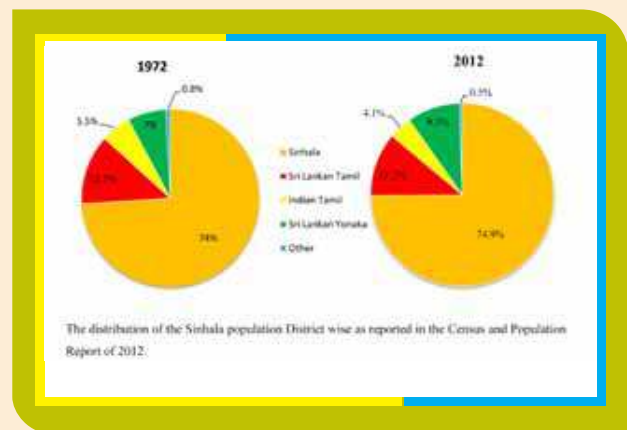
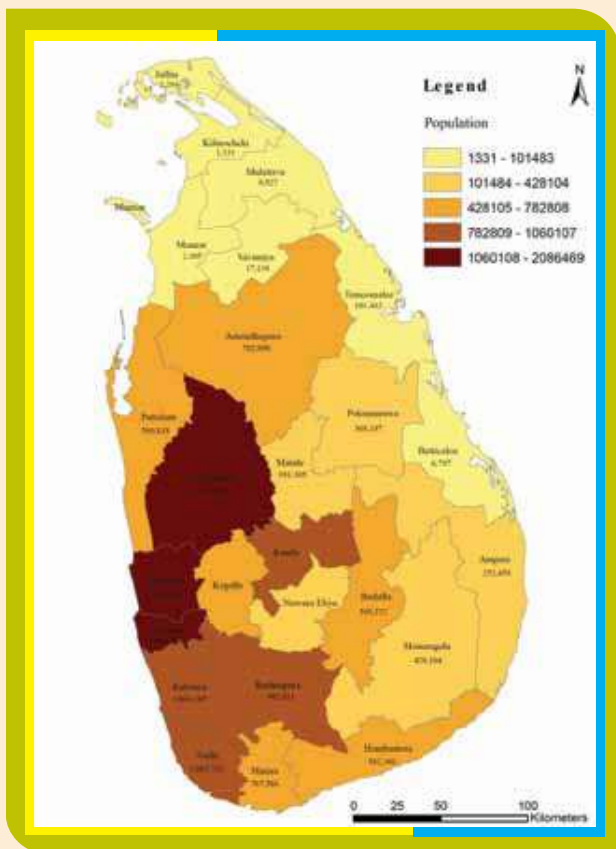
The first ever count of population and collection of population statistics in Sri Lanka had been done in 1871 and since then except for the year 1991 when the country was under wide unrest prevented the count, there had been a count of the census at every ten years in this country. In every one of the count of the Census it had been overwhelmingly proved that the Sinhala population had been the vast majority and claiming to have been widely scattered all over the Island as can be seen from the Table given here.

Year	% of the population	Year	% of the population
1881	66.91	1953	69.36
1891	67.86	1963	71.00
1901	65.36	1971	71.91
1911	66.13	1981	73.85
1921	67.05	1991	-----
1931	65.45	2001	82.00
1946	69.41	2012	74.09

*Table showing the distribution of the Sinhala community*

The following map showing the District wise distribution of the population in 2012 and the accompanied graph showing the distribution of the ethnic communities in 1981 and 2012 it would be very

clear that out of the 25 Administrative Districts of the country Sinhalese have been the largest community in all but 6 Districts while having a fair representation in those 6 Districts as well.



*The distribution of the Sinhala population District wise as reported in the Census and Population Report of 2012*

# Life Pattern

## Agricultural Activities and Food Production

The life pattern of the Sinhalese nurtured by Buddhism was very simple and charm. Rice is their staple food. Therefore the base of their economic and social life was the agriculture. The arrival of the Aryans and their establishment of settlements or the villages in the valleys<sup>1</sup> of the water bodies can be seen as an indication of their strong attachment to the practice of agriculture that was in vogue here. The story that Prince Pandukabhaya while been engaged in war against his uncles had met his future queen, Pali,<sup>2</sup> a daughter of one of the uncles while she was carrying the lunch for her father who was busy at work in the paddy field (MW16:29-39) vouch for the fact that even as far back as the 4th century BC not only the ordinary Sinhala people but also the members of the Royalty had been engaged in agriculture.

Ever since then agriculture had remained to be the main means of living of the Sinhalese. This takes two forms as wet farming (muddy agriculture) and dry farming (chena cultivation/slash and burn). In the past while the wet farming was almost entirely confined to the cultivation of paddy that supplies the staple food, the dry farming was a sort of mixed farming system where other than rice there were several other cereals, pulses, yams and unlimited number of vegetables and fruits cultivated in the chenas. which served as a check against food shortages and even famines. Among the popular types of things cultivated included cereals like, *amu*, *meneri*, *kurahan*, gingerly, gram, etc that needed lesser supply of water than the rice and many other varieties cultivated in the muddy fields.

## Food Pattern

Among the subsidiary foods, the main extra food items most popular with the Sinhalese are the jack, breadfruit etc that are grown in the home gardens. Numerous yams, fruits, vegetables grown in the chenas mostly the different varieties of pumpkins, manios and other yams etc that provide much needed proteins, were grown in the home gardens as well as in the chenas form an essential and invariable requirements in the diet of the Sinhalese

The people who live in the coastal belt had made fishing their means of livelihood while some people in

the interior engaged in fishing in the rivers, streams, canals, tanks and ponds and consumed. Preservation of food had been an art of food pattern of the Sinhalese from the ancient past. Long before artificial methods of food preservation came to be known, Sinhalese were resorting to the method of drying food items for preservation in addition to numerous other methods like making pickles, cooked and drying, burying in the sand or earth etc. In this exercise salt is compulsorily added to preserve the main item unspoiled.

1 It is reported that Tambapanni on the bank of Aravi Aru, Anuradha grama near Malwatu oya, Upatissa Grama near Kanadara oya, Uruwela Grama at the mouth of Kala oya, Vijitha Grama near Mahaweli river, Dighayu grama near Gal oya and Mahagrama near Kirindi oya were established.

2 When the Prince Pandukabhaya requested from Pali for meals, since she did not have suitable plates to serve the visitors she plucked from a nearby some broad leaves and as she got ready to serve food on them the leaves turned out golden plates and hence ever since then this princess came to be known as Swarna Pal.



The cultivation of fruits in the home gardens and in the parks had been a custom of the Sinhalas from the ancient past. Among the fruits popularly grown are mango<sup>3</sup>, pineapple, banana<sup>4</sup>, oranges, pomegranate, etc. In addition to them Sinhalas are accustomed to make full use of the variety of fruits that grown in the jungles quite often.

The variety of spices that the Sinhalas are used to add when cooking like ginger<sup>5</sup>, pepper, cardamom, chillies, nutmeg, etc are still been grown by the people of the upcountry where the native people had been using them for centuries.

Animal Husbandry and more precisely, the cattle breeding too had been prevalent among the Sinhalas. The cattle known as village cows were mainly for milk and buffalos / cows for agricultural work. Until very recent times the buffalos had been used mainly in the field of agriculture for ploughing the field, threshing the paddy and other heavy works. In addition to them was the transportation. However with the introduction of modern technology the tendency for breeding animals is slowly fading away.



3 It is proved from the story found in Mahawansa about the coming of Arahant Mahinda that mango had been cultivated in the country during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa in the 4th century BC (Geiger:MW. 14: 16-19)

4 There is reference to say that during the time of King Dutugemunu on the occasion of the laying of foundation to the Ruwanweli Seya there were pandols made out of Banana trees as decorations.

5 In the description about the manner the required items were received Mahawansa relates about a trader dealing in ginger.



Still for all, since the curd, a very delicious dessert in great demand among both local and foreign people and hence a much popular product made out of cow milk, there is a tendency in certain areas which are specially known for its production to continue to thrive it as a lucrative vocation. Since the curd is invariably coupled with trickle or honey made out from the sap of *kitul* palm tree there is an apparent increasing enthusiasm to develop the *kitul* honey industry in the jungle bordered villages. Alongside with this is the encouragement given to improve a new industry of Bee-keeping as a home industry.

Sinhalas who are used to take three main meals a day prepare their different types of food in different ways. The great diversity of the food pattern of the Sinhalas is clearly displayed by the variety of different foods prepared from the same base whether it is rice or any other grains or yams and other items like roots or fruits etc or else in the case of curries wide variety of ways and kinds of preparations. On the other hand it is a clear indication of the unusual width and the depth of the body of knowledge in culinary art of the Sinhalas that has naturally come into praise from all those who have had the fortune of tasting the true cooking skills of the true Sinhalas.

Another popular feature in the food pattern of the

Sinhalas is the presence of a wide variety of sweets and victuals served on the occasions of festivals, ceremonies and social gatherings. The list of names of these varieties of sweets is so long that naming them is a much time and space consuming effort. However, among them can be found some which are almost peculiar to Sri Lanka and not known outside Sri Lanka. Among them are oil cakes like *kevum*, *mung kevum*, *konda kevum*, *athiraha*, *pani kavum*, *welithalapa*, *aluwa*, *thala kerali*, *helapa*, to name only a few.

It needs to be accepted that the natives have taken from the outsiders many things in respect of food and sweetmeats and instances are not rare of using the adopted practices in between the normal native practices, Good example is the use of bread and other main food items of the European cultures in our own routines.

In an international environment where inter relations can be built up Indian, Chinese, Italian and other cultures have contributed in various degrees to our culinary culture as well. As a result we have a new vocabulary pertaining to the food patterns and culinary practices Thus we have cakes, pastries, cutlets, sandwiches, noodles, pasta, fried rice, pizza, and many in addition to the kokis, pancakes, etc over and above the large number of Indian and Pakistani food items.

## Trade and Commercial Activities.

Vijaya, according to the opinion of some critics had been a leader of a trading group that had visited Sri Lanka at the time. However it is also believed that the tribal people who had been occupying this island prior to the coming of Vijaya had been in the habit of trading in gold and silver, gems and pearls etc with the foreign traders.

With the coming of Vijaya together with his group and the several groups that followed them later from India the trade relations between the two countries had broadened. Sri Lanka situated specially close to India in a very crucial central position in the Indian Ocean and as a country with several highly important natural harbours as very reliable evidences prove Sri

Lanka was engaged in trade not only with India but also with various other countries like Greece, Persia, Rome etc from the pre-Christian era.

As the Sinhala originated and started to be spreading it is evident that they had been principally aligned to agricultural activities. They who got accustomed to a self-sufficient economic system based on land and agriculture had not been bent on trading activities and the income collected from the cultivated land formed the principal source of royal income too. However the foreign trade too remained as a means of extra income of the King. Therefore there is evidence to prove that foreign trade had been in vogue from the period of the Anuradhapura kingdom and in the trading activities the King had the monopoly of it.

Both import and export trading activities were executed through the intervention of the King and gold, silver, pearls, gems, ivory, elephants were among the exported products while horses, textile, sandalwood and camphor were among the main imports.

The Western nations who started to spread their authority in this country from the 16th century had the trade as the main objective of their visit to the East. Hence they established trade agreements with the kings and collected the trade items they wanted. Among these items cinnamon was the principal commodity. The trading activities of the Muslims were curtailed to some extent. Yet the internal trade remained in the hands of the Muslims. They exported the spices like cardamom, *sadikka*, pepper etc that they collected under the barter system from the villages.

During the period of the British rule since the foreign trade superseded the agricultural activities, it was apparent that the Sinhala community too was leaning towards it. However it was only a limited number of principal families that took part in trade with the large majority of the Sinhala community remaining to be farmers

## Technology

Prior to Sri Lanka going under the colonial rule of the Western imperialists the technological wisdom possessed and made use of by the Sinhala had been of highest level and second to none as can be well observed through the

wisdom that is displayed through the irrigational technology, architectural technology, Sculpture and Iconography, Paintings etc in addition to various other creative aspects of the Sinhala.

## Irrigational technology

The irrigational technology can be considered the major discipline in which the Sinhala have had displayed their skills and knowledge most. The highly sophisticated irrigational technology of the Sinhala reached the peak by the time they had

to face the challenge of meeting the demands of the increasing populations who required water for their survival while at the same time the need was there to increase the water supply for increased agricultural purposes.

## The Wewa or Tank

The tank or *wewa*, canal, bund, *relapanawa* or the breaker of waves, *wana* or spill over, Biso kotuwa or the Sluice gate, are all the major parts of the irrigational technology of the Sinhala. The ancient Sinhala Kings were vested with three main responsibilities where the supply of water for the production of their food requirements was one of them<sup>6</sup>. It would be seen that almost all the Sinhala Kings from King Pandukabhaya of the 4th century BC to King Parakramabahu the Great of the Polonnaruwa period had performed a gigantic service to fulfill this responsibility .

According to the historical sources which contain names of more than thousand tanks built by our kings vouch for the fact that all the Kings from 4th century BC up to the Polonnaruwa period in the 13th century had fulfilled their responsibility with much diligence. However not all these tanks have been identified and owing to the decline of the prosperous civilization developed by the Sinhala with Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa as centers most of these tanks too would have had ended up as ruins.

Those giant tanks which are still in use but built in the ancient times like Minneriya of King Mahasen (275-301), Kalawewa of King Dhatusena (455-473), Paththapasana or Nachchaduwa of King Moggallana ii (531-551), Kantale or Gangathala wewa of King Agbo ii (604-614), Parakrama Samudraya of King Parakramabahu I (1153-1186) are only a few of the great tanks that stand up to now to relate the admirable Water supply and Drainage technological expertise of the Sinhala of the past.

After the construction of the tank bund they realized the possible danger to the dam from the waves developed in the tank that would harm the bund by way of erosion of the bund. In order to prevent this harm, the inner surface of the tank bund was covered with a layer of stones paved on the bund surface. This helped to comb out or break the force of the wave and allowing it to go back smoothly to the body of water in the tank thus preventing any harm to or wash off of the surface of the inner side of the tank. Hence it is called the *rala*= wave, *panawa*= comb that smoothen the force. The ingenious inventions by the Sinhala engineers have been accepted as proper and highly useful, successful and scientific irrigational technological innovations by even the modern scientists. This is proved from the continuation of the application of these very systems even by the modern scientists. Hence it proves beyond any doubt that the ancient Sinhala Engineers had been ingenious as any in the present day and hence being second to none.

Another significant feature is the construction of what is called *Pitawana* or the outer exist or the spill-over exist. It is constructed at the head of the tank where the incoming waterway enters the tank. It is constructed in such a manner that when the water level of the tank reaches a point beyond which will be harmful to the bund then that body of water could be diverted from the spill gate without been allowed to add to the water in the tank. The foresight of the Sinhala to have realized this danger and then to come out with the solution so appropriate to safeguard the gigantic construction from being damaged has proved the wisdom of the Sinhala engineers. The modern experts in the field are astonished about the ingenuity of the Sinhala Engineers.

<sup>6</sup> The other two responsibilities were the safeguarding of Buddhism and the protection of the country and the citizens.

## The Canal system

From the very beginning of the agricultural life style of the Sinhala the water that had flowed down through the rivers, streams, drains etc was harnessed for their numerous uses by diverting it to their cultivation plots. In this exercise of conducting the water to where it was necessary, the artificial methodology used by the Sinhala Engineers can be identified as the system of a network of canals. As can be ascertained from the map given here of the distribution of the tanks and canals that had been built from the beginning of irrigational history in Rajarata up to the most illustrious final period of irrigational achievements in the form of a network engulfing the entire Rajarata. It is proved beyond any doubt that the Sinhala Engineers had made use of an unbelievable high level technological wisdom and body of knowledge in conducting the water through the canals, streams and drains to their cultivation plots.

King Dhatusena who built the tank Kalawewa in 473 AD constructed a canal named Jayaganga, 54 miles in length to conduct water from that tank to the Tissawewa in Anuradhapura and the other villages along the route of the canal. The astonishing wonder about the canal is that the slope of this 54 miles long canal is a mere 6 inches per mile. This has proved to be an unbelievable marvel in the field of irrigational

technology that make even the modern Engineers puzzled and dumb-founded for want of an explanation. The network of irrigational canals that connected all, big and small tanks with each other locally known as *Ellangawa* is yet another outstanding great feature of the irrigation technology of the Sinhala. The local name signifies the network of canals built to facilitate the out flowing



## Bisokotuwa - Sluice Gate

The water that was collected in the tank needed to be diverted to the fields for which purpose there was the necessity for a gate to lead the water in the tank in an efficient and very careful manner into the canal system that conduct the water to the fields. Hence

the ancient Sinhala Engineers designed a special sluice gate which is better known as the *Bisokotuwa*, literally meaning the enclosure of the outlet to ensure the conduct of the water most efficiently. According to the evidences elicited from archeological, literary,

and inscriptional sources the technology that had been used in the construction of the *Bisokotuwa* out of all the sluice gates had come for much praise and appreciation among the modern Engineers of the East and West who are also most astonished by this accomplishment.

Henry Parker, an Englishman who had seen all these marvels for himself during his stay in this country and published a masterpiece among travel books while highlighting the special features of the *Bisokotuwa* technology had pointed out that the technology of the ancient Sinhalas in this field can be very well considered to be akin to the modern technology employed to control the flow of water from the large reservoirs by the name of “valve towers”.

E.L. Brohier, another of the foreign experts to have visited Sri Lanka and see for himself the marvels of the ancient Sinhalas while testifying to the truth of what Henry Parker had commented on, had expressed the opinion that the Sinhala Engineers by constructing the *Bisokotuwa* over some 2000 years before present, have proved to be the heirs to the honour of being pioneers of the “valve towers” technology.

In addition to all these, there are the numerous other publications by several others who had studied the tanks, bunds, canals, drains etc of the ancient Sinhalas during the period of the British rule in this country. Among them are such eminent persons as C. Woodward, Emerson Tennent, Sir Henry Ward, John Bailey etc who had valued the supreme achievements of the Sinhalas in the field of Irrigation.

Furthermore, the foreign engineers and experts who were executing the Maduruoya Project under the modern accelerated Mahaweli development projects in the 1980s with the help of all the most modern technological devices and machinery and equipment were confronted with an unbelievable coincidence. It was the unearthing of a stone tabloid planted some thousands years ago by the ancient Sinhalas at the very same location identified by these experts as the best place suitable for locating the sluice gate of the tank. It is not then surprising that those foreign engineers who could not fathom the depth of the body of knowledge of the indigenous engineers in regard to the field of irrigation engineering were flabbergasted by this discovery.

Basawakkulama



Parakrama Samudraya





Bisokotuwa



Kuttam Pokuna



## Architecture

It is well accepted that the Sinhals had been improvising their vast body of knowledge related to Architecture by adding new ideologies to their own from time to time learning from other sources as and when the need arose. Thereby they made the Sinhals the inheritors to an immense body of knowledge on our own Architectural science as reflected in the unlimited area of creations. This is found among the Stupas, Statues, Religious buildings, Royal palaces, Residences of the Elite as well as the residences of the ordinary people. Among all these the religious creations take pride of place.

Among the oldest creations can be seen the caves which had been improvised with the ridges carved on the edges of the cave entrances that belong to the pre-Christian era and they happened to be a common sight seen in plenty in the areas where Buddhism was spread. The expertise of the Sinhals in architectural creations can be best seen reflected in the ridges added to cave entrances to prevent the rain water from coming into the caves. Primary sources reveal

that King Devanampiyatissa made 68 caves suitable for the Buddhist monks led by Arahant Mahinda Thero to spend the rainy season in Mihintale. In the subsequent period as Buddhism spread rapidly such caves in thousands were built in various places in the country and were offered to the Bhikkus as is recorded in the inscriptions. Great King Valagambahu is credited with the construction or the conversion of very many caves as abodes for the Buddhist priests and temples.

The most outstanding of the architectural creations of the Sinhals namely the Stupas were started to be built in the 3rd century BC and the Thuparama built by King Devanampiyatissa with the enshrining of Lord Buddha's sacred relics is considered as the first historic stupa to have been built.

The large scale nine-story building called Lovamahapaya (Brazen Palace) put up by King Dutu Gemunu (161-137 BC) for the benefit of the Bhikkus under a pre-planned design within the Mahamevuna



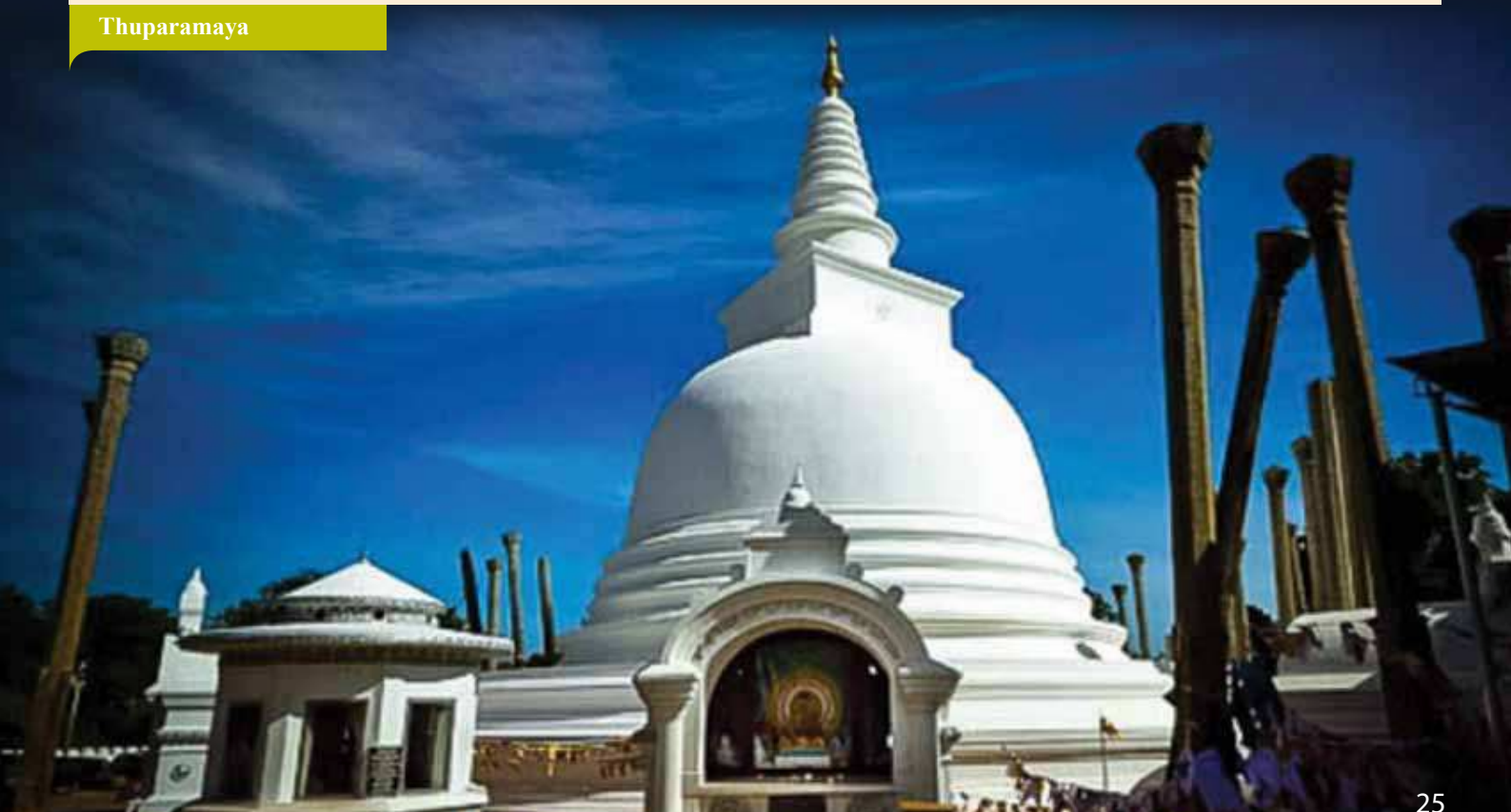
garden is considered as a proof of the stupendous achievements of the Sinhala Architectural expertise in the pre-Christian era. King Dutugemunu also caused the construction of Mirisawetiya stupa on a base of 168 feet diameter and 300 feet in height, Ruwanweliseya with a base of 289 feet diameter in the form of a bubble , hence its introduction as a stupa of bubble shape. According to the details given in Mahawansa about the construction of this Stupa (MW 29: 5-12) it is astonishing how the Sinhalas had resorted to build such strong and long lasting stupendous buildings with the choice of proper and the appropriate materials and masonry technology from the foundation level itself.

From the long past when it was considered that the protection of Buddhism as well as the provision of and hence the building of suitable places for the people to engage in religious observances was the responsibility of the King up to the present time not only the Kings but even Ministers and the elites had been

constructing the Stupas and various other Buddhist religious places of worship. King Valagamba (89-BC to 77 BC) built Abhayagiri Stupa while King Mahasen (274-301) built Jethavanaramaya on a base of 367 feet and height of 232 feet. When it is considered that these belong to the pre-Christian and early Christian eras it will be proved that the Scientific Architectural knowledge of the Sinhalas had been astonishing and beyond comprehension.

Sinhalas had not stopped the constructions of large stupas at that. It is amply proved by the thousands of stupas scattered all over the island up to now considered to have been built by all the kings who were ruling the country from the early period of Anuradhapura in the pre-Christian era up to the Kotte period of the 16th century. At the present time not only the rulers but also ordinary Sinhala Buddhists, with the help of the rich and the elite class continue to enliven the culture of building the stupas unbroken.

### Thuparamaya



Ruwanweliseya



Lowamahapaya



Parakramabahu Maligaya





Nishshanka Lathamandapaya



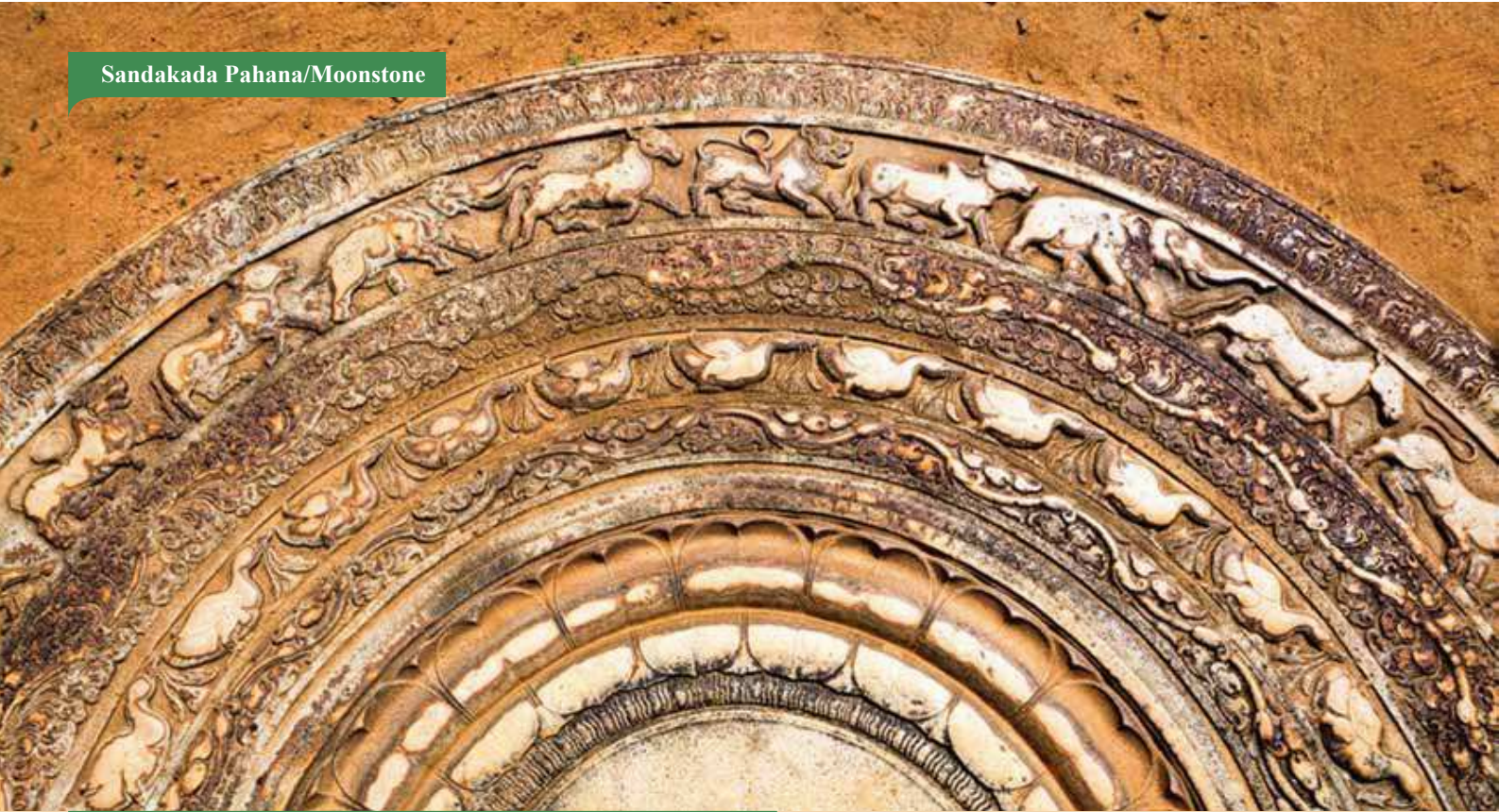
Polonnaruwa Galviharaya



Temple of Tooth Relic







## Sculpture

The construction of statues, can be considered as another reflector of the technological wisdom possessed by the Sinhala. Among the subjects of the sculpture, the most important and prominent was the Buddha statue. From about the second century we can see the sculpturing of the three-fold Buddha statues namely Standing statues, seated statues and the sleeping statues. The statues of Maligawila Awkana, Buduruwagala, Budugala, Sasseruwa, three fold statues of Galvihara in Polonnaruwa are only a few among the very popular and extra ordinarily artistic statues. Some of them are sculptured on stone to a height of more than 50 feet. Later on different raw materials like bricks, lime and sand mixture etc came to be used.

Yet another type of the Buddha statues which is considered a special feature in the Sinhala sculpture is the seated statues and the sleeping statues which postures can be found not only in the ancient royal temples but happen to be a popular and common feature even in the Statues that can be found in almost all the rural village temples through -out the country. The Sinhala sculptors had been much careful to preserve in these numerous statues the unique great qualities associated with the Lord Buddha alone, like the circle of rays depicting His immense wisdom and the inherent great qualities of Seela and Samadhi. At the same time it is displayed through these efforts how over a long history of over 2500 years the Sinhala community had continued to cherish their body of scientific knowledge up to the present time.

Among the seated statues, the Samadhi statue found in the garden of Mahamevuna in the sacred city of Anuradhapura depicting the Lord Buddha's meditational position and several others located in various places in the Samadhi position are considered as the best examples of the expertise and the body of knowledge of the Sinhala sculptors in the execution of the technology of sculpting with greatest care and discipline.

In the art of sculpturing it is not only the Buddha statues that had been the subject but included among others the venerable Bhikkus, Gods, Kings and also the elites. Most conspicuous of them are the statue considered to be that of Parakramabahu the Great in Polonnaruwa, Ven Wariapola Sri Sumangala Thero, Vihara Mahadevi, Gods Saman, Vibhishana, Vishnu, Kataragama, Patthini etc who are considered as the Gods in charge of the various Provinces, Districts, Villages etc. In addition to all these those great leaders and Mahanayake Theros who are known to have rendered a valuable service to the Country, Nation, Religion and in many other fields like political, Arts and Culture various vocations like Medicine, Agriculture, Education, Religion etc. have often been honoured by erecting their statues in public places. Statues of special interest and culturally important are those of the war heroes who had bravely fought against the imperial powers even at the risk of their lives, including Weera Keppetipola, Weera Puranappu, etc followed by the war heroes of the recent past who had sacrificed their lives to free the motherland from the cruel terrorism among whom Denzil Kobbekaduwa, Gamini Kularatna, are very prominent. Great leaders of the modern era who are credited with valuable services to the country and the people in addition to the fields they were well versed

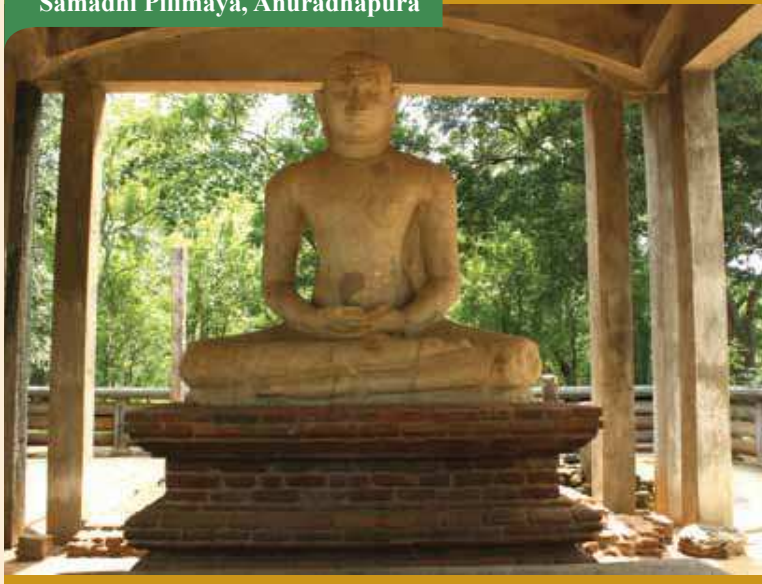
in too have been deservedly honored with a statue in an appropriate place for the person concerned like the Parliamentary premises, important public places or in places where their services had been best made use of.

Another branch of Architecture depicting the prowess of the Sinhala architects happen to be the royal palaces. Chief among those creations are the royal palace in Anuradhapura considered to be palace of King Wijayabahu 1st, royal palace in Panduwasnuwara, the three-story royal palace in Polonnaruwa considered to be the palace of King Parakramabahu the Great, royal palace of king Nissanka Malla close to the Topawewa. The building of the Sigiriya Kingdom conspicuous by its outstanding architectural features and creativeness during a time of war is undoubtedly an extra ordinary achievement.

As important indicators of the marvelous and great expertise of the Sinhalas in the architectural decorations and designs are the variety of plights of steps, *makara thoran* (pandals) with the figure of *Makara*, Guardstones, moonstones, commonly found in various places are the most important. In addition to all these the bathing ponds with the *Kuttam Pokuna* (twin ponds) at the head, Nissanka *Latha Mandapaya*, Buildings accommodating the Royal Councils, Remnants of the old Temples of Tooth that had existed in the various kingdoms with the Temple of Tooth that exists in active position in Kandy, the statues of the Gods of Mahayanism along with the thousands of remnants of the architectural creations found scattered all over the island will bear evidence to the great body of architectural wisdom the Sinhalas had possessed.



Samadhi Pilimaya, Anuradhapura



Isurumuniya Pemyuwala



Avukana Pilimaya



King Parakramabahu



## Paintings

Among the numerous areas of creative knowledge of the Sinhala, the knowledge of paintings was well known and evidences to prove it can be gathered from the places where proofs are found about the architectural expertise. The world renowned paintings of Sigiriya that belong to the 5th century are considered as the oldest paintings in extant in Sri Lanka and declared as a World heritage. At present, 22 paintings have been protected. All these paintings happen to be female figures. Variety of paints had been used with a display of special expertise. According to the opinions of the experts these women can be human beings or super human or even representations of lightening and clouds or some such representation.

The paintings found in a cave in Hindagala some 6 miles from Kandy are believed to be contemporary to the Sigiriya paintings. Furthermore, in addition to

the paintings on the cross-bar of the entrance doors- *Wahalkada* – in the Ruwanweli stupa, Jethawana stupa, Abhayagiri stupa etc paintings belonging to the early period could be seen in almost all the ancient temples among the paintings on their walls. Even at the present time paintings done by the very popular and most competent artists of the time can be seen in places like Kelaniya and Bellanwila as it is the case with almost all the Buddhist temples, however big or small may be spread throughout the country. The various incidents, environmental factors and offerings made, positions and postures related to the life of Lord Buddha depicted in these extraordinarily attractive paintings display not only the Buddhist thoughts of the Sinhala community but also their skills and competence in the field of paintings.

Sigiriya Paintings



Hindagala paintings



Pancha demima



## Special social and cultural characteristics and variety of festivals Games

Achery, Elephant riding, Horse riding and the hunting were among the games considered to be reserved for the royals, and the elites in the past while water sports, garden sports, dancing and Singing were more or less the inherent outstanding leisure games of the Sinhalas from the ancient times. Even at the present times these games have not only survived up to now but also can be found been engaged in by the village folk

too. There are many indoor as well as outdoor games considered to be inherent to the Sinhalas coming from the ancient times. *An-keliya, porapol gesima, Angampora, Onchili pedima (swinging), Thachchi penima, Gudu penima, Elle gesima*, volleyball, etc are only a few of such outdoor games while *Dam adima, raban gesima, pancha demima* etc are only a few of the indoor games of fame.

Olinda Poruwa



Raban Gesima





## Music

Sinhala had been in the habit of using music to add entertainment at various functions as well as for enjoyment from the ancient times. Mahawansa records that on the very first day in Tammannawa, Vijaya in the night was disturbed by a sound of music and on inquiry from Kuvanna, the local ruler told him that it was the playing of music on the occasion of the wedding of a local chief to a bride from an area in the interior of the country<sup>7</sup> (MW. 7: 33-35). From the ancient times, the Sinhala had been making use of Music for entertainment on special festive occasions and for enjoyment like at weddings, Birthday celebrations, and other social, cultural occasions.

Music had been an invariably essential item in the royal courts so much so that Kings had their own musicians and music groups to provide entertainment to the royal household. Royal parades as well as the march to battle grounds etc were accompanied by music groups. Similarly the ordinary people had their own ways of enjoying music with the help of the traditional dancers and musicians who provided these

services at the regular traditional festivals and rituals like the Peraheras.

Many are the traditional musical instruments used by the people. Most popular and commonly used are the drums of different styles, like *geta beraya*, *yak beraya*, *Dawula*, *Tammattama*, *Udekkiya*, *Rabana*, *Tablawa*, *flutes or horanewa*, *cymbals*. Often some of them had been peculiar to certain areas or families or traditions only. Getabere is mainly up-country where as the yak bere is low-country and Dawula is Sabaragamuwa while the Murdhangaya is associated with the Tamil Hindus. Among the musical instruments in popular use by the Sinhala in addition to the ones mentioned above are the same instruments that are used by others in the Hindustani music and also in western music. Hence as much as any other community the Sinhala are very much elated by their very traditional musical heritage and despite the intrusion by the modern western musical instruments and music they continue to cherish with much delight their own heritage.



Different Drums

7 This was the wedding occasion of a leader of the Yakshas in that city of Shirishawasthu conducting his bride from city of Lanka (Mahiyangana the principal city at the time)

## Drama and Cinema

It can be seen that much of the ancient heritage of dance and drama is revitalized. In the area of drama basically traditional stories are used more and more for stories and plots mainly derived from religious sources. As much as it happened then in the contemporary society too current issues are been highlighted on the stage thereby functioning as social reformers to find solutions to problems of the people. Much knowledge and inspiration is drawn from the traditional drama like *kolam* and *sokari* traditions. Sinhala drama through these means had reached a very high level to gain the attention of the

international audiences as well.

Cinema is the latest introduction to the array of sources of entertainment. However it can be said with certainty that the capabilities of the Sinhals in this area as well had already being stamped that we have been able to produce several international level Cinema producers and equally admirable line of very capable and illustrious actors and actresses who had already contributed much to keep the flag of the Nation flying high in the international arena.

## Processions and Festivals

The Dalada procession held annually in the Dalada Maligawa in Kandy followed by several other Buddhist temples in the island are among the foremost cultural pageants of utmost significance that can be seen in the Sinhala community. Ever since the bringing of the Sacred Tooth Relic from India in the 4th century, the Dalada procession had been held, the first being at the Abhayagiri temple in Anuradhapura, under the patronage of the Kings at the time thus taking over the ritual as the greatest responsibility for all the kings during their period of rule. All of them had continued it without a break and the tradition is been continued up to date by the modern day rulers of the country as well who during their term of office provide patronage to perform it with all the pomp and glare. Most absorbing and astonishing is the accompanying large number of decorated elephants on parade and made even more entertaining by the addition of large number of troops of traditional

dancing, singing and drumming thereby elevating it into the level of a national cultural Pageant.

The attraction of the event to the many foreigners can be judged from the interest shown by them to plan their visits to the country well ahead of time to see the pageant. In addition the pageant is an equal attraction for the locals who display a very deep and solemn attachment to the event which is more a ritualistic bondage to the sacred Tooth relic which the Buddhists believe to be the living Buddha. The universal interest shown towards this event naturally make the entire nation alive and brimming with joy by the grandeur of the Sinhala cultural performances.

No sooner the principal ritualistic procession of the temple of Tooth in Kandy is over there are several other Provincial Dalada processions that attract the attention of the devotees in equal veneration. Such



processions are been held with all the glory in Kotte Raja Maha Viharaya, Ratnapura Saman Devalaya in association with Delgamuwa Raja Maha Vihara where the Sacred relic was hidden from the Portuguese, Bentota, Pusulpitiya where the Relics were kept for the night. There are an increased number of mini Dalada processions of recent origin as well.

The Perahera culture has been deeply rooted in this country so much so hardly a Poya day or such significant day passes without been celebrated with a colourful pageant. Among them can be found the

processions of Kelaniya, Bellanwila, Ratnapura Saman Devalaya, Aluthnuwara Devalaya in Balangoda, Kotapola Gatabaru Devalaya, Dondra Vishnu Devalaya, Kataragama Devalaya, Muthiyangana Vihara, Mahiyangana Vihara, Hanguranketha Vishnu Devalaya, Navagamuwa Pattini Devalaya in the main. With the popularity and the wide public attraction gained by these new additions to the customary array of processions Sinhala have found it so effective these days that all temples consider it an essential part of any and every festival in the temple.

Kandy Esela Procession



Kelaniya Esela Procession



## Sinhala New Year Festival

The Sinhala New Year festival held annually in the month of April from the ancient times had been celebrated in a majestic way with the participation of the royals and the elite. It continues to be so celebrated even today since it had become a unique means of glorifying the life style of the people. The festive celebrations take the form of a cultural pageant that provides much glamour to the life style of the people. The festival basically intends to transfer the much valued traditional customs and practices, values and etiquettes coming from the

ancient times and so important to the good conduct of the society to the younger generation in the same way it had been continued to transfer the cultural values from generation to generations. The entire society is reawakened and almost all folk games and pastimes get a new leaf of life during this period. Simultaneously the Tamil Hindus too celebrate the Hindu New Year during this same period. Hence this period of the New Year stands out as an ideal reflection of the national harmony and reconciliation that prevails in the society.

Avurudu Table



Respect Adults



## Astrology

It is a common and popular practice among the Sinhalese to resort on the occasions of starting any new activity or function, to observe the customs and rituals on auspicious hours in consultation with and even participation of the practitioners well versed in astrology. It is almost a national characteristic of the Sinhalese to observe on all occasions of their most important events in life like building new houses,

introducing the solid food to the newly born children, introducing to the letters (learning process) admitting to schools, marriage, etc the customs and rituals and start everything on an auspicious hour. It had been the customary practice from the very ancient times to receive the blessings of the Buddhist monks who chanted pirith while the auspicious function was initiated on the auspicious time.

## The Medical Practice Inherent to the Sinhala Community

The multiple references found in the historical chronicles and other primary sources to “*Bhesajjasala*” to denote the ancient hospitals that existed in this country is a clear proof of the great awareness of the ancient Sinhala about the science of medicine from an ancient past.

King Pandukabhaya of Anuradhapura in his efforts to build a planned city for Anuradhapura it is recorded that he established even a hospital and a maternity hospital in the 4th century BC (MW. 10.102). King Buddhadasa who ruled in the 4th century had been a very great medical expert and his knowledge of medical science benefitted not only the human beings but also the animal world including the most poisonous snakes. He was competent not only in providing medication for the sick but was clever at surgery as well. He is reported to have built hospitals in each village and appointed doctors to all of them. Therefore the modern day healthcare provided by the government is only a continuation of what our great rulers in the past had provided for us.

In the past it is reported that every village in Sri Lanka had a medical practitioner who was known in Sinhala as “*Wedarala*” and he is reported to have provided the medical attention required by all in the village and all those treatments were according to the Sinhala medical system. At present one can see large volumes of Ola manuscripts in various libraries or even in the custody of the individuals all containing the medical information of the old Sinhala medical system including the different treatments for different ailments etc. Evidence is available in plenty to show how much highly the Sinhala medical system had been regarded prior to the period the western medical system under the duress of the colonial masters achieved the priority place even among the Sinhala community. Even in this 21st century when the western medical system enjoys much popularity it has to be admitted that the confidence on the Sinhala medical system is been kept alive as can be seen from the enthusiasm shown by many to revert to native systems almost as the last resort.

## System of Government

The system of government had evolved to suit the environment of the country and to suit for the requirements of the people over a long period of more than several centuries. It had been subjected to much severe changes through the intervention of the western forces. At the moment owing to the present day Parliamentary system of government that is based on the party system which provides the ideal background for the factional warring system, the people of a country can be found to be divided

and torn into pieces. It is not only among the different groups that the splits take place but even among the Sinhala themselves there is growing disputes among them that hinders the good government system that had been prevailing in the country through the long period of our own system of government. The stark truth is that splitting into rival groups is very severe not only between the various groups but also among the Sinhala themselves and hence the entire society is subjected to misery and destruction.

Nishshanka Malla Rajasabhawa



King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe



Mahanuwara Raja Sabhawa



King Raja Singha II



## Religions and the Faiths and the Beliefs of the Sinhala Community

An absolute majority of the Sinhala Community are Buddhists. During the period of the Sivhelas<sup>8</sup> who had contributed immensely to the beginning of the Sinhala in the 6th century BC Lord Buddha was believed to have visited Sri Lanka thrice. However the establishment of the *Buddhasasana* (Buddhist Dispensation) with the four-fold adherents groups

of *Bhikku*, *Bhikkuni*, *Upasakas* (male laity), and *Upasikas* (female laity) took place in the 3rd century BC during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa predominantly by the Sinhala of the Sinhala desaya. Since then Buddhism became the state religion and the provision of protection to Buddhism as well as the provision of facilities for the followers to engage



in religious observances became the responsibility of the King.

The fact that Buddhism spread out in the whole island immediately after its introduction is proved by the evidences in the inscriptions, chronicles, and other Buddhist texts in addition to numerous archeological evidences of the monasteries and stupas etc and even existing religious places throughout the country. At the earliest period the Bhikkus were offered the modified natural caves for their living while the construction of the temples for offering to the Bhikkus by the kings and the elite took place subsequently.

Both the rulers and the ruled of the Sinhala contributed their maximum towards the permanent development of Buddhism through a period of 2500 years by way of providing objects of worship like the Stupas and statues in addition to the bringing from India of the Sacred Bo-Tree and the sacred Tooth relic. The Buddhist Bhikkus and the Laity not only gave their might to the propagation Buddhism within the country but also took necessary actions to introduce it to the far away foreign countries like vast continent of China and at the present time too they continue to serve the religious needs of the Buddhists all over the world.

The invaders from South India during time of the Anuradhapura period caused much destruction to the Buddhist sacred places. Yet when they were defeated by the native armies and country was regained the Buddhist kings devoted their time and energy to restore the destroyed sacred places to their former glory but no Buddhist Kings ever tried to destroy in retaliation the Hindus and their temples and their other religious places. That is how the true reconciliation was maintained throughout the history of the Sinhala.

This fact is clearly proved by the manner of renovation and conservation of the Hindu kovils erected by Cholas, the brutal destructors of Buddhist monuments in Polonnaruwa within its sacred area are been effected and implemented. The Hindu monuments in Trincomalle, Kataragama, Munneswaram and Kotahena are also receiving the same treatment as the Buddhist monuments thanks to the reconciliatory attitude of Buddhism and the Buddhist community. Furthermore, one would be surprised to see how Buddhists visit Hindu Kovils in different parts of the country and engage in religious observances without any ill-feelings thus displaying the religious harmony that had been existing among the Sinhala-Buddhists and the Tamil-Hindus in the country supplying an ideal reply to the critics of Sinhala-Buddhists who find the unity between these two communities unbearable to them.

It was not only with the Hindu community that the Sinhala Buddhists had been living in harmony but they had been living in harmony with the Muslims too who had been living here from about the 7th and 8th centuries engaged in trade. They have had almost the monopoly of the internal trade up to about the 15-16 century and the Sinhala had been extending their full cooperation. It needs to be highlighted that history of the country has much more secrets to be revealed in respect of the communal harmony of the country that many who would like to see the country in turmoil strive to hide. Portuguese came to the East and Sri Lanka too in pursuit of their erstwhile enemy, the Muslims who were a threat to their monopoly of east-west trade. When Portuguese came here and even had the sway over the littoral sections of the country they took action to banish all Muslims from the country. Then it was the Sinhala Buddhist Kings who came to their rescue and gave hiding places from the upcountry to live and most of these land happened to be the lands of temples or Devalayas. We cannot



be blind to the history since it is what had happened. Yet Sinhala-Buddhists had been at the receiving end however much philanthropic they had been.

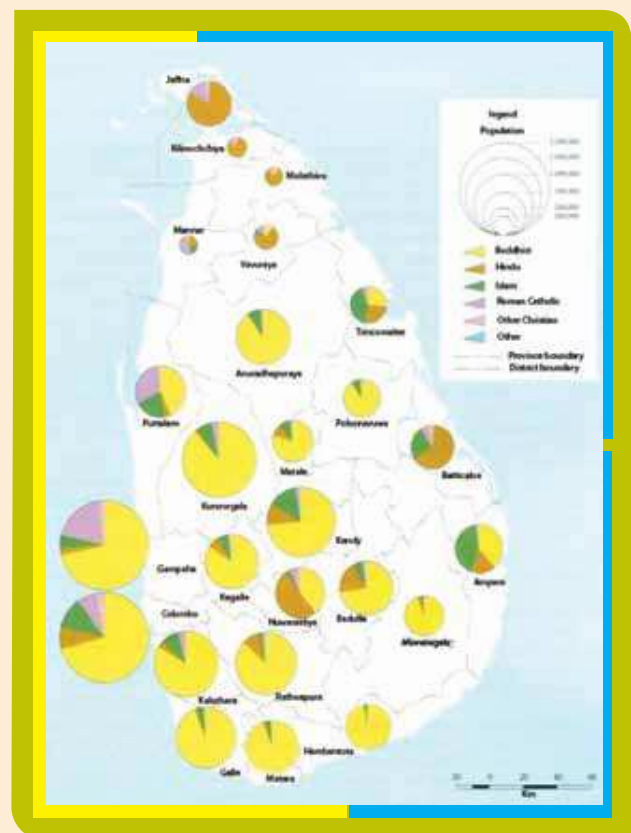
While the Buddhists, Hindus, and Islamists had been living in peace and harmony within Sinhale came the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the European religion of Christianity and started to propagate the new religion. Though the religions of Hinduism and Islamism did not spread in the Sinhala communities different sectors of Christianity started to propagated among the Sinhala Buddhist through different means but achieving desired results. Hence it cannot be forgotten that the great grandparents of most of the dignitaries attached to the new religions were Sinhala-Buddhists.

Even under this situation the acceptance of Buddhism as the state religion of the country from 3rd century BC has been maintained until the fall of the last Sinhala kingdom into the hands of British. Even in 1815 the British imperialists of Christian faith too could not reject this situation. and hence in 1815 when the Kandyan Convention through which the handing over of the Kandyan kingdom was effected British could not refuse to accept through the Clause 5 of the Convention the responsibility to protect Buddhism, the Buddhist Priests and all the land and properties of the temples<sup>9</sup> and the sacred places of the Buddhists.

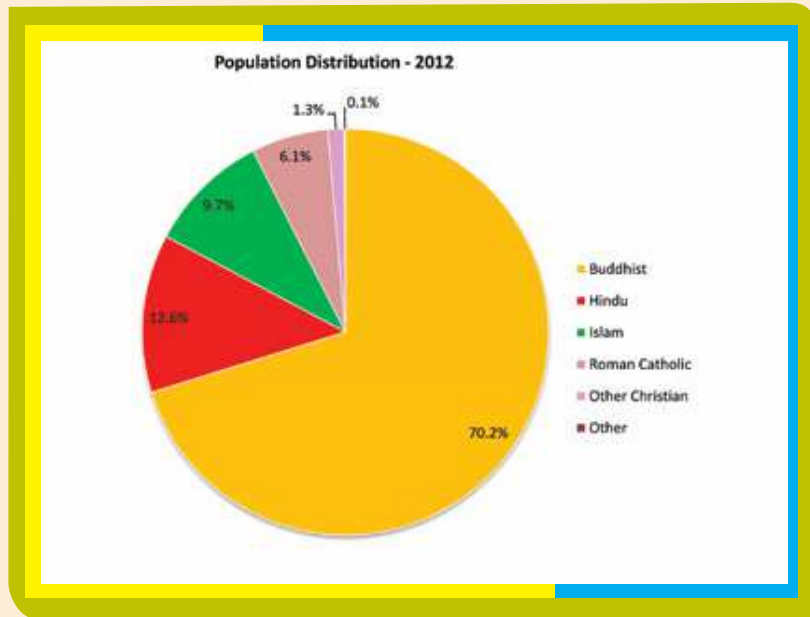
Despite the incidents of religious disturbances that had taken place afterwards within Sinhaladesha, the position of state religion enjoyed by Buddhism in this country remained unhindered until 1972 when in the name of religious harmony it was conferred only the position of primus inter pares place among the religions in the country by the Constitution of 1972. Despite the toleration of all that insults and

injuries by the Buddhists, there are often campaigns to compel the government to delete even the position of primary place among the religions of the country which also happen to be the religion of the vast majority of Sinhalas who are the absolute majority of the country's population and to declare the country as a non-religious state.

All this would compel us to take appropriate action to make the people understand the history of the country, how religious harmony was maintained by the majority Sinhala-Buddhist population extending hands of friendship to others whenever they were in need of protection, sustenance and even confidence of living in peace and harmony and how the minorities responded most faithfully to their best of friends throughout history of the country.



9 The Buddhist religious institutions and places of worship have under them a large number of land and properties given over by the Kings and the ordinary laity for the sake of merits.

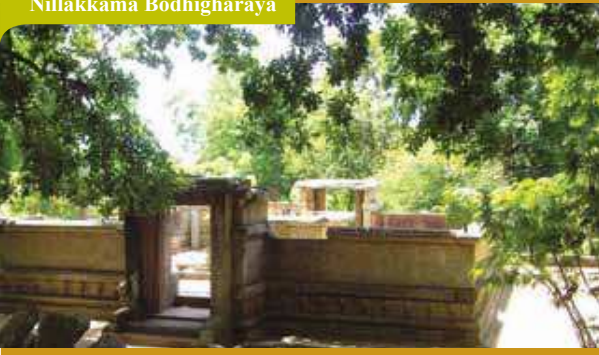


## A Temple

Bellanwila



Nillakkama Bodhigharaya



God Saman



Dambulla Prathima Gruhaya



## Dress and Ornaments of the Sinhala Community

From the beginning of the Sinhalas, the dress code they were used to was very simple and scanty, most probably due to the fact that they had been experts at adjusting their life style to suit the nature and the environment. Until about the 15th century according to the information women had been wearing a dress which had no upper section to cover the breast while they wore a clothe that extended below the knees to cover the bottom of the body. The males were wearing a short cloth above the knees while there was none to cover the upper body. However the royals and the elite were using various grand style dresses and used a complete ceremonial kit on ceremonial occasions even from the pre-Christian era. The paintings and statues provide evidence to the effect that even the Kings were wearing only ornaments and had bare upper bodies.

At the present time most of the dresses used by the Sinhala community appear to be those inherited from

the Kandyan kingdom around the 15th and 16th centuries. There had been separate official dresses for the kings Officials like *Nilames* and other elites and all of them had their dresses that covered the upper body as well. This dress was known as “*Mulu Anduma*” (Complete ceremonial dress) they had ornaments meant for them as well. The high level elite class ladies used to appear in the Upcountry *Osariya* (wrap around cloth) with seven necklaces of which *Agastimalaya* was the principal necklace and in additions they wore variety of bangles mainly the Bangally bangles. It is a common sight even at present to see the young men and women appear in these dresses at weddings and similar festive occasions.

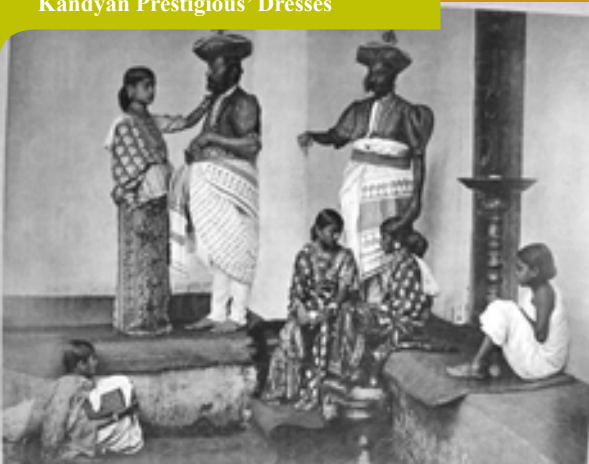
The Sinhala community has only a limited number of dresses specially meant for them. The rural males are used to wear the sarong, *baniyans* (vest) and *kamisa* (shirt). Rural women are often dressed in cloth and jacket while young women and girls wear *hettaya*



with lama *sariya* (children's cloth). The urban women and the employed women are used to wear the *osariya* or the *saree*.

The school uniform that had been recommended as the uniform for the entire school-going population has now been reduced to a position where it has become the uniform of only the Sinhala community while allowing children of other ethnic groups to wear their own uniforms. Therefore it is doubtful whether the promised national integration and peace and harmony among the different groups in the country could be achieved with that type of differences among the school children been encouraged.

Kandyan Prestigious' Dresses



Nilame Costume



Saree



Half Saree



Osariya



Courtesy of internet

National costume



## The Language and the Literature of the Sinhalas

The language of the Sinhalas is also known as Sinhala and it is as old as the history of the Sinhala community. There is evidence to prove that at the time of the arrival of Arahant Mahinda Thero in the 3rd BC there was a language in use and that was known as the *Dipa Bhasha* or the language of the Island, Sinhala.

Benefitting from the many languages that had contacts with us this language had developed over the last 2500 years to what it is now. With the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka the Brahmi scripts that was in use in India too was introduced to Sri Lanka and it can be seen that the early inscriptions too had been written in *Brahmi* script. Subsequently Pali language came to be used in the study of Buddhism since Buddhist scripture were written in Pali and it

furthered the development of the Sinhala language very much. Therefore it would be seen that Pali language as well as the Sanskrit language that was prevalent in India too came to swell the development of the Sinhala language by way adding many words as well as the language rules and regulations meant for the proper usage of the language.

During the time of the Anuradhapura period itself beside the writing of inscriptions the writing of books too started at the same. Since the inscriptions are limited to a least number of lines of writing they have very little significance as examples of literary achievements. However the Sigiri graffitis which provide much literary taste and value are considered as a milestone in Sinhala Literary history.



Among the books written during the Anuradhapura period the three books that had survived namely *Siyabaslakara*, *Dhampiya Atuwa Getapadaya* and *Sikhawalanda Vinisa* show much diversity in their subject themes. The oldest Sinhala book in extant today happens to be *Siyabaslakara* compiled in *Gi metor* (style) is believed to have been written in the 9th or 10th century. Since it shows much Sanskrit poetic features it proves that Sinhala language and literary works have had the influence of Sanskrit from the very early stage of history.

*Dhampiya Atuwa Getapadaya*, a grammar book written in the 10th century proves that the written styles in the Sinhala language had already fashioned by that time. This literary work also displays how the words from Pali and Sanskrit have been added into the Sinhala language. Both *Sikhawalanda* and *Sikhawalanda Vinisa* are grammar books and hence not much literary taste can be expected from them but they still provide us with much knowledge about the usage of language.

By the time of the Polonnaruwa period not only the language but even literary field had gained sophistication and vast improvement. Hence there was literary works in numbers and on diverse subjects. It was during this period that great works like *Muwadevdawatha*, *Sasandawatha*, poetry books based on Jathaka stories, Dharmapradikawa, Amawatura, Butsarana, Siinhala Thupawansaya etc in addition to a grammar book by the name of Sidathsagarawa were gifted to the nation. Accordingly it is proved that Polonnaruwa period had provided us with books on variety of subjects including grammar which had helped the language to gain perfection.

The vast majority of the writers and authors of this period happened to be the Buddhist monks who had gained high levels of scholarship. What is important

is that they used their skills in writing to elucidate on the deep meanings of the Buddha's teachings in addition to writing about the Buddha's life story, proper manner of engaging in the Buddhist rituals and practices etc. thus highlighting the relationship between the religion of the people, Buddhism and the language of the people, Sinhala and the union of the two, a feature that is strongly established in this country almost from the origin of the nation.

Owing to the influences that came from Tamils, Sinhala culture as well as the language and the literary field had much impact felt. As a result many things had been added into these areas from them. The number of additions to the Sinhala language that had been effected then can still be seen in force in our language, daily life, rituals and festivals and culture as a whole.

The rapid development that was apparent during the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods in the Sinhala language and literary fields had a great setback with the invasion of Magha in the 13th century which brought about the collapse of the Kingdom of Polonnaruwa.

Some efforts were taken by the Kings of Dambadeniya and Kurenagala specially King Wijayabahu 111 of Dambadeniya who along with the help of the Bhikkus tried to revamp the language and literature. His successor Parakramabahu 11 was a great scholar and pandith whose competence had been duly recognized and acknowledged by the conferment of the honouary titles of "*Kalikala Sarwagna*" "*Shadbhasha Parameshwara*" Hence it was natural that maximum contribution was forthcoming from him towards the rejuvenation of the language and the literature. The revival can be gauged by the number of books written during this period both in Pali and Sinhala. Among the most popular of them are

*Saddharmarathanawaliya, Kusadawatha, Pansiya Panas Jathakaya, Dalada Siritha, Kuveni Asna, Elu Attanagalu Wansaya, Anagatha Wansaya.*

This was followed by the Gampola period when writing of poetry was gaining popularity and the period is considered to be special owing to the beginning of the new field of Messenger poetry. The language by now had gained a heavy development and education was spreading. Hence it was natural that new directions were explored. The first of the Messenger poetry namely *Tisara Sandesaya* and *Mayura Sandesaya* were written during this period.

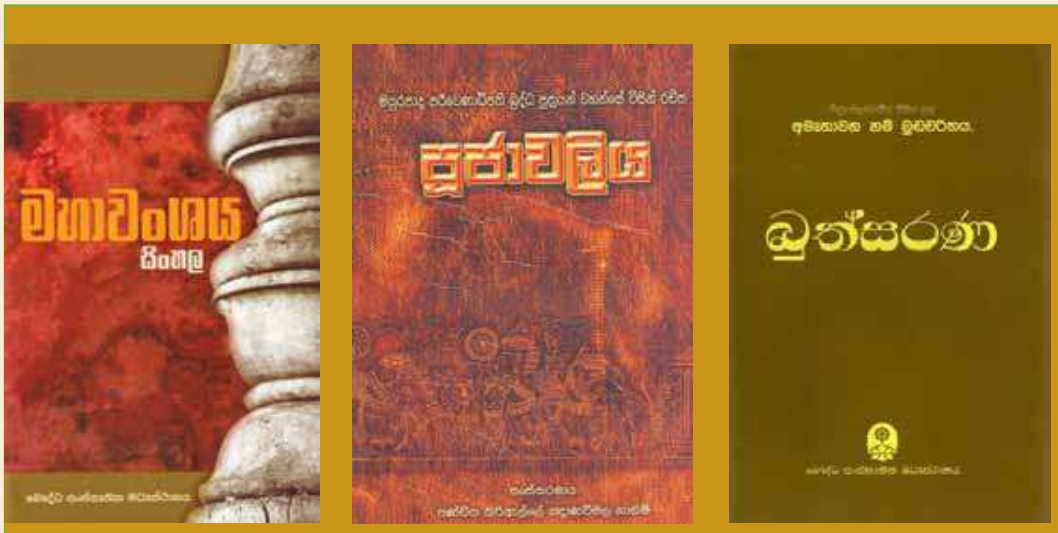
Gampola period was followed by the Kotte period, starting in 1412 and it can be considered without any doubt as the golden era of Sinhala literature. The great heights reached during this period can be measured by the number of educational centers of international fame opened during this period. Most popular among them were Padmawathie Pirivena in Keragala, Wijayabahu Pirivena in Thotagamuwa, Sunethra Mahadevi Piriveana in Pepiliyana, Irugalkula Pirivena in Mulkirigala, Sri Gnanananda Pirivena in Raigama.

As can be expected there was a great impetus for acquisition of knowledge and the Bhikkus in large numbers engaged in education and literary activities resulting in producing a very large number of Buddhist monks who were well known here and beyond the shores for their great scholarships. Among them were the great names of Mahanethpamula Widagama Thero, Keragala Vanaratana Thero, Shadbhasha Parameswara Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero, Mangala Sangharaja Thero, Maithiya Maha Thero, Irugalkulathilaka Thero, and Wetthewe Thero

were prominent for their scholarship and contribution to education, language and literature. There were the several gems of Sinhala literature written during this period such as *Paravi Sandesaya, Selalihini Sandesaya, Kokila Sandesaya, Kavyasekaraya, Saddharmaratnakaraya, Perakunmba Siritha, Loweda Sagarawa, Buduguna Alankaratya* are outstanding among them.

In the contemporary period it is seen that the language and literature of the country had been influenced by several countries from a totally alien environment namely the West and Europe in particular. Portuguese, Dutch and English (more broadly British) who had enjoyed periods of domination over the destinies of this country have contributed much by way of influences in many fields and language and literature too had not been able to escape the fate. There are many contributions to the development of language and literature of the country coming from a large number of eminent scholars in the field of culture and literary world. Among some of the great names are W.A de Silva, Piyadasa Sirisena, Prof Sarathchandra Ediriweera, Martin Wickramasinghe, T B Ilangaratna, K Jayatilaka, P B Alwis Perera, Sagara Palansuriya, G B. Sennayaka, Prof. Siri Gunasingha, Dr Gunadasa Amarasekara are outstanding.

Sinhala language too is faced with the same challenges that others as well face in the context of fast changing social system that prevails. Sinhala language alone cannot escape from it. Therefore the challenges posed by the latest language instrument of computer language directs problems to the Sinhala language as well and apparently it has so far successfully faced the challenges and hence its language had broaden the boundaries of Sinhala language too.



## Socio-cultural customs and Practices

### 1. Observance of Auspicious Times

The custom of adhering to an auspicious time to start any beneficial and benevolent activity had been followed by the Sinhala community in the past almost from the pre-Christian era. Even the kings had been following this practice in inaugurating the important

state activities. This is proved by the fact that King Dutugemunu on the occasion of laying the foundation for the construction of Ruwanweli seya as described in the Mahawansa. (MW. 29-14-15) followed the auspicious hours. This custom of observing the

traditional practices and rituals was applied in the case of all actions in the state functions with meticulous care.

The Sinhala, who followed the example set by their king adhered to the traditional custom in the same seriousness and specially in the observance of the auspicious hours at the very inauguration start of all their activities with the firm belief that the success and achievement of the anticipated success will be ensured. It appears that this custom has relevance not

only to the activities like construction of houses and buildings, weddings and other events in the personal life but also to all the day to day activities of the people. The truth is that they were very much dependent on these customs and practices whose validity can be judged by the fact that they remain in the society as a powerful social force up to now simply because they have proved to be beneficial to the people who ever relied on them. The preparation of the auspicious times in the most systematic way was the function of the astrologer of the village.

## 2. Pregnancy and Child Brith

The pregnant mother in the Sinhala society enjoyed in the past a special place of honour and hence their society, the relatives, friends and well-wishers considered it their responsibility to take care of her by providing her with those that she wished to have or to eat in her pregnancy craving. This was due to the acceptance that the delivery of a child is an addition to the numbers or the strength in the village or the community.

It was customary in the Sinhala society for the mothers to deliver their children at home since there the battalion of elderly women with experience to help her. However now with the availability of the Midwifery services in every village to look after the health of the expectant mothers, the need for the services of the experienced mothers in the village is not felt much. Even the delivery is also increasingly taking place in the government hospitals where facilities have been greatly improved and hence the people do not want to take the risk of retaining the mothers to deliver at home. This is further encouraged

by the increasing tendency to resort for operations without waiting for natural deliveries.

Among the most important customs practiced by the Sinhala at childbirth is known as “Rankiri katagama” or wetting the mouth with golden milk as the very first feeding introduced to the new born child. It is the first feeding administered by way of wetting the mouth of the new child with a drop of mother’s milk into which a clean piece of gold is dropped to make it symbolically golden milk. Once these initial rituals are completed and the visitors are treated with tea and finally the exchange of gifts to the mothers who were in attendance and to the mother and the new born baby, the crowd will find their way home. The next important duty will be to get the exact time of delivery and rush to the village astrologer to get the horoscope done for the newly born one. The astrologer, having consulted the various forces relevant to astrological factors of the time will tell the impacts of the stars and give the best indications to provide a suitable name for the child.



### 3. Attaining of Age - Puberty of Female Children

It was a firm customary obligation of the elders in the Sinhala-Buddhist society when the girls in the family, no matter how many, attain age to have set rituals performed on each occasions mainly because it has deep social value and hence each one deserves to go through the process. No sooner it was noticed that the girl had attained age, she would be confined to a room which will be tabooed to the males including the father until the ceremonial bathing takes place on an auspicious hour as prescribed by the village astrologer. While she is left inside the room she is invariably expected to keep a piece of iron as a means of protection from evil forces even while the elderly women will be in attendance to her. According to the local belief system when a girl is attained age there is a greater danger of her being a victim of the ill-effects of solitude (Thanikam dosha).

Subsequently the mother of the girl or an elderly female relative will hurry to the village astrologer with a sheaf of betels to seek the help of the astrologer to find a suitable auspicious time to bath the girl. In such a situation it was customary for the astrologer to find the suitable time and in addition tell them about

good and bad effects of the time the girl had attained age and even recommend some offerings in the name of various gods etc to ward off those ill effects.

When it comes to the bathing day the house will be full of elderly women who happen to be relatives gathered there to wish the new lady. The girl would be conducted out of the house where a special enclosure is prepared for the bathing. The water that is prepared with several medicinal plants and even roots for the protection of the girl. The mother or any elderly female relative or as in some areas, the washer women of the family will be in charge of the bathing after which she would dressed up in the best possible way with the new clothes and jewelry brought by the parents. Finally she would be brought before the visitors but still with head and face covered. It is only after the girl had seen her own face from the water in the basin that she would see her father and other relatives for the first time after been confined to the room. Traditionally this was a very private ceremony in the past but now there is a tendency for having large scale celebrations on account of the new life the girl had entered into.

### 4. Marriage

There was a time when it was customary for the Sinhals to marry their cross-cousins. However it came to be the practice for the children to marry whoever is found by the parents. By now it has drastically changed to a system of each selecting his or her own partner.

There were a series of marriage customs and practices

inherited by us from our grandparents. They have changed very much and a new set of customs have cropped up in their place. Today the weddings are held more in hotels or halls than in homes as it was the case until recent times. In the past it was considered essential that the young girls protect themselves to be maidens till they marry and hence the parents and the relatives paid much more attention to protect the

young girls. But though only few traditional families seem to be keen to adhere to these age-old customs, majority appear to be least worried about them.

All the people among the Sinhallas seem to be still very keen to get the best auspicious times prepared by the astrologers. In the traditional weddings the mother is largely involved with the dressing of the bride while the father conducted her out into the hall where the wedding stage is erected. Then it will be the maternal uncles of the couple who would conduct them on to the Poruwa or the stage. These customs were intended to recreate the traditional bonds that prevailed in the traditional society. When the couple get on to the Poruwa the traditional chanting and recitations by the conductor of the proceedings take place where the couple will be blessed for very successful family life. Then comes one of the most important practices namely the “tali pili andaweema” or the dressing of the bride with new attractive cloths and jewelry. It is customary for the Bridegroom to provide suitable dresses that will be worn by the bride on her journey (going away) with the newly found companion.

Once the customs and rituals on the wedding stage are over the couple will be given permission to leave the stage and then another series of activities take place. They include the signing the marriage register, cutting the cake which is a new addition and then receiving the best wishes from all friends and well-wishers assembled there. Depending on the choice of the organizers there will be much music dancing fun-fare until lunch time approaches. After lunch and exchange of goodwill and greetings the couple would depart on honeymoon while the rest will find their own way back.

Poruwa Ceremony



Wedding costumes



Chanting Ashtaka



## 5. Funerals

Sinhala community is rich in its vast body of funeral customs as well. Once a person is pronounced dead the body will be bathed and dressed up to be kept inside a coffin made out of timber. In the traditional society it was the villagers themselves who made it but with the passage of time it has become the practice to purchase it from the funeral undertakers. No competent people to make coffins seem to be available in the villages now. Although it was the custom earlier to keep the body in the house itself until removed for last rites at present it is becoming the custom to keep the body in a funeral parlour till the last rites are performed.

Sinhala-Buddhists were used to cremate the dead bodies rather than bury them and with the increased facilities provided by the local government agencies the cremation is becoming almost the practice. At the time of last rites the priests of the village temple would be summoned and religious rituals will take place and after the offerings to the priests and transfer of merits to the dead the last rites will be completed and the ashes will be collected on the following day to be either deposited in the home garden or to be added into a water body to be flushed away. It is customary for Sinhala-Buddhists to remember the dead on the

seventh day after death when a Buddhist priest will be invited to the house for a sermon in the transfer of merits to the dead which will be followed by an alms giving either on the following morning or most preferably at noon on the following day for a several number of Bhikkus. That will be followed by a lunch for the relatives and well-wishers assembled on the occasion. The same practice will be repeated at the third and seventh months to be followed by a large scale alms giving on the anniversary day . There are Sinhalas but non-Buddhists who will not follow these customs but will follow their own religious practices.



## 6. Respecting Parents Elders and Teachers

According to the Sinhala Buddhist customs and practices the paying of respect to the parents, elders and the teachers is held in very high esteem that non-conformists would be considered as outcasts. This

custom is basically Buddhist oriented. According to the Buddhist teachings the parents deserve the highest honour and respect. It is also been highlighted as a very auspicious deed too.

In the same way the Sinhala Buddhists despite the heavy trends of changes that sweep across the society devote much attention to fulfill their obligations towards their elders as well as the teachers. This can be seen very well reflected during the Sinhala New year festivals when these elders in the society are always well remembered with atleast a sheaf of betels, the unparelled symbol of deep respect and highest honour one can offer to another.



## 7. Treating the Visitors or the Hospitality of the Sinhala Buddhists

It is one of the most exemplary customs of the Sinhala Buddhist community to be courteous, helpful and hospitable to the visitors whether coming home or meeting on the way according to the appropriateness for the occasion. This quality in the Sinhala Buddhists has come for highest praise of almost all the foreign visitors who happened to have enjoyed the hospitality of these people. Often the foreign visitors had showered praise for the smiling faces of the people. This is interpreted as an outcome of their simple lifestyle devoid of any ill feeling, ill will, jealousy or even distrust against another. In their efforts to provide the best treatments they would resort to the maximum possible.

However it is not very far from the truth that these communities apparently due to the high pressure from the forces of modernization and westernization step by step appear to be deviating from these unique customs and practices when the entire world is asking for more and more of them. Yet if serious and genuine attempts are made without sacrificing the rights and inheritance of the true sons of the soil it is most probable that much could be gained towards a successful achievement of reconciliation, peace and harmony that is most sought after today.



## 8. The Significance of the Sinhala Community in the Building up of the Reconciliation

The elucidation found above would convince anyone that it is the Sinhala Community who had been the settlers of the country from the very beginning of the known history and the vast majority of them also happen to be the Buddhists. Hence in taking into consideration any fundamental principle that is so important in maintaining human relations in the society, Sinhala-Buddhists who form the vast majority deserve to be considered very significant factor which if ignored will guarantee the failure of the efforts.

The Sinhala community having had its origin in this country from the pre-6th century BC had been responsible for the very arduous task of evolving the history as well as the culture of this country. In the process they had the bitter taste of facing the challenges of foreign invaders several times and each time coming out victorious thus ensuring the independence and the sovereignty of the country. In this eventful march they were able to build up a formidable free and sovereign state and a peaceful society with inherent qualities of peace and harmony with whoever who came to live in amicable reconciliation accepting the Sinhala-Buddhist orientation of the country.

Subjugation to the western imperialistic nations much of these traditional characteristics that displayed the identity of the nation were erased off but their influences and impacts remain to be strongly felt. In the face of the internal conflicts and dissensions generated by the foreign powers the fundamental rights of the Sinhala community seem to be threatened and as a result the original settlers of the country, the Sinhala appear to be facing the worst agony of losing its identity and the qualities that identified the nation separated from others are fast disappearing or weakened to their utter dismay because they had loved their identity more than anything else.

If the minority groups of this country act in the full understanding of the great sacrifices the original settlers of this country had to make, the cooperation from the majority community will be forthcoming without much bargaining. Otherwise nearly 3000 years of history of the country will prove that there won't be any power capable of achieving the harmony by the use of force on the Sinhala Buddhists and also by hurting their feelings, nothing may be won by any. Instead it may end with nothing gained by anybody but everything lost by all.

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# The Sri Lankan Tamil Community

Prof. S. Pathmanathan

## Introduction

In the multi ethnic and multicultural society of Sri Lanka the Sri Lankan Tamils who had developed as an indigenous group of people from ancient times, are the second largest community. They are identified by the language they speak and Tamil is the oldest among the languages spoken in South Asia. Tamil belongs to the

group of Dravidian languages and is, in fact, the oldest literary language of this group. The people who speak the Dravidian languages are mainly concentrated in the southern states of India.

The Tamil poetic tradition had its origins long before 200 BC. Tamil literature, which is

composite in character, has a long and continuous history and some of the extant poems of this literature were composed in the second century BC. Some of the expressions and grammatical forms that had been lost in the language spoken in Tamil Nadu are still found in Sri Lankan Tamil, which in the course of its development, began to diverge from the language of Tamil Nadu since the 14th century. It retained its originality because the Sri Lankan Tamils developed their own cultural identity as they were sheltered by political and geographical circumstances unlike their counterparts on the other side of the Palk Strait. But, Tamil literature has been a major part of the heritage shared by the Tamils of South India and Sri Lanka.

The historical habitation of the Sri Lankan Tamils is a geographically contiguous region confined to the administrative districts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. In its narrowest limits it coincided with the Judicial District of Jaffnapatnam created by the Dutch in the 18th century. The Commandment of Jaffnapatnam and the provinces called Opperhoofds of Trincomalee and Batticaloa were included in that district. In ancient times it was almost one third of the island's territory. Presently, it is a truncated portion of territory amounting to about one eighth part of the island's land surface. There were also pockets of Tamil settlements in Chilaw, Puttalam and Kalpitiya in the northwestern littoral and Mannampitiya in the Polonnaruwa District.

The Sri Lankan Tamils have played a most important role in the development of kingship and administration, social institutions, art and architecture and above all in introducing and nurturing a mode of production since the Proto Historic Period. In the age of the monarchy the

relations which the Tamils had with the Sinhalese was one of partnership in political affairs.

The view that the Sri Lankan Tamils had their origins in the South Indian invasions of ancient times is a fallacy of modern Sri Lankan historiography. The invasions were directed against the centres of dynastic power, Anuradhapura and later Polonnaruwa, as attested by the *Mahavamsa*. Those among the soldiers who came with the invading armies and stayed behind were assimilated within the population of those cities, which were never reckoned as part of the area of the historical habitation of the Tamils.

The origins of the ancestors of the Tamils and Sinhalese could be traced from the intermixture of the peoples of the Mesolithic and Early Iron Age cultures, which could be identified respectively with those of the Yakkhas and Nagas mentioned in the *Mahavamsa* as the pre-Buddhist inhabitants of the island. The Mesolithic people had lived in the island for about 28,000 years BC. The Early Iron Age Culture had flowed into the island since 900 BC.

S. Paranavitana and S.U. Deraniyagala have suggested that the Nagas could be identified with the people of the Early Iron Age Culture. Their impression is confirmed by the evidence from inscriptions in two languages, Prakrit and Tamil. These are recorded respectively in two different scripts: northern Brahmi and Tamil Brahmi. The Tamil Brahmi inscriptions have remained unrecognized and were not deciphered until recently. Almost all of them are connected with the life and culture of the Nagas as could be seen here later.

There are around 2000 Brahmi inscriptions recorded in Prakrit. Almost all of them, except



the “Tamil Householders’ Inscription” at Abhayagiriya are on the dripledges of caves, and record donations made to the Buddhist Sangha. They are written in a hybrid Prakrit containing loan words from Tamil and the languages of the Mesolithic people. The notices in the Brahmi inscriptions in Prakrit suggest that the Nagas were the second largest community in Sri Lanka during the Early Historic Period. There are approximately 90 references to them in these records. In the meanwhile, the notices on the Bata are twice that number. The name Bata seems to have been the designation of a separate ethnic group who could be identified with the people of the Mesolithic Culture. They were essentially a community of food – gatherers and cave – dwellers until their assimilation into a new social formation that developed after the spread of the EIAC.

The people of the EIAC who had come to the island from Peninsular India, ended the stone age, and introduced and developed a mode of production, which was basically similar to that of the advanced communities in the sub – continent.

They had developed the art of casting metals and quarrying stones. They had developed the technique of producing heavy equipment and instruments of iron for cutting or excavating rocks and making stone columns and other large items of utility.

The people of the EIAC in Sri Lanka, like their counterparts in South India had the capacity for clearing the jungles, felling large trees and creating fields and gardens for raising crops. Scientific examination of the residual remains of food offerings to the dead as found at burials sites have revealed that the people concerned had cultivated paddy, some varieties of millets, legumes and vegetables. The items of their food also included meat and fish. Faunal remains suggest that the people of the EIAC had domesticated animals and some birds, besides engaging in fishing in inland waters and the seas.

## The Nagas and the formation of Tamil Society

The society that is revealed by the Brahmi inscriptions had developed under the heavy influence of the EIAC. Buddhism had exerted a strong influence on this society since the late third century BC. The converts to Buddhism had adopted Prakrit names and around this time the wide gap between the Mesolithic people and those of the EIAC had narrowed because of cultural assimilation. The Nagas, who had still retained some traces of their identity were the most powerful and dominant group although their

demographic strength was smaller than that of the Mesolithic people.

The impression that the Nagas were predominant among the people of the EIAC is confirmed by archaeological evidence. They are referred to in all inscriptions found on burial urns and on stones in cairn circles and dolmens. The present author had the occasion to examine some of these monuments by the courtesy of permission granted by the Archaeological Department and

the authorities of several museums in the country. A noteworthy feature of these inscriptions is that they are recorded in the Tamil language and in the Tamil Brahmi script that was developed in South India to record texts in Tamil.

The inscriptions of the monuments of the EIAC have a twofold significance. They reveal that the Nagas were in fact responsible for the spread of the EIAC in the island. The other major consideration is that the Nagas were a Tamil speaking community. This is not at all surprising because the EIAC had flowed into the island from South India.

The Tamil Brahmi inscriptions in the island are not exclusively confined to the burial monuments of the EIAC. They are found on a wide variety of items scattered in all parts of the island excepting the low – country wet zone and the central highlands. Nevertheless, their concentration is mainly in the districts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

They are also found in substantial numbers in the Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Puttalam districts. They are also seen at settlement sites, villages, towns, premises of temples of great antiquity, jungles, rocks, mountains and in the midst of paddy fields. They are inscribed on a large variety of items: bare rocks on the ground, hill – slopes, grind – stones, mortars, oil – press, stones of various categories and sizes, lamps, conches, pottery and terracotta images, images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, sculptures of the Naga cult and Hindu deities and on coins issued by Naga chieftains in the Jaffna and Vanni districts.

The information found in these inscriptions is supplementary to that found about the Nagas in the

Prakrit inscriptions engraved in Brahmi characters. Between these two categories of inscriptions those engraved in Tamil Brahmi despite their brevity and limited vocabulary are broader in scope as sources of historical information. They provide evidence about the existence of a multi religious society. The stone sculptures of the five – headed cobras, imaginary hydra – headed creatures, venerated and propitiated by the Nagas, bear the name *Maninakan*, which was applied to the deity whom they worshipped. Sometimes the name *Maninakan palli* is found instead of the name *Maninakan*. The sculpture or any other object on which it is found was considered as the abode of *Maninakan*.

Sometimes they used stones of various shapes and sizes as symbols of worship instead of the Naga sculptures. A small triangular and portable piece of stone was often used as such a symbol. They also created sites or constructed temples dedicated for the worship of *Maninakan* and these were called *Maninakan – palli*.

As seen earlier a large number of the Nagas were converted to Buddhism as evident from the Brahmi inscriptions. A substantial proportion of the Tamils living in the Jaffna and Vanni districts were Buddhists in the Early Historic Period. In all Buddhist images found in the museums in Jaffna and Vavuniya the name *Maninakan* is engraved on the images of the Buddha, on the footprints and the component parts of temples. On a personal observation we found the names / titles of three successive generations of Naga rulers inscribed on the basement of the cetiya – like structures at Kantarodai in Jaffna. At one of them the Tamil word *takali* (தகளி) which has the connotation “dome” (*andam*) is written on a small rectangular stone. It, suggests that precautions were taken

in medieval times to secure these buildings from decay. It is also possible that a monastic establishment of great antiquity had survived until the 14th century. The Buddha images from Puloly, Vallipuram and Nilavarai are some of the most conspicuous items of Buddhist sculptures on which the name *Maninakan* was engraved in Tamil Brahmi characters.

In the Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara Districts Buddha images that could be assigned to a period before the 2nd century A.D. have not yet been found. But, in all of them, there are foot – prints bearing the name *Maninakan* in Tamil Brahmi characters. Available evidence suggests that a Buddhist temple called *Maninakan – palli* was found on a hill at Tanthamalai in the southwestern part of the Batticaloa District.

There is now adequate evidence to suggest that many of the most venerated and ancient Hindu temples in the island were established by the Nagas before the third century AD. Tirukketisvaram, Munnesvaram, Tirukkonesvaram and Nakulesvaram were among such temples. Besides, the Sivan temple at Panankamam in the Vanni and that of Nirmukkap pillaiyar at Vantharumulai appear to have been established at sites where there were shrines of the Naga cult. The last of these is particularly significant. There are here two items of sculpture of the Naga cult: a large and finely carved stone image of a five – headed cobra and that of a *nagabandha*. Presently, beside these there is a large stone image of Ganesa and all these are placed together in a row. In front of them and at the southeastern corner of the modern temple there are images of Bhairava and his rider, the dog. Curiously on all of them the name *Maninakan* had been inscribed. Another most ancient and famous temple, Agastiya – Sthapanam

at Tirukkarasai in the Trincomalee District, had gone through the same process of development.

In most of these early Tamil inscriptions in Sri Lanka the expression *vel* is prefixed to the name Nakan. As *vel* is defined in lexicography as a chieftain, the compound expression *velnakan* may be construed as the designation of a chieftain who was of Naga lineage. The Tamil word *vel* had the same connotation as *raja* encountered in the Brahmi inscriptions recorded in Prakrit in Sri Lanka. The *vels* are mentioned in a large number of inscriptions scattered throughout the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Such references presuppose that there were a large number of chiefdoms in the areas that were included in these provinces. In this connection it is relevant to refer to the *Mahavamsa*. In its account of Dutthagamini's campaign, against Elara, that chronicle records that after having passed Mahiyangana he had subjugated 32 *Damila* Kings on his advance towards Anuradhapura along the eastern littoral. The polities referred to by the *Mahavamsa* had no connections with Elara and had their origins in the Tamil settlements that had been established by the Nagas. Our scrutiny of the Tamil Brahmi inscriptions has resulted in the impression that there were around 20 chiefdoms occupied by the Tamils and organized under the authority of the Naga rulers in the eastern littoral. It is significant that the *Mahavamsa* identifies the chieftains of Naga lineage as Tamil rulers.

Although the Nagas spoke Tamil they do not seem to have developed a sense of ethnic identity based on language. They articulated their identity with reference to tribal links and kinship connections based on them.

The *Mattakkalappu Purva Carittiram* (MPC), a chronicle that records the quasi – historical traditions of the Batticaloa Tamils, says that the Nagas became strong after having intermingled with the valiant Yakkar and founded towns (*nakar*) from which they exercised authority. In this case this chronicle seems to record the folk reminiscences of an actual historical phenomenon.

Among the Nagas the succession to the rank of *vel* (chieftain) was patrilineal and consistently from the father to the son. The assumption of alternate names / titles is a recurring phenomenon. The Tamil inscriptions consistently record the names of three generations of chieftains in the following order: *Vel Nakan Makan Vel Kannan; Vel Kannan Makan Vel Nakan*. These expressions translate: Vel Kannan is the son of Vel Nakan, the son of Vel Kannan is Vel Nakan.

There is no information in the local Tamil inscriptions about the systems of administration developed by the Nagas. But, a reference to *Ilamakan* in an inscription from Vakaraï and the depiction of the miniature figure of a man armed with a bow and arrow on a terracotta slab from Karaitivu suggest that there were soldiers serving the Naga chieftains. The *Mahavamsa* alludes to Naga princes in the north possessing armies.

Although the Naga chiefdoms were spread over a large area in the island only the Jaffna Peninsula was described as Naga *divaina* or Nakadipa. The *Manimekalai*, a Buddhist Tamil narrative poem refers to the Naga principality of Jaffna as *Nakanadu*. Presumably Kantarodai in the centre of the peninsula was the capital of this principality. As a centre of urbanization it had an antiquity comparable to that of Anuradhapura and Magama in the southernmost part of the island.

It was economically prosperous and a flourishing centre of trade as suggested by archaeological remains. The Nagas who controlled political activities had encouraged local craft production and foreign trade. Potsherds and coins of diverse and foreign origins had been found at this site. The Early Iron Age Culture had provided the impetus for its development.

The Nagas had dug wells and constructed minor irrigation works. They had laid the foundation for the spectacular development of art and architecture in subsequent times. It is seldom realized that the semi – circular stones they had used as stepping stones of buildings of a sacred character were the prototypes of the *vahalkadas* of the medieval period.

## Royalty, Mercenaries and Merchants

The kingdom of Anuradhapura, which had its origins as a chiefdom in the Proto Historic Period developed as the major political entity in the island in the Early Historic Period. The Pali chronicles, which record dynastic history within a chronological framework based on the Buddha

era, naturally focus attention on the capital city which had the dual character of being a centre of royal authority and a monastic city. A considerable amount of authentic information relating to kings and the royal family, dignitaries and functionaries at the royal court and the principal events at the



capital city are found in these chronicles. They have little or no information about the peripheral areas and the people living there. One could not therefore find any information about the areas of Tamil habitation that were developed by the Nagas with the exception of Mantai which had become the principal *entrepot* of the island and a focal point of international sea – borne trade.

The account of the Tamils recorded here is subject to serious limitations imposed by the nature of the source materials available. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether the Tamil communities that are described in this section entirely became an integral part of the Tamil society that survived the ravages of time. They were mostly assimilated into the mainstream of society within the limits of the Anuradhapura Kingdom. But, they exerted a great influence on the politics, society and culture of that kingdom.

That this kingdom had a centralized administration and encompassed all parts of the island is a fallacy of modern historiography. *Rajarata*, which included the districts of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and a part the Kurunegala district was the core area of this kingdom. It had the likeness of a segmentary state. The southern part known as *Dhakkhinadesa* was governed by a nominee of the king in the latter part of the first millennium. The king's authority was ephemeral in *Malayadesa*, the central mountainous region. Ruhuna in the south had virtually a separate existence. There is no record of any invasion conducted against *Uttaradesa* by any of the kings of Anuradhapura. Of course some of them had made donations and renovated Buddhist shrines in the Jaffna peninsula. Some of the kings had exercised a sort of suzerainty over the Tamil chiefdoms in the eastern littoral during the early

centuries of the first millennium.

The constructional activities of the kings of Anuradhapura were most impressive. Agricultural prosperity, the royal monopoly of precious items like gems and ivory and the tolls levied on the sale of commodities especially at the ports were the sources of enormous wealth for the kings of Anuradhapura. The city, which was located in the plains, was vulnerable to attacks by invaders and rebels from within the kingdom. There were in all five major invasions of the island before the Chola conquest. On all these occasions the city was either occupied by the invaders or evacuated by the King.

In the second century BC. two Tamils who were the sons of a horse trader dislodged Suratissa, the younger brother of Devanampiya Tissa, and occupied the throne for a period of 22 years. They are described in the most complimentary terms in the *Mahavamsa*. Elara, who was the first invader from South India occupied Anuradhapura and ruled for a period of 44 years before 161 BC. The Pali chronicles describe him as a great and powerful monarch who ruled with even justice towards friends and foes alike. There is no evidence to show that either Elara or the Tamil invaders who subsequently occupied the throne had any authority over those parts of *Uttaradesa* where the Tamil speaking Nagas had established chiefdoms.

In the reign of Vatthagamint Abhaya (103, 89 – 77) some Pandya princes entered the island through Mantai, advanced towards Anuradhapura and seized power and ruled for 14 years.

In the first two centuries AD. there were eight kings at Anuradhapura who were of Naga lineage.

As the Nagas were a Tamil speaking community as seen earlier, these rulers ought to be considered as local Tamil kings. The presence of Nagas at Anuradhapura during the Early Historic Period is attested by the evidence from Tamil inscriptions found on sculptures at various sites from Anuradhapura.

Under the Nagas Tamil influence at the royal court was dominant. In the reign of Queen Anula, the consort of Coranaga, the Purohita at the royal court was a Tamil Brahmana. He had the name Niliya. The leader of the guild of architects was *Damila Vatuka*. As *vatuka* has the connotation “northerner” he may be identified as a person of Telugu – Kannada extraction.

In 429 AD. a prince of Pandya lineage, who is referred in the Pali chronicles as Pandu, led an invasion that resulted in the conquest of Anuradhapura. He and his associates, six in all, had ruled the kingdom, in succession, for a period of 27 years. They had adjusted themselves to the local cultural environment and supported and even espoused Buddhism.

A matter of greater importance was the employment of Tamil mercenaries. Aspirants to the throne and dispossessed princes were in the habit of recruiting mercenaries for their wars against the rulers of Anuradhapura. Two kings of Naga lineage Ila Naga (AD. 33 – 43) and Abhaya Naga brought Tamil mercenaries from South India and wrested power at Anuradhapura. Much later, Moggallana, the son of Dhatusena (455 – 473), who was deprived of his right to the throne fled to South India for safety and from there returned with a Tamil army and seized royal power from his younger brother Kassapa (473 – 491).

Siri Naga, a general of Silameghavanna (619 – 628) had revolted against the King with the support of a Tamil army. Later Aggabodhi III (628 – 639), Dathopatissa (639 – 650) and Hatthadatha (659 – 667) had brought Tamil armies for the purpose of securing the throne. Prince Manavamma who had a long sojourn in Kancipuram at the Pallava court occupied the throne (654 – 718) with the support of an army sent by the Pallava king.

Most of the mercenaries who had come from South India settled in the island and sometimes played a decisive role in the politics of Anuradhapura. The activities of Potthakuttha Potthasata and Mahakanda, three powerful Tamil warrior chiefs at Anuradhapura, are noteworthy. Peace and stability at the capital depended in considerable measure on the disposition and support of the Tamil warriors and their leaders. Potthakuttha, for instance, had become a king-maker. Some of them, however, supported and even became converts to Buddhism. They established and supported Buddhist monasteries and donated lands for their maintenance. Since the eighth century, there was a growing Tamil Buddhist population at Anuradhapura, The Tamil inscription at the premises of the Abhayagiri Vihara, which could be assigned to the eighth century, records the construction of a platform of 16 ft. square in front of the Bo – tree of the monastery. There are several other Tamil inscriptions of a Buddhist character at Anuradhapura. They belong to the ninth and tenth centuries.

The references to *Demel kuli* and *Hel kuli* in inscriptions of the late Anuradhapura period presuppose that there was a perception among court officials that there were two principal ethnic groups within the Anuradhapura kingdom. It is confirmed by the occurrence of the expressions

*Demel Kaballa, Demelat – Valademin and Demel – gam – bim* in inscriptions. These could be translated as ‘Tamil allotments’, ‘Tamil lands’ and ‘Tamil Villages and lands’ respectively. As South India and Sri Lanka formed a single trading unit Tamil merchants played a vital role in the internal and external trade of the island. The activities of two Tamil merchant guilds are discerned from a few inscriptions. A Tamil inscription of the merchant guild called *Nankunaddar* from the northern sector of Anuradhapura records some activities of merchants who had established a Buddhist monastery that had the name *Makkotaippalli*. It was obviously named after the city of Makkotai, the capital city of the Cera king. The concluding part of the inscription, in the form of a verse, is a panegyric on a senior monk (*Sthavira*) who had the name Dharmapala(n).

There were some Cetti merchants at Anuradhapura in the ninth century. A Tamil inscription records the monetary deposits made by two Cettis, Cekkilan Cankan and Cekkilan Cennai, for burning lamps at a temple in the reign of a certain Cankapotivarmar.

The amounts were invested with the assembly of a locality called Kumarakanam. The presence of the merchant guild called *Manigramam* in an interior part of the island, is attested by the Badulla Pillar Inscription of Udaya IV.

The two major landmarks in Hinduism that flourished in the island during the days of the Anuradhapura kingdom are the temples called Tirukketisvaram at Mantai and Tirukkonesvaram at Trincomalee. The first of these temples dominated the landscape of Matottam and was supported with incomes from trade, commercial activities and commodity production. The peak period of its development coincided with that of Matottam as a hub of international sea – borne trade. The fame of the two temples at Matottam and Trincomalee had spread to the Indian sub – continent. The hymns on these temples that were composed and recited in the seventh and eighth centuries by Gnanasampantar and Cuntarar, two of the veteran leaders of the Saiva movement are included in the vast compendium of the sacred literature of Saivism in Tamil..

## The Monarchy and Merchant Towns

Tamil influence at the royal court of Polannaruva (1070 – 1255) was growing in an unprecedented manner because of several factors: dynastic marriages, the alliance between the monarchy and the merchant guild of the *Ainnurruvar* and the elevation of Tamil dignitaries to positions of rank in the administration. Only a synoptic account of this could be given here because of compelling reasons.

Some of the dynastic marriages were politically significant. For instance, Mitta, a younger sister of Vijayabahu I (1055 – 1110) was married to a Pandya prince and his son Manabharana was elevated to the rank of *Yuvaraja* with the support of the Mahasangha and the ministers of the previous King, after the death of Vijayabahu. Later, Parakramabahu, the son of Manabharana, became king of the whole island (1153 - 1186).

The relations between the Tamils and Sinhalese were one of co-existence and co-operation in matters relating to state formation, constructional activities and in supporting Buddhism and Hinduism.

Society at Polonnaruwa had a multi ethnic and multicultural character. There was a remarkable degree of mutual influences that provided the inspiration for innovative ideas on kingship and administration. Hindu influence on Buddhist art and architecture was considerable as exemplified by the *Thuparama* and other monuments of the reign of Parakramabahu I

There were many contingents of Tamil, Kerala and Kannada warriors in his armies. Some of the notable leaders of the armies under Vikramabahu (1110 – 1132) Gajabahu II (1132 – 1153) and Parakramabahu were Tamils. Some of them had the designation *Damiladhikari*. Moreover, it was during this time that a composite standing army had come into existence. There were a large proportion of *Velaikkara* and *Akampati* warriors in the army as attested by the *Mahavamsa* and inscriptions. Some of these warriors supported Buddhist foundations and even became converts to Buddhism. The Tamil inscription from Ruvanvalisaya, which reads: *Jagatoppakandan perumpli*, “the great temple of the warrior Jagatoppan”, presupposes that a Tamil or Kannada regiment had taken the responsibility of protecting this historic monument during a period of turmoil.

The *Ainnurruva*, a body of merchants who had gained a foothold in the early 11th century wielded great influence in society. They established a close relationship with the monarchy and their mercenaries served as auxiliaries of the royal army as in the days of the Cholas. They had

secured a virtual monopoly of the trade of the Polonnaruwa kingdom and it was because of the recognition of their importance in society that a *nagaram* merchant (*nagaram situ*) was appointed as a member of the King’s Council.

The *Ainnurruvar* otherwise called *Nanadesis* or *Valanceyar* had contributed to the process of urbanization in considerable measure. They were largely responsible for the development of the mercantile sector at Polonnaruwa. The artisan communities affiliated to them were engaged in constructional activities. Most of the Hindu temples in Polonnaruwa were established by the *Ainnurruvar* fraternity of merchants. The largest Saiva temple in the City, Siva Devale No.5, had the name *Ainnurruva Isvaram*.

The settlements of the *Nanadesis* that were established in the 11th century had developed into market towns of considerable importance in the 12th century. They were found in the interior parts of the country and served as focal points for the flow of commodities. At these towns there was a confluence of the routes of internal and international trade. They were also called *virapattinam* or *viradalam*. They were autonomous and administered by governing bodies called *perumakkal*. Inscriptions recording information about them have been found at six sites: Padaviya, Vahalkada, Budumuttava, Viaharehinna, Galtampitiya and Detiyamulla.

These inscriptions are in different stages of preservation. In these records attention is focused on their composition, affiliations and religious and cultural activities. They had large numbers of mercenaries under them and had affiliations with artisans and commodity producers. Their towns and wares were guarded by warriors who



are generally described as the *Virakkoti*. They established Hindu monuments and established close links with Buddhist monastic centres. As attested by the Polonnaruva inscription of the Velaikkaras, the military community in their

service was invested with the responsibility of protecting the Temple of the Tooth Relic by Thera Mugalan of the Uttaramula fraternity of monks and the ministers of the King, soon after the death of Vijayabahu I.

## The Kingdom of Jaffna and the Chiefdoms of the Vanni

The development of the Kingdom of Jaffna in the late 13th century was the culmination of a long process of Tamil settlements in the northernmost part of the island in the Proto Historic and Early Historic Periods as seen earlier. In the Jaffna Peninsula and the Vanni there is a large number of Tamil inscriptions which attest the existence of chiefdoms (*velpulam*) under the Nagas. Among them the one based at Kantarodai became the most powerful and its rulers exercised control over a large part of the Peninsula.

In the 12th century the Peninsula had become the major outlet for trade with South India since the decline of Mantai. It would appear that some chieftains of Ganga lineage established a kingdom based in the Jaffna Peninsula. During the reign of Magha he had secured control over the northernmost part of the island and re-integrated it with the remnants of the Polonnaruva kingdom. He established military outposts in these parts of the island.

Magha lost power around 1255 when the Javakas under the leadership of Candrabhanu invaded the island and in course of time established a kingdom in the areas of Tamil habitation in the north. He

was able to gain a foothold with the support of the Pandyas whose suzerainty he had acknowledged. In recent years some coins issued by the Javakas have come to light. Because of a dispute that arose between them and the Pandyas, Vira Pandya led a successful invasion of the kingdom of the Javakas, killed Candrabhanu in battle and raised his son to the throne.

On their return the Pandyas engraved the figure of the double carp, their dynastic emblem at the peaks of Tirikonam and Tirikudam and returned to their country. Pandya suzerainty over the kingdom led to the establishment of the Arya Cakravarttis to power and authority. They were the kinsmen of the Pandya general called Arya Cakravarti who invaded Yapahuva in 1283. The Arya Cakravarttis shifted the capital from Trincomalee to Nallur in the Jaffna Peninsula. The first King of this dynasty brought under his control the whole of the Jaffna Peninsula, the island of Mannar and the Vanni districts and made arrangements for their administration.

The Kingdom of Jaffna was a segmentary state where a large extent of territory in the Vanni was divided into chiefdoms which had a great

measure of autonomy. They had their origins in the units of polity established by the Nagas in the Early Historic Period and their rulers were styled *Vannipam* or *Vanniyanar* since the 13th century. In the kingdom there were seven such chiefdoms the administration of which was a replica of that of the part of kingdom under the direct authority of the King. The four provinces of the Jaffna Peninsula, the islands that adjoin to it and the coastal strip of territory on the west coast up to Mantai were under the authority of the Kings.

The control of the pearl fisheries in the Gulf of Manner and the Indo Lankan trade across the Palk Strait were the main sources of wealth for the rulers of Jaffna. They engaged in trade and commercial activities and developed a naval power of some significance. In 1344 the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta was a guest of the Arya Cakravartti when he was residing at Puttalam and engaged in conducting the pearl fishery. The account of Ibn Battuta is valuable as an authentic record of the power and activities of the Arya Cakravartti, who was perhaps the first indigenous ruler to discern the potentialities of the cinnamon trade as a source of economic power.

In the mid-fourteenth century the Arya Cakravartti pursued a policy of expansion with a view to secure the benefits of trade. The *Rajavaliya*, a Sinhalese chronicle of a later date, describes the Arya Cakravartti as the foremost in economic and military power among the rulers of the island, and because of that position he was collecting tribute from the central highlands and the nine ports in the low country. The armies of the Arya Cakravartti had advanced towards Gampola, the capital of the Sinhalese kingdom in the highlands and up to Panadura on the west coast. Later they were defeated and driven out when Alagakkonara

whose ancestors were of Kerala extraction emerged as the Chief Minister of the Gampola Kingdom.

In the 15th century Parakramabahu VI (1412 – 1367) ascended the throne of Kotte and the kingdom of Jaffna became vulnerable to attacks from the south. In fact, Sapumal Kumara, who was brought up at the court of Parakramabahu, led two invasions against the Arya Cakravartti and his second invasion resulted in the conquest of the northern kingdom. The Tamil king fled to South India and returned later after a long sojourn of 17 years.

The kingdom of Jaffna was not annexed to that of Kotte and the King of Kotte was content with enforcing the claim of a vague form of suzerainty. The conqueror Sapumal or Cempaka Perumal was appointed as the deputy of the King of Kotte. Sapumal Kumara, however, exercised independent authority with the support of local chieftains. Jaffna was ruled as a Hindu Tamil kingdom by the new ruler. He had his residence at Nallur where he established the Kandasvami temple as the temple of the royal court as recorded in a local tradition. It retained its position as the grand temple of the city even after the restoration of the dynasty of Tamil kings. In a Sanskrit text recited until recent times during the annual festival at the modern temple at Nallur, Sapumal is extolled as the devotee of God Subramanya and as the ruler who made the “sixteen great gifts” (*Sodasa Mahadana*) to the temple he had established. It may be noted here that Sapumal had issued coins in the name of God Kandasvami.

When the old King Parakramabahu died Sapumal proceeded to Kotte and occupied the city. In the meanwhile he lost authority over Jaffna, which

Temple at Nallur



was recovered by the former King with the support of South Indian chieftains. His successors ruled for a period of 150 years until the Portuguese conquest in 1619. Apart from establishing a system of administration the Arya Cakravarttis, some of whom were highly accomplished in learning, laid the foundation for the development of a poetic tradition. They brought a large number of manuscripts from India, which were analyzed by scholars who later compiled texts on astrology, Ayurvedic Medicine and in other fields of learning. The *Cekaracacekaram*, *Pararacacekaram*, *Taksina Kailaca Puranam* and the *Irakuvamsam* are some of the outstanding works among them.

Cankili I (1521 – 1562) was one of most remarkable kings of Jaffna. He reorganized the army, introduced the use of fire arms and managed to defend the kingdom against major offensive operations by the Portuguese. He consistently followed an anti-Portuguese policy and persuaded Mayadurne of Sitavaka to continue the war against them for the defense of Buddhism and promised military support for this cause. His reputation was marred by his executions of the neophytes in Mannar.

In the 14th and 15th centuries the royal courts of Kurunagala, Gampola and Kotte were receptive to Tamil influences. Mercenaries, artisans and Brahmins and traders came in large numbers and settled in the western littoral. Eventually they were assimilated into the Sinhala society. The Tamil language and literature were subjects of study at some of the leading monasteries. The long and well - preserved Tamil inscription that was engraved in 1344 at Lankatilaka presupposes a tradition of Tamil learning at the monasteries. The Galle Trilingual Slab Inscription set up at Devinuvara by Cheng Ho in 1409 suggests the use of Tamil as a language of international commerce in the 15th century.

The Tamil chiefdoms in the east came under the suzerainty of the kings of Kandy in the 17th century. The chieftains called *Vanniyandar* or *Vanniyar* made all appointments to the posts of subordinate ranks, collected taxes and administered justice. They had military forces in proportion to their resources and capacity and were obliged to supply troops to the king in times of war. In all the wars against the Portuguese and the Dutch they remained steadfastly loyal to the kings, to whom they paid an annual tribute in the form of elephants, wax, honey and ivory. They were also the members of the 'Kings council' that was summoned at the court for consultations before decisions were made on crucial matters like the succession to the throne, war and peace. In the east the *Vanniyars* led the armies against the Portuguese and Dutch positions in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The kingdom of Jaffna was conquered by the Portuguese in 1619 and placed under an officer of the rank of Captain-General. The architectural

landscape was completely changed. All the Hindu temples were destroyed and whatever that remained of Buddhism faded out. Christianity was proclaimed as the state religion and the converts to Roman Catholicism remained steadfastly loyal to the churches even under Dutch persecution. The Portuguese retained the native administration except the positions of the highest ranks.

In 1658 Jaffnapatnam was conquered by the Dutch and constituted as a Commandment, one of the three major divisions of the Dutch possessions in the island. As they remained

in power for a period of approximately one hundred and forty years (1658 – 1796) they made an impact on Tamil society. This was evident in the management of economic, judicial and administrative affairs, Like the Portuguese they retained the native hierarchy of traditional ranks in the administration, instituted a system of courts and established a Seminary at Nallur for higher education. They codified the laws and customs of the northern Tamils and proclaimed it as a code of law, the *Tecavalamai*, in 1707 when Cornelis Jan Simons was the Governor.

## Society, Laws and Customs

Tamil society traditionally consisted of a number of castes arranged in a hierarchical order, which had some regional variations. In the Jaffna peninsula, the islands and the northern Vanni the Vellalar who were numerically preponderant were at the apex of the system. The Vellalar were an agricultural community of peasants and farmers. They dominated the villages and ran the affairs of the government. They were appointed to positions of higher rank in the administration. The Brahmins, who had no land holdings, were effectually the employees of the Vellalar and they conducted rituals at temples and domestic ceremonies. Nevertheless, most of them were educated and made a contribution to the cultivation of literary pursuits. Until recent times they were highly respected and it was considered that their protection and maintenance was an obligation of society as a whole.

Some of the other castes of people were included in the group called *kudimakkal*. The Koviari, Vannar,

(Washermen), Ambaddar (barbers), Nalavar and Paraiyar were included in this category. Among these the Koviari occupied the highest position and in social rank they were next to the Vellalar. They managed the affairs in conducting weddings and funerals. They also managed the agricultural operations of the farmers and the main events in temples. It should be noted that the Koviari had the obligation to serve the Vellalar families of high status only. The peasants could not command their services. The washermen had the facility of entering the homes of the first three castes and the temples. The barbers had the obligation to participate in some rituals at funerals and some domestic ceremonies.

The Paraiyar were so called because they were principally durmmers serving at funerals and at temples on occasions of festivals. Since the days of the Kings of Jaffna they were engaged in weaving cloth of coarse texture that had a demand in the local markets.



The Nalavar, who were found in substantial numbers, performed all the duties in extracting the products of the Palmyrah palm. Their habitations were mostly in Palmyrah groves. They cut down the palm leaves used for fencing and thatching roofs. They extracted toddy, which was a favourite and popular drink among the unorthodox classes of people. They also worked in the farms and performed functions of a multifaceted character, which were vital for the sustenance of society and economy particularly in the Jaffna peninsula and the islands.

The fishing communities of Karaiyar, Timilar and Mukkuvar stood outside the orbit of society dominated by the Vellalar on whom they were not dependent. The social organization among the Batticaloa Tamils was slightly different. The Mukkuvar were in control of Affairs and held a dominant position. The farmers among them called podis had large extents of land and in the post Polonnaruva period the eastern region had become the granary of the island. In the Batticaloa region some of Vanniyar rulers were Mukkuvar and in olden days they had been engaged in military service. In the east there was flexibility in inter-caste relations. There was no notion of pollution and inter-caste marriages were not infrequent. There were caste symbols, which were often burnished on cattle as brand marks. Traditional caste symbols are listed in the *Mattakalppau purva carittiram* (MPC), which is basically a text on the traditions and customs of the Batticaloa Tamils.

The artisan communities held an important position in society. The gold-smiths, copper-smiths, brass-workers, iron-smiths and carpenters produce items of vital importance to society. The last two among these groups had settlements in

almost all villages as they produced agricultural and household implements. Among the Batticaloa Tamils there is a large concentration artisan families. There are some villages where they are numerically predominant.

In the Tecavalamai, which is still a part of the legal system, and is applied to the Tamils of the Northern Province, properties are of three categories: *mutosom* or ancestral property of the husband, *citanam*, the property given to a bride on her marriage as dowry and ancestral property inherited through matrilineal descent and *teddam* or property acquired by a husband and wife after their marriage. These three categories cannot be combined and each of them was considered as a distinct entity. In the division of parental property in the life time of the parents or afterwards all *mutosom* was inherited by the sons and daughters have exclusive right over the *citanam* of the mother. The *teddam* or acquired property was considered as common property that has been divided among male and female children. The *Tecavalamai* code has been revised in modern times but the concept of the three fold division is still maintained.

The Mukkuvar society was matrilineal and inheritance devolved on the sons of sisters and not the sons of a father. In this system there were only two categories of property: *Mutosom* and *teddam*. The husband who could donate or dispose any acquired property at his own will but he had no such rights over the *mutosom* or inherited property of his wife. Because of the complex character of rights over lands the British judges could not comprehend it properly and Mukkuvar law was abolished in 1878 and was replaced by the provisions of the Roman Dutch Law.

As there was no spatial or upward social mobility marriages were confined to a narrow circle of people living in villages. The brides and bridegrooms were selected by the parents. The young men and women had no choice and were obliged to accept the decisions of the elders of their families. Once married, they got on well and toiled hard to sustain the family and improve living conditions.

Weddings were conducted on a grand scale and great expenditure. In former times weddings were conducted at the homes of the brides. It was solemnized with rituals performed by Brahmins in front of an assembly of invited guests, relatives,

friends and neighbours. The *thali kaddu* or the tying of *thali*, the symbol of wedlock suspended to a golden chain was the main aspect in the whole scheme of rituals. The couple sits in a cross legged manner on an elaborately adorned arched pavilion. They wear expensive garments and the bride is adorned with a profusion of golden jewelry, which is a part of her dowry. Garments worn by her during the occasion of marriage are part of the gifts made to her by the bride-groom. The bride wears a silk saree with delicate embroidery. The bride-groom also wears expensive silk garments and a turban. The wedding is an occasion for feasting and festivity which in former times continued for several days.









A custom peculiar to the Sri Lankan Tamils is the post-puberty ceremony conducted after a girl had attained age. The girl is adorned with expensive attire and jewels when the ceremony is conducted

in front of a gathering of invited guests. Elderly people shower their blessings on her. The ritual is followed by a feast

## Hindu Revival and the Tamil Renaissance

The Tamils became exposed to western influences under British rule (1796 - 1948). Freedom of worship and expression, the rule of law and a general advancement in education were the hallmarks of British colonial rule. It provided the setting for the regeneration of Tamil society in the 19th century.

An unprecedented progress in general and higher education, the revival of Saivism and the Tamil renaissance were the principal developments. An exposure to western influences had provided the impetus for the flow of modern ideas chiefly through the activities of the Protestant missionaries from England and America. The work of the Americans was exclusively confined to the Jaffna Peninsula and the neighboring islands where they had established their predominance.

The Wesleyans and Anglicans had a few schools in the Peninsula. Evangelical enterprise in the Eastern Province became a monopoly of the Wesleyans. The missionaries embarked on a programme of establishing primary and secondary schools. The Hindus and Roman Catholics soon followed them. Such a development led to an unprecedented progress in the rate of literacy.

In 1823 the American missionaries established the Batticotta Seminary, which was deemed to

have attained the standard of some European universities. Greek and Latin, Tamil and Sanskrit, natural and physical sciences, Christianity and Hinduism and English Literature and Composition were the fields of study. The graduates of the seminary had attained the capacity for critical examination of texts and traditions.

Another unique institution was the Medical College established by Dr. Samuel Fiske Green at Manipay, which was the first one of its kind in the whole island. Because of these developments the Tamils became the foremost community in education. Therefore they were able to get a large share of the jobs of all grades in the administration, the business sector and the professions. Besides, their devotion to work and duty placed them in an advantageous position.

Among the Tamils a new class of élite exposed to western influences came into existence. It had deep roots in the cultural traditions of the past. There was a close connection between the regeneration of Saivism and the efflorescence of Tamil learning. But it has to be observed that the Christian Tamils also made a remarkable contribution to the revival of Tamil studies here and abroad.



Because of the unprecedented developments in the rate of literacy and secondary and higher education there emerged a substantial number of highly accomplished scholars. A large number of books of vital importance in the history of Tamil literature, which were in manuscript form, were printed and published during this period. The publications aroused a great deal of interest among the people. This task, which was first undertaken by Arumuga Nalvalar was continued by C.W. Thamotherspillai and was later completed by U.V. Svaminatha Aiyar of Tamil Nadu

The *Tirukkural*, the most comprehensive work on dharma (*aram*) in Tamil with the commentary of the veteran scholar Parimelalakar was published by Arumuga Navalar in 1862. C.W. Thamotherspillai was one of the foremost Tamil scholars in the 19th century. He embarked on a programme of activity that elevated him to the pinnacle of fame. While he was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in the state of Putukkottai, he collected a large number of manuscript copies of some major works in Tamil: *Tolkappiyam* with a commentary by *Cenavaraiyar*, *Viracoliyam*, *Culamani* and *Kalittokai*. The first of these books was published by Arumuga Navalar.

There was a galaxy of highly accomplished scholars among whom Arumuga Navalar was a lumina. He had achieved what others could not and did not. He had dedicated his life and career for the cause of defending Saivism, the religion of his ancestors. He was a pupil of Revd. Peter Percival of the Wesleyan Mission and while he was a student and Tamil Tutor of Percival he had familiarized himself with the principles of Christianity and the means adopted by the Missions in their evangelical enterprise.

He adopted them for his own cause-the defence of Saivism.

His eloquence and masterly knowledge of Saivism and Tamil literature and a courage of conviction were the essence of his charismatic personality. Scholars and the rustics were spell bound by his orations. In 1847 he started a programme that had no precedent in the Saiva tradition. He conducted a series of lectures at the Sivan Temple at Vannarpannai on matters of religion and secular affairs, and people from all parts of the peninsula flocked to hear him. He had already caused an awakening among the Hindus when he established a school, the Saivapragasa Vdyasalai at Vannarpannai for providing an education in the Tamil medium with a Hindu orientation. He had invited the erudite scholar Sivasankara Panditar to conduct a series of lectures on Sivasiddhanta to the pupils of his school. Sivasankaran was a great scholar in Tamil and Sanskrit and knew English. He was one among the several scholars who responded effectively against the attacks on Hinduism by the missionaries.

Sabapathy Navalar who later became a Vidvan of the Tiruvavaduturai Atinam, Kumarasamy Pulavar of Chunnakam and Senthilnatha Aiyar of Erlalai who had attained a great reputation as scholars had connections with the school established by Navalar either as pupils or as teachers. In 1849, Arumugam (Navalar) went to South India to purchase a printing machine. The pontiff of the Tiruvavaduturai Atinam invited him and on his request he delivered a series of lectures. The pontiff who was amazed at the eloquence of Arumugam and his knowledge conferred on him the title Navalar "the beacon of oratory". Thereafter he was referred to as

Arumuga Navalar. He returned in that year with a printing machine that was installed in proximity to his school. He was the first Tamil to have established a printing press. It was through this establishment that Navalar brought out in printed form a large number of Tamil books that were in the form of palm leaf manuscripts. Some of these works are major landmarks in the history of the Tamil language. The *Kantapuranam*, *Periyapuranam* and the *Tiruvilaiyadatpuranam* were edited and published by him. Besides, he rendered them into prose and made them available in printed volumes. These were recited and learnt with deep veneration by the Hindus.

Another major contribution by him was in the field of education. He is the first Tamil to have prepared and published graded text books for school children. For a hundred years they had been the models. Arumuga Navalar made a significant contribution for the modernization of the Tamil language by introducing an innovative style in which combinations that could be awkward because of grammatical rules could be broken up and simplified and pronounced with felicity. Arumuga Navalar is considered as the master of modern Tamil prose and his *Periyapurana Vacanam* still remains unrivalled in quality.

Under him Saivism went through a process of regeneration and Christian evangelism suffered major reverses. The Batticotta Seminary was closed on the recommendations of the Anderson Committee in 1856. The main reason was the disinclination among the students of the Seminary to become converts. The ideas and achievements of Arumuga Navalar were a source of inspiration to the Hindu community. Towards the end of the 19th century their energies were directed towards

the establishment of Hindu schools of all grades and Hindu Associations. The establishment of Jaffna Hindu College, the Board of Hindu Education and the Saiva Paripalana Sabai are some of the principal developments. The temples became the focal points of religious and cultural activities.

Towards the last years of his career Navalar concentrated his attention on reforming Hinduism. The management of temples became a matter of concern. His attacks on the management of the Nallur Kandasvami Temple were forthright and forceful. In his tracts he articulated the view that temples are the common property of the community of worshippers and they have overriding rights over them.

In the 20th century Svami Vipulananda (1892 – 1947) became the most accomplished and reputed Tamil scholar. He was born at Karaitivu in the Amparai District and had his secondary education at St. Michael's College Batticaloa and St. Patrick's College, Jaffna, where he was later appointed as a Science teacher. In 1920 he became Principal of Manipay Hindu College. During that period he resuscitated the Oriental Studies Society and the Kalanilayam at Vannarpannai. He joined the Ramakrishna Mission in 1922 and was ordained as a Sanyasi by Svami Shivananda who conferred on him the name Vipulananda by which he was known subsequently.

Svami Vipulananda had a multi-disciplinary education. He was a Science graduate and a Tamil Pundit of the Madurai Tamil Cankam. His interests were varied. He had an abiding interest in comparative literature and in the translation of selections from English Drama into Tamil. He

had poetic talents of a high order. He was for some time editor of the Prabuddha Bharata, the principal organ of the Mission. In 1925 he was charged with the responsibility of re-organizing the R. K. M. Schools in the island. He became the Principal of Hindu College, Trincomalee and while holding that position he established a number of schools in the Eastern Province. One of his major achievements was the establishment of the Shivananda College at Kallady Uppodai, which became the Principal Hindu College in the Batticaloa District. Svami Vipulananda became the first Tamil Professor at the Annamalai University in 1928. In 1931, he was appointed to the Chair of Tamil at the University of Ceylon, a position he held until 1947. Like Arumuga Navalar he left behind a legacy that enriched the cultural heritage of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

In the development of Tamil Lexicography the American missionaries were the pioneers. The Tamil - English Dictionary compiled by Miron Winslow was a comprehensive and outstanding work. The range of vocabulary covered by this work is larger than that of the Madras Tamil Lexicon. Wyman Kathiravetpillai, who was a graduate of the Batticotta Seminary compiled a Tamil dictionary, which became the basis for the one published by the Madurait Tamil - Cankam.

During the mid-twentieth century many scholars in the U. K., U. S. A, Germany, France, the Soviet Union, Japan and the Netherlands took up to the study of Tamil language and literature and pursued researches on them. Fr. X. S. Thaninayakam, who was a Lecturer in the Department of Education, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, was successful in forming the International Association for Tamil Research

(IATR) with the objective of establishing close links among scholars engaged in Tamil studies. He earned a reputation because of his innovative ideas in Tamil Studies. He maintained that Ancient Tamil literature was classical in the true sense of the term and that it was secular in character as it is about human society and the natural surroundings. He also maintained that Tamil devotional poetry of a later period was unique in world literature because of the depth of spiritual experience and the theological conceptions epitomized in it.

Tamils are fond of oral and instrumental music, which are of a classical vintage Traditional music, which had its origins in ancient times had gone through a process of modification and refinement over the centuries. The *nadasvaram*, *tavil*, *mridangam*, *vinai* and flute are the principal instruments. They are played according to rhythmic notes of Carnatic music. The *natasvaram* is recited on auspicious occasions at homes, public institutions and usually at temple festivals. Those who are engaged in it are usually settled in the premises of large temples. Their services are rotational and hereditary. It was customary to invite reputed musicians from South India. There are in the universities of Jaffna and Batticaloa institutes of Fine Arts where students in considerable numbers receive training in classical instrumental music and Carnatic Music. Since the early 20th century young men and women have been sent to learn music and Bharata Natyam at Adyar and other centres in Tamil Nadu. On their return, they have been in the habit of establishing training centres. Most of them are in Colombo, Jaffna, Batticaloa and Kandy.

## Demography

There has been a steady decline in the percentage of Tamil population. In the early days of British occupation it was found that the Tamils. Were about a third of the entire population in the Island. According to the census report of 1881. The number was reduced to 24.90%. The decline was a gradual and continuous process. In 1911 Sri Lankan Tamils were 12.86% of the total population. Within a century there was steady and steep decline.

In 1981 and 2011 the figures were 12.71% and 11.15 percent respectively. Before the British occupation the Tamils were the preponderant community in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. There were small pockets of Tamils in coastal strip between Puttalam and Kalpiti (ya) and in Mannampiti(ya) in the Polonnaruwa District.

In the 19th and early 20th century a substantial proportion of Tamils had moved out and settled

at Colombo, Negombo and some towns in the interior parts of the country because of employment opportunities. The concentration of government departments and business houses in the metropolis of Colombo and the development of plantations agriculture on the Central highlands were the principal causes for this movement. Presently among the towns in the Southwestern and central parts of the island there is a substantial Sri Lankan Tamil population only in the city of Colombo.

The reasons for the decline of Sri Lankan Tamil population in percentage terms are manifold. The growth rate is the lowest among that of the major communities. There have been large scale emigrations during the thirty years war. because of security reasons. Approximately a million people have emigrated from the island with bitter memories. Besides the loss of lives due to the incidents of war has been enormously high.

## Food and Cuisine

Rice is the staple food of the Sri Lankan Tamils as it is among the Sinhalese and Muslims. Apart from rice and curry many other items of food are made of rice processed in different forms. *Pittu*, string hoppers and hoppers, which are the main items of morning or evening meals, are made of rice flour. Batticaloa Tamils make hoppers in three or four different ways. Some of them are sweet because of the addition of sugar or jaggary. *Thosai* and *idli*, which are the favourite items of

the Tamils here and abroad, are made of rice and black peas and usually eaten with sambol and/or *sambar*, a hot preparation cooked with dhal (Toor) and a number of vegetables, with a large amount of gravy.

Spices of a large variety are essential ingredients for the preparation of curry dishes, vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Chillies, coriander, pepper, cumin seeds, dill seeds fennel, saffron, mustard,



ginger and garlic are used for the preparation of curry dishes. Onions and green chillies are used for all items. But, Batticaloa Tamils avoid green chillies for items prepared with hot spices including large a proportion chilli powder.

Rice and curry is the mid-day meal without exception. It is also served at weddings and on other occasions of feasting, with a wide variety of dishes. At weddings and other ceremonial occasions among the Hindus of the Northern Province and those settled in Colombo and other cities only vegetarian meals are served. But among the Batticaloa Tamils it is customary to serve mutton or chicken curry with sea foods.

Normally a vegetarian meal at home will consist of curries made of dhal and a few vegetables. Brinjals, country beans, green plantains, drumsticks, ladies fingers, pumpkin, snake and bitter gourds, jams (pot jam) spinach and some other varieties of green leaves are the usual items for making vegetarian dishes. Carrot, beetroot cabbage and corli flower also have nowadays become common items of food. Until recently, they made a curry of tapioca with a special flavour and it was very palatable. Brinjals, bananas and potatoes are usually fried and served as additional dishes. Lime pickle, mango pickle, curd or whey are supplementary items in a vegetarian meal. *Vatakam* made of a combination of margosa flower, partially ground black peas, red onions, curry leaves and fennel is a delicacy for vegetarians.

Traditionally, a dhal curry made of green peas is a compulsory item in the mid-day meal served at weddings and other ceremonial occasions. Ghee has to be provided for mixing with it. *Payasam* is served as an item of desert. It is a most delicious item prepared with milk, rice ground to small pieces or chow, sultanas, cashew-nuts, sugar and cardamom. It was also prepared at homes and served as part of the main meal after breaking a fast.

Thai Pongal, New Year Day, Navaratri and Dipavali are occasions when certain special items are cooked and served after making ritual offerings to the gods. On the first two occasions milk rice is cooked with jaggery and offered to the Sun god. *Aval* is an important item among the dainties offered to the deities during the Navaratri festival. It consists of three items: rice flakes, scraped coconut and jaggery of cane syrup.



Thaipongal



Hindu New year







The dainties among traditional food items of the Sri Lankan Tamils are *motakam vatai*, *ariyataram*, (*atiracam*), *payirram paniyaram* made with ground green peas, rice flour, and coconut, *murukku* and *cippi*. On the first day of the Tamil month of *Adi* (July – August) two special items are cooked at home: *Kolukkaddai* and *Adik kul*. They are sweet preparations made of rice-flour, coconut, split green peas and cardamom. The first is a solid item of oval shape and the other is like a thick syrup.

A special and famous item is the *odiyal kul*. The special ingredient is the flour of the sun-baked and unboiled palmyrah roots. The flower is soaked in water for several hours and after filtering out the water, it is kept in a vessel. A substantial amount of ground chillies and tamarind are boiled with a small quantity of rice. Besides, pieces of fish, crabs, prawns and sometimes cuttle fish are

cooked with the ingredients mentioned earlier. Pieces of tender jack or jack-nuts, beans and the leaves of *murunkai* (drumstick) are added on to them. Once they are boiled the flour of *odiyal* is mixed with them and stirred with a ladle. When it is cooked the pot is removed from the fire and the cooked item is served to the inmates of the home and guests.

In recent times the Tamils have developed a liking for fried rice and lump rice which are cooked at homes and served at feasts.

Among dainties *laddu* and *kesari* have become favourite items because of South Indian influences. Since the mid - twentieth century cakes, rolls, cutlets and patties have become important items of the menu. They are served at Birth day parties and Tea parties.

## Jaffna Food



The Sri Lankan Tamils are very fond of fruits of which only three varieties are locally produced. Jaffna mangoes have a reputation because of their flavour and very delicious quality. They are seasonal products. Bananas are cultivated in plantations and are available throughout the year. There are several varieties some of which are particularly delicious.

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Photo of Kaleel in Bilal Emporium

# The Muslim Community (Moors)

Prof. Dennis B. McGilvray

## Introduction

Sri Lanka was known to early Arab seafarers as sarandib, where Muslims believe Adam fell to earth from paradise, and to European colonial powers as Ceylon, an island nation with a dominant Sinhala-speaking Theravada Buddhist majority and several religious minorities, including Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. In the Sri Lankan census of 2012, the entire Muslim religious community of Sri Lanka (combining all Muslim ethnicities

and all Muslim sectarian groups) represented 9.7 per cent of the total population of 20.2 million. Islam is the third largest faith in the island after Buddhism (70.2 per cent) and Hinduism (12.6 per cent). In comparison, Christians (both Sinhala and Tamil) of all denominations are 7.4 per cent.

Within the overall Muslim religious community (*umma*), the largest ethnic subgroup by far – 95

per cent – is the Tamil-speaking Muslims (or Moors), representing 9.2 per cent of the total Sri Lankan population in the 2012 census. All of the other Sri Lankan Muslim subgroups are extremely small by comparison, constituting altogether no more than .5 per cent of the country's population. The largest of these is the Malay community, descendants of Javanese and Malay soldiers and royal exiles transported to Colombo during the Dutch period (1658-1796). In colonial Ceylon the Malays, who like the Tamil-speaking Moors are Sunni Muslims of the Shafi'i legal school,

achieved recognition in government service (police, fire brigades, military) as well as in law and education. There are also three small Indian Muslim trading communities of Sindhi and Gujarati origin, some quite wealthy, who mostly arrived during the British colonial period (1796-1948). Among these, the Memons are Sunni Muslims, while the Khojas and Dawoodi Bohras are Ismaili Shia Muslims. In the twentieth century, a small Ahmadiyya ("Qādiyāri") community, followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908), has also established roots in Sri Lanka, notably in Colombo and Negombo.

## Origins and Historical Linkages

The historical origins of the Sri Lankan Moors are, in a sense, pre-Islamic, because Persian and Arab sea-traders across the Indian Ocean were well known from Greek and Roman times. It was only after the advent of Islam in 622 C.E. that the same Arab and Persian sailors carried the new faith to the island, as well as to Southeast Asia, seeking textiles, spices, and gems (Ameer Ali 1981a, Effendi 1965, Kiribamune 1986, Wink 1990). Although the earliest evidence from the Islamic period is limited to fragmentary travelers' accounts, early Islamic coinage, some tombstones and a few lithic inscriptions, the origins of the Muslim community of Sri Lanka are plainly continuous with the pre-Islamic seaborne trade between South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East. By the 14th century C.E., Adam's Peak (*Sri Pada*) had become a focus of trans-oceanic Muslim pilgrimage and was starting to become a central element in a distinctively India-centric conception of Islam (Battuta 1986, ch. 8; Ernst 1995). Later, following Vasco da Gama's 1498

naval crusade against the "Moors" of Calicut, Portuguese sailors encountered Muslim traders in Sri Lanka who spoke Tamil, who had ongoing links with the Muslims of the Malabar and Coromandel Coasts of South India, and who had been given royal permission to collect customs duties and regulate shipping in the major southwestern port settlements under the suzerainty of the Sinhalese Kings of Kotte (Indrapala 1986; Abeyasinghe 1986).

Unlike the great North Indian Muslim empires founded by conquest, or local South Indian principalities controlled or influenced by Mughal or Deccan power, Sri Lanka never gave rise to a Muslim kingdom or polity. Nor was it the scene of any major Muslim uprisings such as the Māppila rebellions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Kerala (Dale 1980). Nonetheless, the period of Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule was harsh for the Moors, who were subjected to special penalties and restrictions because of their Islamic



faith and the threat they posed to the European monopoly of overseas trade. Ultimately the effect of Portuguese policies was to encourage (and by an official edict of 1626, to require) migration of many coastal Moors inland to the Kandyan Kingdom, where they engaged in *tavalam* bullock transport and a diverse range of other occupations (C.R. de Silva 1968; Ali 1980a: 337ff.; Dewaraja 1986, 1994).

In 1626, King Senerat of Kandy is said to have resettled 4000 Moors in the Batticaloa region of the east coast to protect his eastern flank from the Portuguese fortification of Puliyantivu (modern Batticaloa town) that occurred soon thereafter, in 1627. If true, this is the only historically noted Moorish migration to that area (Queyroz 1930: 745, C.R. de Silva 1972: 88, Mohideen 1986: 7-8). Senerat's resettlement is not corroborated in any local sources, but as early as the 15th century, and certainly by the 17th century, Moorish farmers had become well-established on the east coast (Neville 1887, Pathmanathan 1976). This historical migration explains how the Moors of

Sri Lanka came to pursue occupations of many different kinds across the island, but especially in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the island, paddy agriculture and fishing.



(Fig. 1)

## Culture and Society

From the beginning of the colonial period in the early 16th century, Muslims were designated by the Portuguese colonial power as Moors (i.e., Portuguese *mouro* or North African), a term the Portuguese applied to Muslims everywhere in their African and Asian empire, as well as by such familiar European terms as "Mohammedan" or "Mussalman." In Tamil they identified themselves as Sonahar (*cōnakar*, West Asian or Arabian, from Tamil *cōnakam*, Arabia), although their

most common designation today in all languages is simply "Muslim."

While the Moors include mixed descendants of pre-colonial Arab and Persian seafarers, frequent connections with South Indian Muslim communities and additional intermarriages with Sri Lankan Tamils have occurred over the centuries, a fact that is reflected in various cultural practices (Hussein 2007, Jameel and Hussein

2011). Indeed, commercial, cultural, and even migrational links between Muslim towns in southern India and Sri Lankan Moorish settlements are confirmed in the historical traditions of Beruwala, Kalpitiya, Jaffna, and other coastal settlements where Sri Lankan Muslims have lived for centuries (Casie Chitty 1834: 254 ff.; Denham 1912: 234, Shukri ed. 1986, Mahroof, et al. 1986). Like the coastal Muslims of South India and most of the Muslims of Southeast Asia, the Sri Lankan Moors are members of the Shafi'i legal school, a legacy of the south Arabian sea traders who first brought Islam to the entire region (Fanselow 1989). Today the Sri Lankan legal system recognizes Islamic law in the limited domains of Muslim marriage, family, and inheritance, as well as Islamic religious endowments (*waqf*). Local Islamic judges (*qazi*) are appointed to adjudicate domestic disputes in areas where there are significant Muslim populations.

Starting in the 1600s and possibly earlier, Sri Lanka also experienced the widespread diasporic migration of Yemeni shaykhs and sayyids from the Hadramaut region that scholars have traced across the Indian Ocean and into Southeast Asia (Ho 2006). In Sri Lanka, those elite families who trace descent from the Prophet Muhammad and his closest relations (Arabic *ahl al-bayt*, “people of the house [of the Prophet]”) claim the title of Maulānā, and their exclusive marriage practices serve to safeguard the purity of their high religious status (McGilvray 2008:292-296). Another hereditary endogamous sub-group within the Moorish community is that of the barber-circumcisers, known colloquially as Ostā (from Arabic *ustād*, “master” of a skill). In addition to providing shaves and haircuts for Moorish men in rural settlements in the island, the Ostā has been the customary folk-surgeon who circumcises Moorish boys usually between the ages of 9-12, a practice

that is now being replaced by outpatient surgery in hospitals. Today, however, a female Ostā will still be called upon to perform the genital incision that is customary for Muslim baby girls within the first forty days after birth (Hussein 2007:67-77, 464-465; McGilvray 2008:304-310).

Apart from the five “pillars of Islam” that are expected of Muslims throughout the Islamic world – the declaration faith, prayer five times each day, tithing for religious charity, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Mecca – many Sri Lankan Moors also share with their co-religionists across South Asia a devotion to Sufi saints (*avuliyā*) and an engagement with local chapters of Sufi orders (*tāriqā*). Apart from the many local holy men venerated in tomb-shrines (*ziyāram*) across the island, the two most widely popular Sufi saints are Abd'al Qādir Jīlanī (d. 1166 C.E., buried in Baghdad) and Hazrat Shahul Hamid (d. 1579 C.E., buried in Nagoor [Nagore], on the Tamilnadu coast near Nagapattinam). Often referred to in Tamil as *muhiyatīn ārtavar* (“Lord Mohideen”), Abd'al Qādir Jīlanī was the Persian-born founder of the Qādiriyya order whose popularity extends throughout the South Asian Muslim world, including Sri Lanka (Zarcone et al. 2000). A festival and feast in his memory is celebrated annually at Daftar Jailani, a site on the southern escarpment of the Kandyan Hills near Balangoda where he is believed to have conducted mystic meditations in the 12th century C.E. (Aboosally 2002; McGilvray 2004, 2016a). Later, it is believed that Saint Shahul Hamid of Nagoor (known in Tamil as *nākūr ārtavar*, “Lord of Nagoor”) visited the same location, establishing a legend that enhances the fame of the Nagoor Dargah as a destination for Sri Lankan Muslim pilgrimage and vow-making (Azeez Saheb, S.A. 2014).

Active participation in Sufi orders attracts a relatively small number of Sri Lankan Muslims, but it seems have grown in recent decades, led in some cases by charismatic and controversial shaykhs such as Abdullah Payilvan and Rauf Maulavi whose bitter theological opponents invoke Wahhabi and Salafi doctrines of *towheed* (unity of God) against them (McGilvray 2011). Typical lay Sufi practice will involve a Thursday night meeting for *zikr* (reciting or singing in unison the names and attributes of Allah), a group ritual

that differs between specific Sufi orders, under the tutelage of a local Sufi shaykh to whom followers have pledged their spiritual allegiance. The largest Sufi orders in Sri Lanka are the Qadiriyya, Shaduliyya, and Rifa'i, although other tariqas are known, including the Naqsbandi and Chishti orders that have strong followings in North India. Contemporary Sufi shaykhs typically establish their base of support in particular towns and regions, and their style of leadership may reflect local cultural conditions (McGilvray 2015).

photo of Jailani Rifai Ratib





photo of Muslim women at Daftar Jailani



photo of KKP Bawa in green turban



Perhaps the most eye-catching specialists in the Moorish community are the Bawas, a non-hereditary category of Muslim religious mendicants (*faqirs*) who perform dramatic acts of Sufi devotion at mosque festivals and saintly shrines. The Bawas generally display the kinds of public self-mortification practices associated with the Rifa'i order of Sufism: cutting their skin with knives and piercing themselves with iron spikes while a chorus of Bawas sing and beat tambourines. Regarded as antinomian by many conventional Sri Lankan Muslims, the Bawas nevertheless attract crowds of eager spectators for their nightly festival performances at regional Sufi shrines such as Daftar Jailani in the Kandyan Hills, Porvai (Godapitiya) in the deep south, and the Beach Mosque at Kalmunaikkudy on the east coast (McGilvray 2004, 2008:297-304; Hussein 2007:482-490).



To varying degrees, the Sri Lankan Moors preserve matrilineal and matrilineal family patterns, a legacy of pre-colonial and early colonial coastal trade, migration, and familial ties between Sri Lanka and south Indian Muslim ports such as Kilakkarai, Kayalpattinam, Cochin, and Calicut, a connection that has shaped Tamil social structure in Sri Lanka as well (Raghavan 1971:199-217). For example, there is a similarity in kinship terms and a preference for matrilineal (women-owned) houses that can be seen in a comparison with Marakkayar Muslims in coastal Tamil Nadu and Māppiḷa Muslims in coastal districts of northern

Kerala. In the Eastern Province districts of Batticaloa and Ampara, the matrilineal principle of tracing family (*kuti*, matriclan) descent through women, and the matrilineal tradition of transferring houses and land to daughters as a dowry (or as an independent pre-nuptial gift) for the purpose of marriage, is followed by Moors as well as by Hindu and Christian Tamils (McGilvray 1989, 2014). In some east coast Moorish towns such as Akkaraipattu, the older mosques continue to be managed by a board of male trustees representing the matrilineal clans to which members of the mosque congregation belong (McGilvray 2008).

photo of Akk Sinnapalli drum - 1971



photo of Kattankudy Mira Palli Mosque rooftop



Today there is a wide distribution of the Muslim population across the island, with two-thirds living in Sinhala Buddhist majority regions, including a large urban population in Colombo, and one-third living in the Tamil-speaking agricultural and coastal districts of the north and the east (Fig. 1). Ampara in the east is the only district in Sri Lanka with a plurality of Muslims in the local population, thus a focus of vigorous Muslim politics. Taken as a whole, the Moors of Sri Lanka reflect a wide spectrum of socio-economic levels and occupational specialties, from wealthy urban business magnates and gem-traders to rural

farmers and fishermen, from textile and hardware merchants to restaurant owners and tea shop proprietors, from teachers and professionals to marginal small-holders and impoverished slum-dwellers (Mauroof 1972). The current post-war economic prosperity and professional success of the Muslim community is visible in most parts of the island, except in the IDP camps of Kalpitiya and Puttalam where many Northern Muslim families forcibly dispossessed by the LTTE in 1990 still languish today (Hasbullah 2004, Thiranagama 2011).

## Identity and Ethnic Challenges

The variety of disparaging terms for the Sri Lankan Moors is symptomatic of the identity problems they have faced over the centuries in differing colonial European, Tamil, and Sinhalese contexts. Denham (1912: 232n.) observed a century ago that "*chōni*," short for *cōnakar*) was commonly used as a rude Tamil nickname for Muslims in the Batticaloa region. Two other slang terms are *nānāmār* and *kākkā*, regionally variant Moorish kin-terms for "elder brother." During the colonial period, the presence of so-called "Coast Moors," expatriate Muslim traders from the South Indian coast, generated additional tags for Muslims: *marakkala minissu* (Sinh. for "boat people"), *hambaya* or *hambankāraya* (Sinh.) and *sammankārar* (Tam.) from either *Malay sampan* "skiff" or Tamil *cāmān* "goods." The British also used the word "tambey" (Tamil *tambi*, younger brother) to refer to itinerant Muslim traders. Ameer Ali (1980, 1981a) provides a useful discussion of these impolite references, a more extensive vocabulary than is found for the Sinhalese or the Tamils.

Muslims have often been the target of communal animosity and violence from the Tamil side, most harshly seen in the LTTE massacres of eastern Muslims at prayer and the forced expulsion and expropriation of Muslims from Jaffna and Mannar in 1990. However, the most traumatic case of anti-Muslim violence came from the Sinhala side in 1915, when Sinhala mobs burned Muslim shops and homes in an outbreak of civil unrest that required the deployment of British colonial troops to restore order (Roberts 1994, Ameer Ali 1981b). When a leading Tamil statesman of

the day, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, defended the Sinhala rioters against colonial justice, it deepened a rift that had already opened between the Tamil and the Muslim communities over the question of ethnic/racial group representation on the Legislative Council, further eroding Muslim confidence in Tamil leadership and strengthening Muslim loyalty to the British crown. This was also the period when the influential Buddhist religious crusader, Anagarika Dharmapala, was preaching against Muslims and foreigners who were alleged to be weakening the integrity of the Sinhalese nation (Guruge, ed. 1956: 540). Nevertheless, when it became clear that the Sinhala ethnic majority would firmly control the democratic politics of Ceylon as independence approached in 1948, the urban Moorish leadership chose to align itself with the Sinhalese bloc instead of with the Tamil nationalist and federalist parties.

In the first four decades of independence, the Muslim leadership pursued a pragmatic, self-interested, and largely successful strategy of flexible coalitions and alliances within the two main Sinhala majority parties, taking advantage of their position as kingmakers and as foils against Tamil federalist agendas. Throughout this period, local anti-Muslim outbreaks occurred in both Tamil and Sinhala areas, but never escalated to the level of community-wide concern. After 1983, when the armed Tamil Eelam conflict broke out, the Sri Lankan government took care, through concessionary tactics as well as covert subversive operations, to prevent the Muslims in the northern and eastern regions from joining the "Tamil-speaking" nationalist project.



Despite these gestures from the Sinhala majority leadership, however, in the 1980s the Muslims created their first political parties in response to the dangers they faced from the LTTE in the eastern region, signaling their intention to chart a more independent political course between the two ethno-nationalist rivals, the Sinhalas and the Tamils.

This is symptomatic of a recurring dilemma for Sri Lankan Muslims: how to construct a collective identity that provides both meaning and security within the turbulent arena of Sri Lankan ethno-nationalism. In pre-colonial Ceylon, the Moors

as a group would have been viewed as similar to a Sinhalese or Tamil caste: a locally-situated, endogamous, ritually-ranked, occupationally specialized group regulated by royal or chiefly authority. In parts of South India today, specific Muslim communities continue to be categorized this way, but it is an obsolete viewpoint in modern Sri Lanka. Instead, the twentieth century has provided the Moors with three possible ethnic identities, each with its advantages and disadvantages under changing political and social conditions (McGilvray 2016b).

## Sri Lankan Moors as “Tamils”

The first option has been the linguistic or cultural one championed by Hindu Tamil leaders such as Ponnambalam Ramanathan in the early 20th century, who sought to classify the Tamil-speaking Moors as “Muslim Tamils” (*islāmiya tamar*), just as Tamil-speaking Christians are regarded as “Christian Tamils.” It is an undeniable fact that Tamil-speaking Muslims in the Indian state of Tamilnadu see themselves as full-fledged members of the Tamil ethnic group, a historical heritage that is displayed in Arabic-Tamil literature and in early Dravidian-style mosque architecture (Anwar 2013).

This, of course, reflects the difference in linguistic demography between Tamilnadu, where the entire state is either monolingual or bilingual in Tamil, versus Sri Lanka, where 70% of the population speaks Sinhala. Muslims in Tamilnadu have

had nothing to lose, and everything to gain, by embracing the Dravidian nationalist movement, which in turn welcomed them wholeheartedly as “non-Brahmins” (More 1993, Fakhri 2008). For the two-thirds of Sri Lankan Moors living in the central and southwestern Sinhala-majority regions of the island, asserting their identity as “Muslim Tamils” would pose a severe liability, both at the ballot box and in terms of personal safety and economic wellbeing (O’Sullivan 1997). The situation might be different among the Moors of the North-East, where Tamil linguistic loyalties are shared with Hindus and Christians, and where the Moorish contribution to Sri Lankan Tamil literature remains vibrant (Kannan et al. 2014). However, this could lead to a regional split within the Muslim community, something that Muslim politicians have tried to prevent out of fear of losing influence at the center.



## Sri Lankan Moors as “Arabs”

The second option for Sri Lankan Muslim identity has been to construct a “racial” claim to Arab ancestry, building upon the colonial categorization of the Moors as descendants of maritime traders and religious pilgrims from the Middle East. Muslims were urged to celebrate their Moorishness, corresponding with their Tamil name Sonahar (*cōnakar*, Arab or West Asian). At the turn of the 20th century, the idea of “native races” was the basis for indigenous representation on the Legislative Council in colonial Ceylon, and Muslim leaders hoped that the “Arab” Moorish race could stand on an equal footing with the “Aryan” Sinhalese, the “Dravidian” Tamils, the “Javanese” Malays, and the “European” Burghers. This was also useful as a counter-narrative to the hegemonic Tamil claim that the Moors were their benighted “Islamic Tamil” brethren.

The visits of Arabs and Persians to the island, both as traders and as pilgrims to Adam’s Peak, is well-attested in the historical record, but additional inspiration was provided by the arrival in 1882 of an exiled Egyptian revolutionary, Orabi Pasha, and his fez-capped entourage of followers (Samaraweera 1977). Orabi Pasha became a staunch colonial loyalist after arriving in Colombo, and his neo-Ottoman sophistication inspired new Sri Lankan Muslim fashion styles and projects of community self-improvement, including western-style schools for Muslim children. For Sri Lankan Moors, Orabi Pasha and his supporters came to embody an ideal of Middle Eastern civilization and pan-Islamic solidarity, as later represented in the Khilafat Movement of the 1920s. His Ottoman sartorial taste even inspired

a legal “fight for the fez” in colonial courtroom etiquette (Thawfeeq 1972). The Moors’ Islamic Cultural Home, founded in Colombo in 1944, remains today as the major cultural institution of the Sonahar community, comparable to the Dutch Burgher Union for Sri Lanka’s Eurasian community (McGilvray 1982).

photo of MICH library portraits



The concept of an Arab Moorish “race” provides a simple and appealing origin story. However, at an ethnographic level, Sri Lankan Moorish society departs from Middle Eastern Arab cultural norms in almost every way, apart from Islam itself. Moorish families are not strongly patrilineal or patrilocal; indeed many are matrilineal and matrilocal. They forbid marriage with patrilineal parallel-cousins (i.e., father’s brother’s son or daughter), which is standard practice in the Middle East. Instead, they endorse marriage with cross-cousins, and they reckon family relationships according to a Dravidian-type classification that is virtually identical to the Tamil and Sinhala kinship systems (Yalman 1967, McGilvray 2008). Like the Burghers, many of whom bear little physical resemblance to their

Portuguese and Dutch forebears, the Sri Lankan Moors are often indistinguishable today from the Sinhalese or the Tamils, apart from cultural markers of dress, language, and religion. This awkward point was acknowledged early on by Moorish boosters who nonetheless contended, following European genealogical rules, that even a few drops of patrilineal Arab blood from the 12th century would qualify today's Sri Lankan Moors as members of the Arab race (Azziz 1907). This obviously ignores many generations of intermarriage with Sri Lankan women, a cumulative maternal component that seems far more significant than any original Arab paternity (Ismail 1995).

Most Moors today know Arabic only as a language of prayer and Quranic recitation. Although today one sees many urban Moorish women wearing the black Saudi-style *abaya* and *hijāb*, this Arab form of dress has largely been adopted in the last half-century (Nuhman 2007: 203-208). When I first began anthropological fieldwork in 1969, every Muslim women in the agricultural town of Akkaraipattu (Amparai District) wore an incandescently colorful sari,

pulling the cloth across her face for modesty when necessary (*mukkādu*). Moorish food-ways are clearly Sri Lankan, not Middle-Eastern, with a preponderance of coconut-milk based curries and sweets.

While the claim of Arab ancestry might have a grain of historical truth, there is also evidence of migration and intermarriage from the Coromandel and Malabar Coasts of South India. This would explain why the Muslim community speaks Tamil rather than Sinhala, the language that Moorish descendants would presumably have spoken if their Arab forefathers had wed Sinhala women when they landed in the island. When I spoke with Muslim Tamils in coastal towns of Tamilnadu such as Karaikkal, Kilakkarai, and Kayalpattinam in 2015, they considered Sri Lankan Muslim culture and history to be continuous with their own, citing a long history of family migrations and business dealings with Colombo and other Sri Lankan towns. Similar commercial and family connections with Mappila Muslims from Cochin and Calicut are well known in the British colonial period.

## Sri Lankan Moors as “Muslims”

Although attachment to Tamil language and culture remains strong, and racial pride as Arab descendants still resonates widely, the third and currently most popular ethnic marker of the Moorish community today has become simply “Muslim,” a religious label that is intended to provide an escape from all of the prevailing language-based and racially-based quarrels between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In electing to identify themselves

solely by a religious label, the Moors have done something that the other two major Sri Lankan ethnic groups have been unable to do, simply because there are significant Christian minorities within both the Sinhala and Tamil communities. However, to avoid ambiguity, all other Muslim communities apart from the Moors – such as the Malays, Memons, Khojas, and Bohras – must be identified specifically by name.

When the idea of “Muslim” ethnicity was gaining popularity in the era leading up to independence in 1948, it was not intended to mark out an exclusive Islamic sectarian agenda. Similarly, when the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) emerged in the 1980s in response to LTTE violence against Moors in the Eastern Province, it was not conceived as an Islamist party (Johansson 2016). In the decades since independence, however, the Muslims of Sri Lanka, like Muslims throughout the world, have experienced the effects of pan-Islamic reform movements, leading to significant changes in popular Muslim society and culture. Some of the visible shifts include the widespread adoption of austere Middle Eastern-inspired

*pardah* and *hijāb* attire by Muslim women, the wearing of Arab-style *thobes* and *jubba* garments, and the concomitant display of henna-dyed beards and hair, by some Muslim men, the construction of many new well-funded mosques and madrasas, the stricter public enforcement of gender segregation rules, the marketing of meat and numerous other products with a halal-certified logo, and the growth of Islamic banks and financial institutions. In addition, some middle-class Muslim self-improvement organizations have urged a greater degree of social distance from non-Muslims in the interest of Islamic piety (Haniffa 2008). In some Muslim circles, participation in the Rotary or Lions Club is now frowned upon because the non-Muslim members may consume alcohol.

photo of Tissa Tasneem with lotus



photo of Muslim classroom



Moreover, the very concept of Muslim-ness itself has been contested in recent decades by the polarization between traditionalist and reformist brands of Islam. I am sure that Muslim paddy farmers on the east coast of the island had no idea that their vow-making and celebration of *kandoori* festivals at local saintly tombs was a “Sufi” practice when I first did research among them in the 1970s, but in recent years fundamentalist opposition to such shrine-based Sufi devotion has

become quite zealous, even violent (McGilvray 2011, Spencer et al. 2015: ch. 5). A number of South Asian Islamic reformist movements are now active in Sri Lanka, among them Jamaat-e-Islami, Tablighi Jamaat, and Towheed Jamaat (Nuhman 2007: 174-184, Faslan and Vanniasinkam 2015). To distinguish themselves, adherents of the older and more customary forms of Muslim worship now actively identify as “Sunnatu Jamaat,” i.e., as Muslim traditionalists.

Sadly, the very Muslim religious identity that Moorish leaders had hoped would shield their community from Sinhalese ethnic nativism and Tamil linguistic chauvinism has recently served to bring them directly into focus as a target of militant Buddhist groups. Their Islamic religious identity has now made the Moors vulnerable to accusations of having exogenous origins and of importing an alien proselytizing religion into *Dhamma Dīpa* (“Island of the Dhamma”), the exclusive Sinhala Buddhist ethno-nationalist vision of Sri Lanka.

Although the current problems flared up in 2011, they are only the latest manifestation of an underlying ethnic friction that has troubled Sri Lanka for over a century. The Bodu Bala Sena (“Buddhist Strength Force” or BBS) and its allies Sinhala Ravaya (“Sinhala Outcry”) and Ravana Balaya (“Ravana Power”) accuse the Muslim community of spreading a religion of jihadist terror, economic exploitation, black-veiled misogyny, and cruelty to animals (Jones 2015, Holt ed. 2016). They argue that Islam is a foreign, neo-colonialist religion like Christianity with no authentic roots in South Asian Indic civilization, and one that

allegedly, like Christianity, pursues “unethical conversions.” They claim that Muslims are waging a secret contraceptive campaign (through tainted powdered milk and contaminated women’s underwear) to keep the Sinhala birthrate low, while maintaining a relentless reproductive rate of their own that will demographically transform Sri Lanka into an Islamic nation within a generation or two. They seek to demolish Muslim mosques and saintly tombs that have been built within the “sacred zones” of Buddhist temples and archaeological sites, while objecting to the expansion or construction of new mosques in other areas (Amarasuriya, et al. 2015, McGilvray 2016a). They mock Muslim women’s Arab-style *hijāb* (black outer *abaya* garment, plus head-covering scarf or wimple) and *niqāb* (full facial veil) as resembling a scary “gunny-sack monster” (*goni billa*), and they allege that hidden jihadi terror squads are poised to attack from within the Muslim community. They object to the success of Muslim-owned retail chains such as Fashion Bug and No Limit, whose clerks are accused of seducing Sinhala shopgirls for the purpose of religious conversion. They decry the Muslim slaughter of cattle, despite the fact that beef is a widely consumed part of the Sinhala diet, and they claim, astonishingly, that the kitchen staff in Muslim restaurants are required by their religion to spit three times into the food before it is served to non-Muslim customers. The most successful achievement of the BBS campaign has been to remove the visible halal certification logo from supermarket food and toiletries sold to the general public, arguing that non-Muslim consumers should not have to pay the cost for certifying halal meat and merchandise (Haniffa 2017).



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# The Tamil Community of Recent Indian Origins

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## Brief history and origins

After the British takeover of the administration of Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they involved themselves in various activities including economic enterprises such as plantation agriculture etc. A notable part of the impact that caused in the social, economic and political life of the country is the large number of inflow of labour migration from south India to then Ceylon. According to Betram Bastiampillai,

a former Professor of History of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, immigration to Ceylon for the plantations were mainly from south India Tamil Nadu. First group of Indian Origin Tamils (IOT) arrived in Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, in year 1823 as laborers to work in coffee and then tea, rubber, and cocoa plantations in the hilly regions of Sri Lanka. They were brought to Ceylon by the British from



Thiruchchirapalli, Tanjore, Coimbatore and Madurai districts of Tamilnadu, India. At the request of George Bird a pioneering coffee planter in Ceylon the Governor Sir Edward Barnes recruited the workers since 1827 from South India to Ceylon.

Later in the periods of 1900s substantial numbers of Tamils from India also came to settle in Ceylon as financial entrepreneurs and grocers. There are the trading community of IOT who were not part of the plantation economy who came to Ceylon since then.

*Social Analytic writer Mu.Si. Kandaiah describes the early woes of the IOT community as follows;*

“...The foremost intention of the British was to bring cheap labour for their plantations. The poverty-stricken, Subjugated and illiterate people encouraged to migrate to the (Srilankan) plantations. The people migrated to Sri Lanka with huge anticipations, to quit from hunger starvation and poverty and to make their lives wealthier in a new dreamed destination. They were bought by the unsafe boats and had to walk a long distance to reach the expected destinies. (First to departure ports in south India and then from the arrival port in Sri Lanka) During their (journey) arrival, some boats were submerged in the sea and number of people died. None to do memorials for them as Titanic. It was estimated 40 out of 100 died during their journey from the port to

plantation due to endemic diseases. Their expectations were to reach the destiny to fulfil their dreams hence they tolerated everything for bright future...”

Their travel route was mostly through Mandapam and Thanuskody of the southern parts of Tamilnadu and Thalaimannar in Ceylon. On their way to the hill country of Ceylon they were quarantined for a period of a week or more, examined for infectious diseases such as small pox, cholera or typhoid and vaccinated against those diseases before they were sent to Kandy, from where they were dispersed to locations where they would either work on estates already established by a previous group of workers or clear land to establish new ones. Conditions were harsh and health facilities were very limited. Many died during first few months of employment. Hence, they were instrumental in the establishment of tea, rubber, coffee, and coconut plantations and formed the bulk of the labour force of the plantation sector (Forrest. D.M.1967).

Apart from the IOT labour that was used to clean the forests to create the coffee, tea, and rubber plantations, as referred above, IOT labour was used in another important stream too. Sri Lanka's current infrastructures such as Railways and High Ways connecting the Hill country region with the capitol region of Colombo and the Ports, were created by the British using IOT labour force.

## Early Indian Connection

The other interesting fact is that though IOT plantation working people are labeled as Indian Tamils who arrived in Sri Lanka from south India, are not the first of such kind to arrive from Indian mainland. The current IOT community started arriving from year 1823.

But the last king of Kandy been an Indian origin, who ceased throne in 1815, just only 8 years before! King

Sri Wickramarajasinghe clan arrived from south India to take throne of Kandyan kingdom in Sri Lanka at the invitation of the Kandyan Sinhalese chieftains. King Sri Wickramarajasinghe and his four predecessors were from the Nayakka dynasty of Madurai region Tamilnadu, south India.



*Wikipedia, encyclopedia says that, "...The Nayaks of Kandy (a.k.a. Kandy Nayak Dynasty) were the rulers of Sri Lanka with Kandy as their capital for 76 years from 1739 to 1815. They were also the last dynasty to rule Sri Lanka. They were related to the Tamil Nadu's Madurai Nayak dynasty and to the Tamil Nadu's Tanjore Nayak dynasty. There were four kings of this lineage and the last king, Vikrama Rajasinha, was captured by the British and exiled to Vellore Fort in Tamil Nadu, India..."*

The other piece historical version according to the great Sinhala epic *Mahavansa*, the first Prince Vijaya was a legendary king of Sri Lanka, Mahavansa. He is the first recorded King of Sri Lanka. His reign is dated to 543–505 BC. Prince Vijaya and 700 men landed in Sri

Lanka from eastern coast of India. At the arrival, he married the local Yakkhini queen Kuveni. Later when he wanted to marry a royal, he sent emissaries to the city of Madhura, which was ruled by Pandu king. Madhura is identified with Madurai, a city in South India; Pandu is identified with the Pandyas. The king agreed and sent his own daughter and other women. This group landed in Lanka. Vijaya married Pandu king's daughter and his men married other women. The community established by Vijaya gives rise to the Sinhalese race according to *Mahavansa*.

Therefore the Tamil people who arrived from south India to work in the Srilankan plantations since year 1823, shall be safely considered as the recent Indian origins in Sri Lanka.

## Indian Tamils

The Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka were enumerated as a separate ethnic group for the first time at the census of 1911, when the people of this community became the second largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka. The government decided to consider them as a separate group and named them as "Indian Tamils" in the official census from that year onwards (Dept. of Census and Statistics -1981). Government for various administrative and political purposes, officially identify the community as "Indian Tamils".

The Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka today are mostly the descendants of the immigrants of the third wave of Indian migration who came to Sri Lanka from the 1823 onwards. They are also largely Tamil speaking Hindus but retain their identity separate and distinct from the Sri Lankan Tamils.

In addition to plantation workers, traders of IOT community who were not part of the plantation economy came to the island. They settled here as financial entrepreneurs and grocers. They engaged in urban based businesses and to some extent in some professional and nonprofessional employments, which resulted from the third wave of immigration from India mostly from the southern parts of the country the present Tamil Nadu (Muthiah, S. (2003)).

For the purpose of official classification in a census, terms such as race, nationality, caste have been used at different censuses of population, finally leading to the adoption of the term 'ethnic group' in 1963 and thereafter. Therefore, the Srilankan IOT community too started receiving this status gradually.

## Disenfranchisement

In the early pre-independence period, the IOT community was a closed community confining themselves to the plantations, while actively contributed to the economic well-being of Sri Lanka. The community in general was isolated, living in the central region as well as linguistically isolated from the majority Sinhalese villagers who live in the valleys.

In the 1940s the trade union movement had galvanized the plantation workers into a militant working class. They joined hands with the Lanka Sama Samaja (or Socialist) Party (LSSP), which carried the message of a working-class struggle for liberation from the exploitation by mostly British plantation companies.

Sri Lanka became independent in 1948 as the new state of Ceylon. In the elections to the first parliament of Ceylon, seven Indian Tamil representatives were returned to Parliament. The plantation workers voted either for Indian Tamil candidates or for socialist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) candidates. Dr. N.M. Perera was the leader of the opposition in the first parliament and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party was the second largest party after the United National Party (UNP).

Indian Tamil labour overwhelmingly supported the leftist organizations at the constituencies where IOT candidates did not contest in the

first elections. It was one of the reasons to the successes of the left candidates. Therefore, apart from the ethnic and other reasons, this support to leftist parties was also one of the reasons behind the political decision of the first independent government to disenfranchise the IOT community. The government then, introduced the *Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948*, the *Indian-Pakistani Citizenship Act of 1949* thus the IOT community became stateless. It was followed by the amendment to the Parliamentary Elections Act and it disfranchised the Indian Tamils along with many persons of Indian and Pakistani ancestry.

As they had no means of electing anyone to the Parliament they ceased to be a concern of parliamentary politicians. The plantation workers were thus forgotten from 1948 to 1964. They were unable to profit by any progressive legislation. The housing, health and education of the plantation workers was neglected. Infant mortality was highest in the country. Although since the introduction of universal franchise in 1931, strong traditions of social welfare in Sri Lanka have given the island very high indicators of physical well-being. Impressive national statistics tended to hide the existence of deprived pockets within the population and the most deprived population group has been the plantation labour, which had been economically, politically and socially deprived.

## The first Satyagraha campaign at Galle Face Green

Political representation for persons of Indian origin came to an end upon the elections of 1952. A Satyagraha campaign was launched to protest on the deprivation of representation by the Indian Tamil leaders in 1952. Soumiamoorthy Thondaman, Abdul Aziz, G.K. Motha and P. Perisundaram, K. Rasalingham, C.R. Motha, Kottampalli Govindan Sellappa Nayar, Vaithiyalingham Palanisami Pillai and many others participated in this struggle. It occurred at the Galle Face green, in front of the parliament of Ceylon, then.

It was the first non-violent demonstration occurred in independent Ceylon and it was broken by the opponents of the Satyagraha campaign. It also some tendencies of considerations beyond communal lines as W. Dahanayake, then LSSP MP walked out of the parliament house towards Galle face green, where the Indian Tamil leaders conducting Satyagraha and reassured them compassionately. Tamil congress MP S.J.V. Chelvanayagam too joined him. LSSP leader Dr. N.M. Perera spoke inside house in support of the Satyagraha and against the deprivation of the citizenship of the Indian Tamils of Ceylon.

## The process of Repatriation

Repatriation pacts with India, followed the Disenfranchisement and Citizenship Acts. Soon after independent Sri Lanka's (then Ceylon) first Parliamentary elections the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka were stripped of their civic rights and it took more than half a century to reverse the situation. During this half, a century of stay in Sri Lanka, they were partly (about 50%), repatriated to their ancestral homeland, while the others remained behind in the country under the Srimavo - Sastri pact of 1964 (Mookiah M.S. (1991).

The available information reveals that the Sri Lankan and Indian governments decided to repatriate about 50 percent or more of the Indian Tamils who lived in Sri Lanka at that time without

any consultation for the views of the people in a Pact they signed in 1968 (Oddavan Hollup, 1994)

After making the IOT community stateless, Citizenship rights granted according to eligibility criteria set out in a few enactments enabled Indian Tamils to become part of country's permanent population. This was a long process. There was much political maneuvering by the Indian Tamil leaders and the regimes in power at various times to solve problems. Also, the process imposed on the Indian origin Tamils a price which they paid through heavy sacrifices, and financial hardships. Two generations or more of Indian Tamils after the Independence of Sri Lanka suffered the agony of being a stateless community.

Accordingly, the Indian Tamil population in Sri Lanka experienced different issues and trends during the last two hundred years of their stay. However, in this paper we only look into the

changes that took place from the time this population was identified as a separate ethnic group in Sri Lanka.

## Realities - Plantation workers

The weakest and marginalized segment within the Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka is the plantation community. It is the most underdeveloped segment within Sri Lanka too. It is based in the plantations where most of them are plantation workers who are backward in the social, economic and political spheres of life.

It took about two centuries of living and the passing of several generations in this country, for the community to reach the status of citizens of Sri Lanka officially. The plantations were nationalized under the Land Reform Act of 1971 and handed over to state sponsored institutions for management. After about two decades it was recognized that poor management of the plantations by the state management institutions such as JEDB and SLSPC had resulted in the plantation becoming a white elephant to the state. Therefore, in the early 1990s the plantations were given to private sector management companies anticipating that they will provide better management practices. The state management

during the two decades did not bring about changes for the progress of the workers and their living standards. As a consequence, the workers in the plantations remained as a backward community in comparison with the people of other communities in the country.

People belonging to the Indian Tamil community who are residents in the plantations and in the rural areas of the Vanni districts, Kilinochchi district have to improve their life in the areas of education, skills training, health, housing, and employment to reach minimum satisfactory levels.

Educational attainment is one of the most important indicators of the social and to some extent, the economic development levels of communities. Due to the general neglect of the community by both the state and of the community themselves their educational attainments are considerably backward in the country compared to the other sectors of society.



**Table - 1 Sri Lanka - Educational Attainment among sectors in Sri Lanka - 2012 (in %)**

Level of Education	Urban	Rural	Estate	Sri Lanka
No Schooling	2.6	3.9	12.1	4.0
Up to grade 5	19.5	24.5	41.6	24.4
Grade 6 - 10	37.6	44.8	38.7	43.2
Passed GCE (O/L)	20.5	15.9	5.6	16.3
<b>Passed A/L &amp; above</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>

**Source :** Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2012/13, Preliminary Report, Table 2.5, p32.

To understand the poverty and substandard living of this community in Sri Lanka, some of the indicators connected to their living pattern will be helpful. More than half the estate sector population (53.8%) do not have access to safe drinking water. This explains the vulnerable situation of the community and poor preventive health measures. Also, while at the national level 80% of the households (HHs) are connected with the main grid it is only 62.3 percent at the estate sector HHs. Similarly, toilet facilities are also much less in the estate sector compared to the national level. At the national level 89.1% of the HHs are with toilet facilities and it is only 67.7% in the estate sector.

Ownership of dwelling houses among the Indian Tamils is found to be only 23.8%, while it is 86.8% at National level and 92.0 and 80.3 percent respectively in Rural and Urban sectors. With some of this discouraging statistical information it could be well understood that the current social and economic status of this community is far below that of the national level.

Poverty was 12.6 percent at national level in Sri Lanka at the time of Household Income and expenditure Survey taken by the Department of Census and Statistics in 2006/07. This was 25.8 percent in the estate sector, 13.1 in the rural sector and only 5.0 percent in the Urban Sector. The poverty in Nuwara Eliya district was the highest with 33.8 % among all the districts. Ratnapura (26.6%), Monaragala (33.2%), and Kalutara (13%) districts which are mostly with plantation populations too had a higher level of poverty relative to other districts in the country.

Uva province dominated by plantations has extensive records of highest incidence rate of poverty among those areas suffering from poverty. Extraordinarily the level of poverty in the Nuwara Eliya District increased by about 68 % over two interim periods from 1990/91 to 2006/07. It is noticed that the real total expenditure per month in estate sector with low nonfood proportion remains much closer to the poverty line. It is also revealed that nearly 73 percent population of the estate sector falls into the poorest 40 % of the

population of the country. Nuwara Eliya District is the one where large numbers of estates are located; hence the higher estate sector poverty incidence may affect the entire district.

The poor living standards also can be seen from the information about the house hold income

among the sectors in the country. The following table gives some comparable statistics on the mean monthly income of the major sectors of Sri Lanka in 2006/07 by the most authoritative source the Central Bank of Ceylon.

**Table - 2 Sri Lanka - Sectoral distribution of mean House Hold income per month - 2012 ( in SL. Rupees)**

Sector	Mean HH income	HH size (persons)
Urban	68,336/-	4.0
Rural	42,184/-	3.8
Estate	31,895/-	4.1
Sri Lanka	46,207/-	3.9

**Source :** Dept. of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Sri Lanka, Household Income and Expenditure Survey - 2012/2013, Preliminary Report, Table 5.1, p.40

This poverty condition is also reflected by the ineptness of the people of the estate sector. This was 58.7 % for the Urban sector, 61.4% for the Rural Sector and at National level 61.5% whereas

it was very high as 70.5% among the estate sector. This explains the low income and the resultant ineptness within the estate sector.

## Ethnic distribution in Sri Lanka

At the census of 2012 the population of Sri Lanka was 20,277,597 (about 20 million) and the mid-year population in 2014 is estimated at 20.675 million with an annual growth rate of 0.9 percent (Central Bank Annual Report - 2014). Its ethnic composition consisted of Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Muslims, Indian Tamils, Burghers, Malays and numerically very small cultural minorities, who for the purpose of official classification were grouped under the category of 'others' (Dept. of Census and Statistics 2012)

General demography and geography of prime ethnic groups as at date are as follows:

- (1) The total population of Sri Lanka is little over 20 million
- (2) The Sinhala ethnic population is about 15 million
- (3) The Tamil ethnic population of both Srilankan and Indian Tamils together is about 3.2 million
- (4) The Muslim ethnic population is about 1.8 million

Accordingly, the Sinhalese constitute the largest ethnic group in the country with 74.8 percent of the total population and Sri Lanka Moors comprise 9.2 percent. The Sri Lankan Tamils in the island with a percentage of 11.2, and Tamils of Indian Origin is about 4.15 percent or 842,323 in numbers according to the 2012 census (2).

However, the exact numbers of Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka at the time of 1981 Census and now (2012) are under dispute. This can be explained statistically, geographically and politically.

The department of Census in its 1981 official report pointed out the logical and acceptable reason for the under estimate of the real Indian Origin Tamil population in 1981 Census. It explained the reason as given below.

*“The number of Indian Tamils enumerated in 1971 (1,174,606) together with their natural increase (169,059) gives an estimate of the number of Indian Tamils who should have been in the country (1,343,659) in 1981 but the actual number enumerated in 1981 was 818,656. The difference of about 525,000 between these two figures need to be attributed to migration. According to the Immigration and Emigration records, repatriation was of the order of 312,000. Accordingly, it appears that little over two hundred thousand (213,000) Indian Tamils have reported themselves as Sri Lankan Tamils”.* (Dept. of Census and Statistics (1981) p.115).

This trend of identifying themselves as “Srilankan Tamils”, among the members of IOT community in Sri Lanka has been continuing since 1970s. Therefore, the national census, due to above reason does not provide actual demographical patterns in respect of the Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. Mainly, the members of IOT community

living in the urban areas of the above stated seven provinces outside north and eastern provinces have mostly identified themselves as “Srilankan Tamils’ instead of “Indian Tamils’. The IOT community which has internally migrated to the northern province too have identified themselves as Srilankan Tamils. Due to the ethnically polarized situation that prevailed during the course of the history of Sri Lanka, psyche of the IOT community in Sri Lanka naturally desired to live within the radius of Srilankan patriotism by dropping the “Indian” tag.

Geographically, near 50% of the total Tamil population (near 1.6 million) is living in the north and eastern provinces. The balance near 50% (near 1.6 million) of the total Tamil population in Sri Lanka is spread over the rest of the seven provinces with bigger portions living in Central, Western, Sabaragamuwa and Uva provinces. Most Tamils in the north & eastern provinces are Srilankan Tamils (SLT) and most Tamils living in the seven provinces, outside north and eastern provinces are Indian Origin Tamils (IOT).

There are about 150,000 Srilankan Tamils (SLT) living in the western, central, north-western provinces, while an equal number (150,000) of Indian Origin Tamils (IOT) living in the northern province. There are some IOTs living in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts of the Eastern Province too.

Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA), the largest political alliance representing IOT community in the Srilankan parliament and provincial councils maintains that large chunk of the Tamil population that lives outside northern and eastern provinces is IOT. The total population of IOTs in the country is near 1.6 million. It says that as at today 50% of the total Tamil population in the country is IOT.

**Tamil population in the seven provinces outside north and eastern provinces  
(Prepared with the details gathered from per national census 2011)**

S#	Provinces	Districts	Tamil Population
01	Central	Nuwara-Eliya	407,662
		Kandy	154,874
		Matale	48,156
02	Western	Colombo	258,654
		Kalutara	47,973
		Gampaha	90,950
03	Sabaragamuwa	Kegalle	61,718
		Ratnapura	117,253
04	Uva	Badulla	169,997
		Monaragala	14,373
05	North Western	Puttalam	50,026
		Kurunagala	22,345
06	Southern	Galle	20,869
		Matara	20,546
		Hambantota	2,247
07	North Central	Pollannaruwa	8,546
		Anuradhapura	6,022
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,502,211</b>

## Emergence as an ethnic minority - The present scenario

Today (2017), there are near 180,000 registered plantations workers in the 22-private large corporate plantations and 3 state owned plantations. There is another 50,000 working in the plantations owned by small holder private companies. Altogether with the dependents, the population of the plantation worker segment is about 500,000. This is the 500,000 strong IOT plantation worker community living in the plantations located in the

Central, Uva, Sabaragamuwa, Western provinces of Sri Lanka.

Apart from the 500,000 IOT people in the plantations, near 1,000,000 IOT population have settled in the rural, semi urban and urban locations in the country seeking betterments. They are the second and third generation decedents who have moved from the plantations into the



urban localities areas and cities in the districts of Nuwara-Eliya, Kandy, Matale, Badulla, Galle, Matara, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Kalutara, Vavuniya and Kilinochchi. Numbers of newer generations of IOT community have moved from the central regions into the greater Colombo areas of Colombo, Dehiwela-Mount-Lavenia, Moratuwa and cities of Wattala and Negombo in the western province. Another segment of IOTs have moved to live in the rural areas of Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Mannar districts of the northern provinces. They are engaged in farming and agriculture. There are small numbers IOTs moved to live in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts of the eastern province due to the close proximity from the central region. Another segment of people of Indian origin live in the Chillaw and Puttalam areas of Puttalam district in the north-western province. They are descendants of the Tamils who

migrated from southern districts of Tamil Nadu over the years in 1900s. Also, the decedents of Indian Tamil financial entrepreneurs and grocers who too migrated from south India live in the cosmopolitan urban localities of Sri Lanka.

There are new social layers such as traders, industrialists, educationists private sector employees and small numbers of professionals have emerged within the IOT community, in addition to the plantation workers in the plantations and petty laborers and employees in the rural, semi urban and urban regions. Altogether the IOT community with all above social layers living in the plantations, rural, semi-urban and urban regions have emerged as a strong national ethnic minority in Sri Lanka.

## Indian Tamils are called by different names

From time to time and group to group, the Indian Tamils have been or identified by different names. They have been called and identified by the following names:

1. *Indian Tamils*
2. *Indian Origin Tamils (IOT)*
3. *Up-country Tamils*
4. *Plantation Tamils*
5. *Malayaha Thamils (Tamils of the hill country)*

Among the community members (and group) disagreement remains as how to refer to them.

Some groups for reasons of their own prefer to call themselves Malayaha Thamils, whereas some who consider naming the community as Indian Tamils. As a result of these different views, healthy discussions going on within the community to clear and set the national identification tittle. As it is today, the most agreed tittle appears to be ‘Malayaha Thamils’ of Indian Origins. Socio-political leaders of this community have taken up the position to demand that in all government documents and other institutions, this community shall be identified as “Malayaha Thamils”.

## Early political leaders of the community

During late 1930s some of the leading personalities among IOT community lived in Sri Lanka, were concerned about the backwardness of the working-class people of the community and realized the importance of getting themselves formally organized in the country as Trade Union members. Individuals like G. K. Motha and P. Perisundaram and few others made their contribution by taking over the leadership of Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) in 1939. During this period, K. Natesa Iyer a Sri Lankan journalist, trade union leader and politician of Indian Tamil origin had pioneered the labour movement in the plantations in the early 1930s. Subsequently he was elected to the Ceylon Legislative Council as its member. A.E. Goonesinghe the President of the Ceylon Labour Union accused the Indian Tamils for all the ills of the country. This made Natesa Iyer to quit the Trade Union in which he was a vice President, as a protest against the attitudes of such persons. Thereafter, he founded All Ceylon Estate Labour Federation and also started an English language journal called "The Indian Estate Labourer". He too was elected to the State Council of Ceylon (1936-1947) as the first person for such an appointment among the IOTs (Patrick Peebles (2001).

Along with the Trade Unionist A.E. Goonasinghe the Sinhala and Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala went to the stage with Sinhala Nationalism which feared the IOT members in the country. It also made them to feel that the backing of a large number of worker community with them will give the community a safeguard from the nationalistic political forces. This was considered to be a sufficient background for the people of IOT to organize a Trade Union and it took the form of Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC). Some CIC leaders approached the Indian leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru for support and advice on this matter.

However, while the Indian leaders encouraged the establishment of an Organization of this kind, they too advised the IOT leaders to depend on their own and not to look for India. Although the stand of the Indian leaders was discouraging them, they took up the challenge to stand by their own decisions (Desai Mahadev, 1928 & 1988). Due to these developments, the people of the Indian Tamil community became totally dependent on the Trade Unions and their leaders for their political and other rights.

## Growths of trade unions and political parties

The Ceylon Indian Congress (1939 -1950) in its formative days was led by Motha and Perisundaram. Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) continued to grow after 1950 by gaining the new name 'Ceylon Workers Congress' (CWC). It was to identify with the Ceylonese nationalist tendency

by dropping "Indian" tag. Later many stalwarts left CWC due to differences with Soumiamoorthy Thondaman. Upon these developments CWC continued functioning under the leadership of veteran Soumiamoorthy Thondaman.

In year 1956, the split created Democratic Workers Congress (DWC) under the leadership of veteran trade unionist Abdul Aziz. Kottampalli Govindan Sellappa Nayar, Vaithiyalingham Palanisami Pillai, Vaithiyalingham Palanisami Ganesan, Doriasamy Naidu, Olimugamadhu Saibo, Balakrishnan, Ashrof Aziz were the stalwarts supported Abdul Aziz in the running of DWC.

Generally, CWC took the rightist socio political line and DWC took the leftist socio political line. In the international arena, CWC led by Soumiamoorthy Thondaman identified with western world and DWC led by Abdul Aziz identified with socialist world and nonaligned movement.

V.K. Vellaiyan formed National Union of Workers in year 1964 with C.V. Velupillai who was an eminent Trade Unionist and a progressive writer and a poet. Up-Country People's Front (UPF) was established by P. Chandrasegaran who hailed from a small-time business family in Talawakelle, was a remarkable trade union and political leader during the 1990s after he left his mother organization CWC. He was backed by V.T. Tharmalingam, B. K. Kader, M. Sivalingam, Anton Lawrence in the making of UPF.

Later in the 1980s, CWC political wing and DWC political wing were granted registrations as Political parties of Sri Lanka by the Elections department of Sri Lanka. Elections department and later Elections commission listed these

two parties as political parties along with other political parties in the country. This was an outcome of the provision of citizenship and thus voting rights to the IOT community. However political wings were parts of the Trade Unions and trade unionism overwhelmed the political party culture amidst the IOT community.

Later in the 1990s, NUW political wing and UPF too were granted Political party recognitions by the Elections department of Sri Lanka along with political wings of CWC and DWC as the political parties of the IOT community in Sri Lanka.

Soumiamoorthy Thondaman who subsequently led CWC became the member of the cabinet of president J.R. Jayawardane in year 1978. He continued to perform with ministerial portfolios during the regimes of president R. Premadasa and president Chandrika Bandaranayke Kumaratunga until his demise in year 1999.

Currently, DWC political wing with the change of name to Democratic People's Front (DPF) led by Mano Ganesan, NUW political wing led by Palani Thigambaram, UPF led by V. Radhakrishnan and CWC political wing led by A. Thondaman are functioning as the political parties. Latest development in year 2015 has seen DPF, NUW and UPF coming together under the common banner of Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) with Mano Ganesan as the leader and Palani Thigambaram and V. Radhakrishnan as deputy leaders.

# Political representatives of Indian Origin communities in Sri Lanka at legislatures

## Legislative council

1. E.G. Adam Ally (1920 – 1924 - first nominee on behalf of Indian Community)
2. S.R. Mohamed Sultan (1924 – 1924)
3. Dhivan Bagadhur Ignecious Sevier Pereira (1924-1930)
4. Kodhandarama Nadesaiyar (1924 – 1930)

## State Council 1931 - 1935

1. Periyannan Sundaram aka Peri Sundaram (1890 – 1957 - Ceylonese lawyer, Trade unionist and Politician) He was the first Minister of Labor Industries and Commerce in the State Council of Ceylon and Deputy President of the Senate of Ceylon)
2. Sidhambarampillai Vaithiyalingham

## State council 1936 -1947

1. Kodhandarama Nadesaiyar
2. Sidhambarampillai Vaithiyalingham

## 1<sup>st</sup> parliament 1947 – 1951

1. S.M. Suppaiyah
2. K. Kumaravelu
3. C.R. Metha
4. Abdul Azeez
5. K.Rasalingham
6. S. Thondaman
7. C.V. Velupillai
8. K.V. Nadaraja
9. Diesinker Ramanujam

## Senators

1. Periyasamy Sundaram
2. S. Nadesan
3. L.P. Jayasena (Lanka Sama Samaja Party)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Parliament 1951-1956

1. Sidhamparampillai Vaithiyalingham (Nominated Member)

## 5<sup>th</sup> Parliament -1960 – 1965

1. S. Thondaman (Nominated Member)
2. R. Jesuthasan (Senator)

## 6<sup>th</sup> Parliament 1965 -1970

1. V. Annamalai (Nominated Member)

## 7<sup>th</sup> Parliament 1970-1977

1. Abdul Aziz (Nominated Member)

## 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament and onwards (from 1977)

1. S. Thondaman

## Former Parliamentarians (until 2015)

M.S. Sellasamy, S. Suppiah, P.P. Devaraj, R. Yogarajan, P. Chandrasegaran, A.M.D. Rajan, V. Puthirasigamany, S. Sathasivam, T. Sennan, S. Rajaratnam, Kanabathi Kanagaraj, K. Jegadeeswaran, Praba Ganesan, S.



Velayutham, P. Radhakrishnan, C. Rajadurai, M. Sachitanathan.

## Present Parliamentarians

In the new millennium, new modern leaders from the community have emerged in the political front.

Mano Ganesan is a political leader and human rights activist was first elected to parliament in year 2001. Due to his participation in the minority rights campaign he is recognized nationally amidst the Srilankan Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala communities of Sri Lanka. He is the son of Vaithiyalingham Palanisami Ganesan and grandson of Vaithiyalingham Palanisami Pillai.

Palani Thigambaram and V. Radhakrishnan were first elected to parliament in year 2010. They have emerged as political and trade union leaders and symbols of new generation in the central regions amidst the plantation workers of Sri Lanka with their contributions in the IOT political and trade union spheres.

Mano Ganesan, Palani Thigambaram, V. Radhakrishnan, M. Thilakraj, M. Velu Kumar, A. Aravindh Kumar are members of the current parliament as members of Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA). Mano Ganesan and Palani Thigambaram are members of the cabinet of ministers and V. Radhakrishnan is a minister of state.

Arumugan Ramanathan Thondaman and Muthu Sivalingam are the other two members of parliament from Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). Arumugan Ramanathan Thondaman is the grandson of Soumiamoorthy Thondaman. Arumugan Thondaman officiated as cabinet minister since 1999 until 2014.

Suresh Vadivelu is also a member of parliament representing the United National Party (UNP).

There are number of second level leaders of the community who are representing the community in the provincial councils and local government councils in the Central, Western, Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces.

## Social Mobility

Greater majority of the Indian Tamils migrated to Sri Lanka since the emergence of the plantations and related activities, were workers to the plantations. Subsequent to their arrival there were also different other groups such as Nattukottai chettiars, and other groups who were not plantation workers but engaged in Trade, Teaching and other occupations such as business assistants, accounting, and few others and settled down in the urban centers around the plantations and in cities like Colombo, Kandy, Badulla, and so on. They were mostly in groceries, money lending, textile supplies and similar trades. In addition to these group of traders Kanganys

(labour recruitment assistants and assistants to estates planters in administration of workers in the plantations and to look after their welfare in the estates) of the estates also engaged in retail trade in the plantations and nearby small towns with proxies and hired sales and management staff. All of these groups engaged in trade and services are comparatively small in numbers, but mostly prosperous. Some of them even purchased the tea estates and became plantation owners after the independence. Most of them in this category established business remarkably in the plantation areas and in urban centers including Colombo have

now achieved a better economic status. Especially in many families their children have gone up to Tertiary level education and some of them have become professionals in Medicine, Engineering, Accountancy etc. including in the present popular IT sector professions both in the local and overseas labour markets. But this achievement is found comparatively in small numbers and proportions compared with the size of a million plus population of the ITC in Sri Lanka.

While a small proportion of the affluent section of the ITC achieved progressed, majority of the workers in the plantations, villages and also some of the working-class section of this community in the urban areas remain poor and backward in many areas of life. In addition to poverty their achievements in secondary and tertiary

education too was very low and in 1990s. As a result of nationalization of estate schools which were mostly providing primary education were physically rehabilitated with the financial and other resources obtained from the Swedish International Development Authority out of about 800 plantation schools around 825 schools were rehabilitated and upgraded. Also, when recruitment for teachers were made educated youths of the plantations were given priority and this resulted in a more reliable man power supply to promote the primary education. This also during the last two decades helped to increase the level of literacy rates among the plantation children which was quite below the national average. Yet there is a long way to go to reach a satisfactory level of growth in Secondary and tertiary level education merely to achieve the national averages.

## Inter relationships

Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka have developed reasonably good relationships with their Sinhala counterparts in the country. While the plantation sector remained a separate entity in the upcountry areas, the connections and relationship with the villagers is remarkable. Especially, in religious terms Hindus and Buddhists have got on very well in most Sinhala areas and the plantation districts. Buddhists patronize Hindu temples and vice versa. Some workers in the Kelani valley and Kandyan plantations have adopted many Buddhist religious rituals while they remain in their own Hindu religion. It is something remarkable to point out that while the two communities have differences ethnically, there is a reasonable amount of amicability between these two religions. In addition to religion especially in the Sabaragamuwa, Uva and Southern provinces most

of the Indian Tamils are conversant in Sinhala not only to converse but also by learning Sinhala in the schools formally, though it is a small proportion of the community. Matara and Galle district estate sector Indian Tamils have adopted some of the Sinhala life style such as the usage of the Sinhala language even at home among their own people, and some other cultural traits such clothing etc. though there is no a formal adoption by conversion of religion. Inter marriage between Indian Tamils and Sinhalese is not uncommon. There are Tamil Sinhala inter marriages at all levels of these communities. No official or formal data is available. For unknown reasons, it is not much openly discussed, possibly due to the lack of community and parental support for such mixed marriages.

## Language of the Indian Tamils

Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka use Tamil as their mother tongue as well as for learning and day to day affairs. For the purpose of employment and professional needs some of them need to learn English and Sinhala as well. However, the plantation workers in the districts of Ratnapura, Kegalle Galle, Matara, Kalutara and Monaragala considerably differ in their language usage patterns from other districts in the country. This deviation has to be looked at carefully. Most of the Tamils in Sri Lanka both Sri Lankan and Indians learned Tamil as their medium of instruction in schools, since 1956 and even before that time. A few of the privileged would have had the opportunity to learn in English despite the state policy of Swabasha (Own Language). While learning subjects in Tamil in some of the urban schools they had an opportunity to learn a second language (English). Training in languages was given according to the preference of the parents and students. In addition to English some also had interest in learning Sinhala as the third language. In addition to this the easy proximity to Sinhala communities living in the urban and rural areas meant that, these Indian Tamils became conversant in Sinhala although

they have not gone for formal Sinhala learning. As such a small proportion of the Indian Tamil population became multi linguists in the process. Ironically, among the Tamil plantation workers of Sabaragamuwa and Southern provinces for the last few decades a remarkable change has taken place, in learning languages. They have limited education facilities in Tamil schools and therefore they are forced to send the children to Sinhala medium schools. Further to receiving Sinhala education they too adopt to the Sinhala language environment to a great extent and even at home with their family members speak in Sinhala. They use the words Puththa (son), duvey (daughter), Thaththa (father), Ammey (mother) Aiyey (elder brother) and malli (younger brother) all in Sinhala and also some or more conversation in Sinhala. Several Tamil women can also be seen wrapping the saree in Sinhala style which is not usual among the Tamils during the past 160 years. However, wearing saree by Sinhala women in Tamil style is not uncommon.

## Religion/s of the Indian Tamils

Most of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka - as much as 90 percent or more are Hindus. They are also Saivites I.E., worshippers of Siva who is given primary importance in Saivism. Among the deities, the mother goddess Amman is very important and is manifest in many forms. However, Tamils

believe that deities with different names are only manifestation of 'one' god. Each deity has a number of reincarnations (avadaram), eg., Vishnu may emerge as Krishna, and Rama, The mother goddess is essentially Siva's consort (Parvathi) - shakthi, his energy and power. The mother

goddess also emerges in different images such as the ferocious Kali, Durga and Mariamman.

The kind of popular Hinduism found on the plantations is closely related to that found in the villages of South India from where the workers had come. This has been the case since the beginning of plantations in Sri Lanka. In addition to the popular Siva, Amman, Ganesh and Murugan worships there are also practices of worship of shrines of village deities such as Muniandy, Roadaimuny, Karupal, Madasamy, Marudaiveeran and some others. These shrines were established in the early days of the plantations by the Indian Tamil workers in and around their work places. Shrines were erected because there were no temples at that time and they felt the need for protection against

various perils, uncertainties and diseases. In the situation of short supply of Brahmin priests most of the temples are manned by Pandarams who performs the functions of a priest in the temple (Ramakrishnan, A.(1993), pp.89-112)

### Number of Temples in the Indian Tamil areas in Sri Lanka

The Department of Hindu Religious Affairs in Sri Lanka maintains a register with 2,405 Hindu temples and Hindu missions in provinces other than North and Eastern provinces. There are 17 districts in these provinces and the distribution of these temples are given in the table below. (table - 4)

**Table - 4 Sri Lanka - Temples and missions in the 17 districts -2010.**

Districts	No. of Temples	Districts	No. of Temples
Nuwara Eliya	624	Kalutara	34
Badulla	339	Monaragala	27
Kandy		Galle	23
Ratnapura	248	Gampaha	21
Kegalle	235	Matara	21
Colombo	192	Polannaruwa	16
Kalutara	114	A'pura	08
Matale	98	Hambantota	01
Puttalam	70		

**Source :** Dept. of Hindu Religious Affairs, Administrative Reports -2010. (Colombo)

Among the temples in the south of Sri Lanka Kataragama appears to be the oldest dating back to 11th to 15th century (Obeyasekara, G., (1978). According to Pathmanathan the well-known Sri Lankan Historian the original Kataragama shrine was established as an adjunct guardian

deity shrine to Skanda - Kumar within Buddhist temple complex. He also points it out that this happened after the 13th century CE when the poet Arunagirinathar identified the very location as a sacred spot.(Pathmanathan S. (1999)).



Matale Mariamman Temple is one another important temple in Sri Lanka. It began as a stone icon of the goddess Mariamman. At this location where the worship of her began in 1820 to the new - form of Matale Muthumariamman temple built in 1852, the most important event of the temple is the annual “Masi Maga Mahotsavam” which takes place in February / March of every year for 26 days is well attended by Hindus as well as Buddhists from various parts of the country.

Seetha Amman Temple at Sita Eliya near Nuwara Eliya town is considered as “the only Sita temple in the World”. It is believed that Sita was held captive by the demon king Ravana. The time it was built and the persons who contributed to the temple are not clearly known but believed to be a very old one visited by both Sri Lankans and Indians in addition to international tourists.

Pillaiar (Ganesh) temples in Colombo (Bambalapitiya), Kandy, Murugan / Kathiresan Temples in Gampola, Colombo, Modera, Nawalapitiya, Pussellawa, Kegalle, Peradeniya, Sivan Kovil in Colombo (Ramanathan Street), Amman temples of Modera, Kotahena, Gampola, Kattukitulla, Warakapola, Haputale, Badulla, Ratnapura are some among the notable urban temples most visited by the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. They are the remarkable contribution of Nattukottai Chettiars during the 19th and 20th centuries in Sri Lanka for the growth of Hinduism in Sri Lanka.

## **Other religions among the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka.**

Internal migration, poverty due to unemployment and underemployment and the caste discrimination prevailing in the plantations and among Hindus have induced some of them to conversion to different denomination of Christianity and Islam. This has represented another avenue for social mobility adopted mainly by the under privileged caste groups. At present, there are as many as 7 to 8 percent of the Indian Tamils who belong to different forms Christianity including Pentecost, Church of Christ, Seventh day Adventist and many others. The process has taken place over some time in the plantation districts - up country; some may even have converted to Christianity prior to emigration from South India though in a negligible size. The conversion during the colonial times was also associated with the offer of good education leading to better employment opportunities and better living, whereas at present it does not prevail in the anticipation of the converted. Further the British planters supported building of small churches on several estates with a fairly large community of Catholics. According to a study, there are about 175 Catholic churches and another 142 mission centers to facilitate the Catholics in the plantations and nearby urban centers (Gomez, A.V.P., (1993) pp.113-131).

Conversion to Islam is also another phenomenon among the Indian Tamils a new one experienced during the last several decades though it is small compared to Christianity.

## Life style of Indian Tamils

The life style of a community can be briefly seen in their food habits and costumes.

## Food

Rice & Curry served in plantain leaf



The food habits of the Indian Tamil community in Sri Lanka consist of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian items. Grains, lentils, rice, milk and vegetables are the main ingredients of the traditional vegetarian food of this community in addition to spices to add flavor and give a distinctive taste to the Tamil cuisine traditionally used by their ancestors in Tamilnadu. Some of the most common and popular dishes of

the community are idly, dosai, vadai, pongal, uttappam, adai, uppuma in addition to the common and usual rice and curry and curd. While these are the common food items of this community in Sri Lanka, they are also now used to consuming rotti, stringhoppers, hoppers, and pittu like dishes. Rotti (wheat flour) and sambol (coconut) has become a much more common menu of the plantation workers.

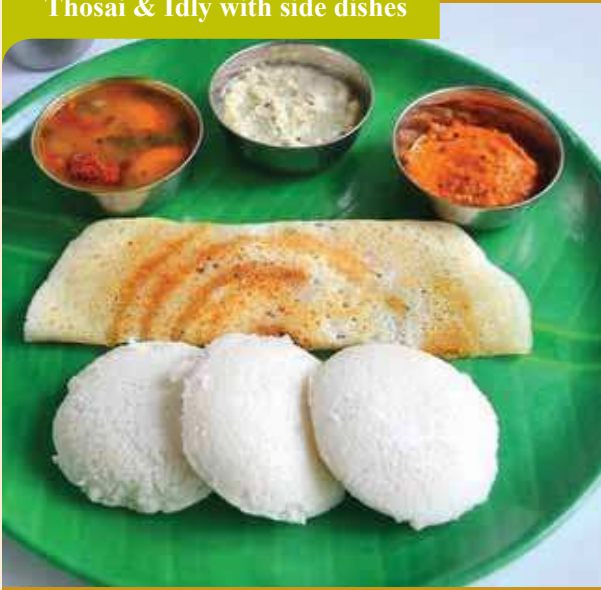
Further to these main food items varieties (all vegetarian) sweet meets such as laddu, mysorpaku, jeleby, paal goa, kesari, adirasam and crispy items such as murukku, mixture, mittai etc. are prepared in different ways without losing their main character.

Non-vegetarian menu preparation with mutton, chicken, fish and egg are common among the Indian Tamils and other Sri Lankans who are non-vegetarians. They mostly use vegetarian food and on Fridays and some even on Tuesdays and Thursdays stick on to vegetarian food for

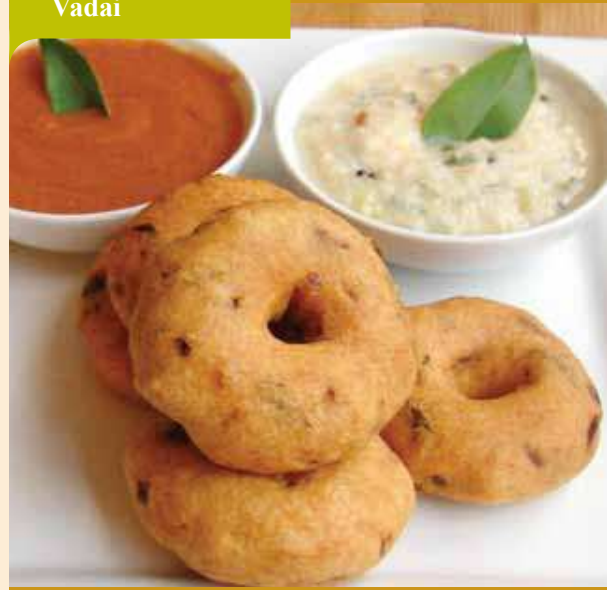
religious reasons. The non-vegetarian food is cooked mostly in Chettinad cooking patterns and with tandoori and buriani dishes. A greater proportion of those who are Hindus never eat beef and pork.

As a result of increased urban life where foreign food restaurants have come into the life of Indian Tamils they are now used to Chinese and western foods. While Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka are mostly tea drinkers filter coffee is a popular beverage for those who can afford it.

Thosai & Idly with side dishes



Vadai



## Costumes

*Clothing and adornment are universal features of human behaviour and an examination of what they reveal and attempt to conceal, contributes to our knowledge about the fabric of cultures and to our understanding of the threads of human nature (Cornwell and Schwarz (1979)).*

Dress patterns are primarily shaped by the climate. But after the evolution of socio-cultural norms, those patterns were established as reflections of social positions. Also it was required of a dress to establish convenience in daily activities and occupation. The dress is also combined with power and authority of respective societies. Generally dress codes of tropical countries are different from those of western temperate climate. In many Asian countries and especially South India the preference is to cotton and the dressing style is wrapping the whole body. The influence of caste also could be seen in the dress code in India and Sri Lanka as well.

The plantation workers dress code is found to be reflecting their poor living conditions, and it was suitable for their hard work in the fields. Women worker use cloth to wrap the body. This was easy and cheap and agrees with common traditional dressing patterns in South India. Their dress pattern was without variations for many occasions such as daily indoor activities, work in the plantation fields, factories and other special activities in their community life. This was true even during major functions like ritual ceremonies, weddings and funerals except for some minor but noticeable differences. There would have been a difference with regard to the behaviour in costumes of the affluent groups at that time.

Women among the Indian Tamil community continued the Saree tradition until very recently and among the plantation workers it is still followed in the same way as it was in the past with the changing trends. However, according to the age girls and young women wear different clothing. Unlike the early days of immigration, they also wear a top (jacket) with the saree. During the early days of plantation history women from affluent families such as Kanganis and traders wore jackets along with their saree.

Women of this community preferred red, green and blue color clothing and avoided white and black as non auspicious shades. Only widows wear white saree and give up all other ornaments and Pottu in the forehead as well. Another notable feature was that until 1970s most of them never wore a pair of slippers even outside in rough terrains at the field or factory sites. Even at weddings most of the brides had a simple dress pattern as their wedding attire in the past. Now it has been changed and depending on affordability they go for special silk woven sarees which is however very much less among the working class women. However, families strive to the level of their affordability to use better clothing at the weddings.

Among men vesti (a long piece of white cloth used to wear below the waist to the foot) was the common clothing at that time with some shawl (thundu) around the neck, or wrapped around the head. Also some wore a sleeveless banian like top with v neck pattern. This was the common attire of the Indian Tamils during the early days of plantations in Sri Lanka. However, a very few people of some standing like Kanganis and



others in the estates also used western coats and head turban. During the wedding ceremony the bridegroom used to wear gold bordered vesti and shawl. But over time and the beginning of the 20th century onwards many changes such as usage of shorts, trousers, shirts and t shirts have become the clothing of the men.

The trends are now changing rapidly and the affluent and urban based Indian Tamils who are comparatively in small proportion have improved their costume both, clothing and ornaments, to a great extent in keeping with modern dressing codes of the affluent societies. Synthetic, woolen, silk and cotton cloths of modern designs and patterns are used by those small groups of people. Men wear western and Indian shirts, Jackets, T shirts, Kurththas, trousers, jeans, pajamas etc. and women wear Indian sarees, blouse / jackets, suridars, gowns of various patterns. They have

now become common dresses of the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka

Ornaments such as thodu (ear studs), mookuththi (nose ring), rings, bangles, minji, hip chain (arunakody), Kolusu (anklets) are some of the ornaments made mostly out of gold were used traditionally. Further to these ornaments thick necklace (attiyal) of various sizes too were used not only as a jewellery but also as savings. In addition to these ornaments Thali which is worn by married women given by the husband at the time of wedding as a symbol of marriage, wear it s long as their husband lives, (this is considered more valuable and holy). The size, pattern and the amount of gold used to make a thali depends on both caste affiliation as well of the affordability of the families concerned (Jayaneththi R. (2014) pp. 164-179).

Saree



Ornaments



Vesti



20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> century  
Indian Tamil clothing (Different ages)



Indian Tamil Wedding Clothing



Bharata natyam





19th Century coffee plantation worker



Seetha Amman Temple



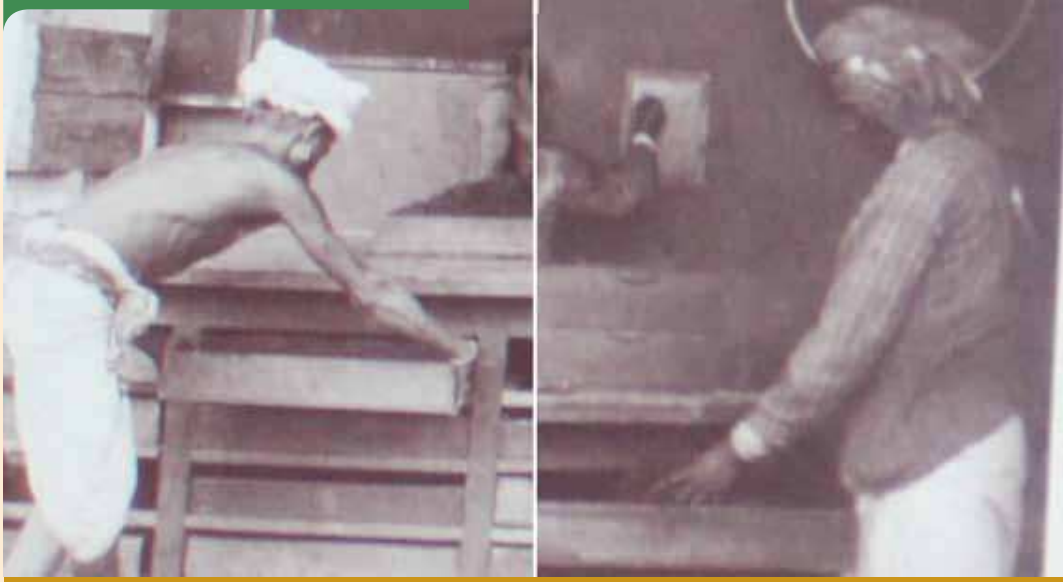
Modern days plantation worker clothing



20<sup>th</sup> century tea plucker clothing



19<sup>th</sup> century factory worker clothing



## Survival of Customs and important event

Customs traditions and festivities of the Indian Tamil ancestors are still continued to be followed by them. The traditional musical instruments such as tappu, udukku, urumi, thamoora, parai, chenjan kattai, sangu, and thandai are used and folk dances such as the kavadi, kummi and karagattam are performed. Also folk dramas / theatre called kooththu in their various forms such as Kaman kooththu, Pon nar sangar kooththu and Arjunan thapasu are still prevalent and not advanced or modernized as with various other forms of Arts. Silambadi or silampattam, is also prevalent among the young men of the community of the plantations but in a small way (Vadivelan, (1993) pp. 148 - 166.)

Among the urban dwelling middle class Indian Tamil families, mostly among girls Bharatha Nattiyam, a classical south Indian dance and

Carnatic music of the South Indian classical vocal music is popular. The playing of Mirudangam (more among boys) and few other Indian musical instruments are also taught among a few. Some of them travel up to Tamilnadu and get trained in these forms of fine arts at prestigious institutions such as Kalashestiram in Chennai and Kaveri college of fine arts in Trichy and elsewhere. Professional instructors in the urban areas run private training for these young children. These are comparatively expensive in the Sri Lankan context and therefore the practice is not widespread among the community.

### Important events

The important events of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka can be identified as religious, social and cultural functions and festivals. There are number



of religious holydays and festivals according to the Tamil Calendar. Not all are paid equal attention and celebrated in the same manner by this community. However, there are some of them that are celebrated with some importance (Hollup, O, (1994) pp. 283-296).

1. Thai-Pongal (14th or 15th of January) is an important religious festival among Indian Tamil community Hindus. Thai Pongal also commences the Tamil month Thai and is an auspicious month suitable for weddings. The Pongal ritual represents the transition from a dark; inauspicious month, Margali (December) to Thai, which a bright and auspicious month.
2. The next day (15th or 16th January) is devoted to the worship of the cow, considered a sacred animal and protected by Lord Krishna. Thai pongal rituals are followed on the second day mostly by the farmers in appreciation of the cow and its important role in their farm life.
3. Thai Poesam, is devoted to Lord Murugan and celebrations are based on the Murugan Temple.
4. Panguni Uttiram which comes on February is in commemoration of Lord Siva.
5. During the month of February and March or July/August the temple festival called Thiruvila is most popular. This will run for 3-26 days. The images of the gods are taken in procession after formal pooja along the streets where the people live in the village / Town / estates.
6. Tamil New Year, which falls in mid April (Siththirai) is usually celebrated with

religious activities mostly at home in the early hours at sun rise.

7. Adi-Vel (July) a festival for Lord Murugan. This is a very big celebration in Colombo, Sammankottar Kovil every year with both Hindus and Buddhists associated with the popular pilgrimage centre Kataragama where the Hindu deity Skanda (Murugan) is believed to be residing.
8. Sarasvathi Pooja (late Sep.- to mid Oct.) a ten day long festival of fasting and worship dedicated to three goddesses, Luksmi (wealth), Durga (security and protection) and on the last three days to Sarasvathi (education and knowledge).
9. Deepavali (late Oct.- Mid Nov.) a very important religious festival among all Hindus throughout the world. Deepavali is a day of rejoicing, based on the story of how Krishna defeated Narakasuran who was evil personified.
10. Karthigai deepam (Nov.) is marked by the lighting of small lamps which some Tamils put outside their homes or shops in the evenings for two days in honour of God. Hindu temples perform major poojas on this day and it is a season for pilgrimage to Kataragama as well.
11. Bajanai: The entire Tamil month Margali (mid December to mid January) is considered to be a dark month and Hindus go on Bajan (praying with devotional songs in the streets in group) during the early hours of the day before Sun rise and end up in the temple, during the Thiruvempavai festival at Chidambaram in Tamilnadu the holiest temple of Saivism in the Tamil tradition.

This Bajan is also take place in many other places where Hindus reside.

12. Some in Sri Lanka especially the workers celebrate the Western New Year as well praying to the gods to bring a good year (with good productivity).

In addition to religious functions the social activities during the new births, girls puberty, marriages and deaths are also very important. These events mostly take place among kith and kin and friends. Weddings according to their affordability are undertaken with great enthusiasm

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# The Colombo Chetties

## Introduction

The Colombo Chetties form an integral part of Sri Lankan society. They are a separate ethnic group different to the Tamils, Moors, Malays, Burgher and the majority Sinhalese community.

In the census of 1946 (Vol.1 Para 1) the Superintendent of Census Mr. A.G. Ranasinghe

states the Colombo Chetties must receive mention in a racial distinction of Ceylon. The term does not include the Nattukottu Chetties who have formed themselves into a guild for carrying on business in Ceylon and are only temporary residents of the islands.

## ORIGIN



*Chetty - Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 1870's*

The Colombo Chetties belong to the Tana Vaisya Caste. The Vaisyas compose the nobility of the land, and according to the classification made by Rev. Fr. Boschi were divided into 3 distinct tribes or castes. The highest sub-division being the Tana Vaisya or merchants followed by Pu Vaisya or Husbandmen and Ko Vaisya or Herdsmen. The Tana Vaisyas are commonly called Chetties. Their earliest ancestors inhabited Northern and North Western India near Coorg and Benares. In the eleventh century they were driven to the South of India by the conquest of Mohammed of Ghazini and settled in places like Nagapatanam, Tanjore

and Tinnevely. It is from here that they traded with Ceylon from the Malabar and Coramadal coasts.

The present day term Chetty is identified with the original terms Sethi in Pali, Hetti or Situ in Sinhalese. This is how the community is recorded in history, There is an association of the term Hetti in Sri Lankan nomenclature in names like Hettiaratchi, Hettigoda, Adihetty, Paranhetti, Hettige Hettigamage, Hettipathirana, Hettihewa and in place names like Hettiwatte and Hettimulla. A nursery rhyme used at play by children down

the centuries has reference to Chetties and their connection to royalty – *“Athuru, mithuru dambadiva thuru, raja kapuru hettiya, alutha gena manamalita haal pothalk garala...”*

According to Professor H. Ellawala (Social History of Early Ceylon) Sethis first came to Sri Lanka just after the arrival of Vijaya and his followers. The account goes on to show that some maidens sent to Lanka by the King of Madura at the request of Prince Vijaya were Sethis (Vaisya Stock). In the same edition Professor Ellawala goes on to state that Prince Sumitta and his seven brothers who came to Lanka to guard the sacred Bo-tree were sons of Deva Sethi from Vedissa City in Avanthi. Therefore their sister (Queen of King Asoka and mother of Mahinda and Sangamitta) was also a Sethi.

Reference is also made in Prof. M. B. Ariapala's Society in Medieval Ceylon to Sethi's participation in the inauguration of kings in ancient Ceylon. (C.M Fernando JRASCB Vol XIV No.47 Page 126). In an article in the same edition a comprehensive write up is given of sethis (Page 104). It also refers to sethis during the time of Vijayabahu I (CV 59.17).

The Nikaya Sangrahaya (ed Kumaratunga), the Madavala rock inscription refers to a high official by the name of Jothy Sitana who set his signature to a grant of land.

In the year 1205 AD there existed a minister of great influence among our forebears named “Kulande Hetti” His name is engraved on a rock in Polonaruwa.

The Gadaladeniya slab inscriptions of the 16th century mentions Situ in a list of officials. The

Political History of the Kingdom of Kotte (1400-1521) by Dr. G.V.P Somaratne (page 51) states that the Alakeswara family of Kotte originated from Sethi Stock.

In the book titled Culture in Ceylon In Medieval Times by W. Geiger (page 110): “A prominent part of the mercantile society in Ceylon were the Setthis but we do not get a clear notion of their social position, probably they were like the Setthis in the Jatakas (ref. R. Flick 1.1 pages 257) the great bankers and stood in close proximity to the royal court.

Of the three brothers who rebelled against King Wijayabahu I, one was Sethinatha a chief of the Setthis, since the other two were court officials of the highest rank, the three were evidently Sinhalese noblemen. (59.16,69.13) Sethinayake is the name of Lambakanna, it was probably his title.

The Mahawansa Vol III p 238 records the arrival in Ceylon of seven sons of King Mallawa of Mallawa Rata accompanied by Chetties who carried suitable gifts for the King of Ceylon. In return the King bestowed titles and also grants of land engraved on slabs in villages such as Kelaniya, Toppu, Ballagala, Bottala, Hettimulla etc; marked out and granted free from duties “to remain as long as the sun and moon endure”. Among the Chetties who presented gifts to the Kings were Epologama Hetti Bandara and Modawatta Chetty. The donors were honoured with titles such as Rajah Wanniah, Rajaguru Mudianse and Mallawa Bandara.

The late President His Excellency J. R. Jayawardene's first paternal ancestor was a Colombo Chetty. In the mid 17th century one of his male ancestors married a Sinhalese by the

name of Jayawardene from Welgama, a village near Hanvalle and from that time took the name of Jayawardene according to his biography written

by Prof. K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins. The mother of his grandchildren is also a Colombo Chetty.

## Contributions To Society

To illustrate the versatility and the high level of intellectual activity of the Colombo Chetty community in the 18th, 19th and the early 20th centuries given below are some descriptions of some members of the community who shone in different fields.

REV. PHILIP DE MELHO (1723-1790) a celebrated Divine Biblical Translator, Linguist and Poet. He was the first Ceylonese who was admitted to the Christian Ministry. His great learning and indefatigable work in the cause of religious education and civilization earned him the title “Rabbi de Melho”. He was licensed to preach before he attained the age of 21, and officiated in Dutch, Portugese and Tamil. He was the author of several books.

MICHEAL JURIE ONDACHE (ONDAAJE) a celebrated Physician of the Palace at Tanjore was invited by the first Dutch Governor of Ceylon to cure his Lady of a serious ailment. His success made the Governor his friend. In appreciation of his performance he was appointed First Doctor of the Town of Colombo. He became a convert to Christianity and was the founder of the family that bears his name. He died in 1714.

REVD. CHRISTIAN DAVID (1771-1852) was a disciple of Frederick Schwartz, was ordained Anglican Minister. He was a celebrated

preacher, first Tamil Colonial Chaplain of Jaffna and Superintendent of almost 47 schools in the Northern Province. He has several children by his marriage to the Miss. Muttukistna. He rendered useful service to Government during the rebellion of 1848.

HENRY FRANCIS MUTTUKISTNA – First Tamil Barrister in Asia (1849) was educated both in Ceylon and Calcutta and afterwards he entered Oriel College, Oxford. He was apprenticed under Sir Anthony Oliphant, Chief Justice and was a brilliant lawyer, orator and scholar. He was at various times Deputy Queen’s advocate and Member of the Legislative Council. He was presented to His Majesty the King of England on retirement.

SIMON CASIE CHETTY C. C. S. (1807-1860) often referred to as Ceylon’s first Civil Servant, was a scholar and prolific author besides being a judge and member of the legislative council. He was born in Calpentyn (Kalpitiya) to Protestant parents, the son of Gabriel Casie Chetty, Mudaliyar of Calpentyn and of Marie de Rossairo.

HON. JEYARAJ PERNANDOPULLE

In the field of politics and outstanding member of the community is Hon. Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, Minister of Planning and Ethnic Affairs. He is a



lawyer by profession and a maverick in parliament. His wife Dr.Sudarshini is a Medical Officer of Health in Negambo.

RICHIE FERNANDOPULLE was the Chairman of the North Western Provincial Council from 1988-1993 and continues as a member since then.

NEIL FERNANDOPULLE is a sitting member of the Western Provincial Council from its inception.

MICHEAL ONDAATJE reputed author. His book "The English Patient" won the much coveted "Booker Prize for Literature" which became an Academy Award-winning film. He has published several novels and books of poetry.

DR.CHRISTOPHER ONDAATJE, is a successful financier and author. He was a member of the Canadian bobsled team that won a Gold at the Olympics. He is the co-founder of a 1.2 billion dollar conglomerate.

REGGIE CANDAPPA is the doyen of advertising in the country. Prior to his career in advertising he was awarded a journalism scholarship at Northwestern University, Illinois, USA. He is Chairman of Grant McCann-Erickson, one of the leading advertising agencies in Sri Lanka. His one-man photographic exhibition entitled "One World" in 1959 of a journey around the world was highly acclaimed for portraying the similarity of human beings in their daily existence. Most professionals in advertising have had training at Grants which is the oldest in the business. He is also a reputed artist with several exhibitions to his credit. He was awarded the National Honour of "Desabandu" for his contribution to Media and Advertising. He was also honoured with the "Kalapathy Award" (Master of Arts) by the Ceylon Society of Arts on their Centenary Year for his contribution to arts. He is a trustee of "The George Keyt Foundation", an organization to develop and sponsor fledging artists in the country. Reggie has served the Colombo Chetty Association as its President for seven consecutive years.

## Religion

The Chetties who were a community dealing in trade and commerce would naturally see the advantage of adopting the religion of the rulers. Being a cultured and educated community, the colonisers found an useful link between themselves and the indigenious population. Although many prominent Chetty families during the eighteenth and nineteenth century were converted into Christianity by conviction.

Many churches were built by the Chetties. The church of St. Thomas was built in 1815 facing

the Colombo Harbour by the Protestant branch of the Chetties. It is traditionally maintained that St. Thomas the Apostle preached here on his journies to preach the gospel on his visits to the Malabar and Coramandel Coasts.

The place name Gintupitiya is derived from the corruption of the name St. Thomas Hills – San Thome Pitiya. Another well known church is our Lady of Sorrows (Master Dolorosa) built in 1820 in New Chetty Street in Kotahena. Many other churches were built or patronized by the Colombo

Chetties in other parts of the country particularly in Galle, Negombo and Kelaniya. Many educated Chetties entered the priesthood and became eminent scholars and authors. Rev. Philip de Melho, Rev. Christian David (1771-1852) and Canon Gabriel Rodrigo Mutukistna are some of the notable Anglican Ministers of the Church. The first Roman Catholic Colombo Chetty to enter the priesthood was Rev. G. N. Canjamanaden O. S. B. He was ordained in 1886. Among the higher dignitaries of the church was Monsignor T. N. Alles, Vicar General of Galle.

The Colombo Chetties were reputed to be very musical. The choir which was formally inaugurated in 1919 performed regularly at the Church of Mater Dolorosa to the present day. It was a regular custom at Christmastime for the choir to visit the homes of Colombo Chetties to sing carols. Originally the carol singers used bullock carts to transport the organs, cellos and violins while the singers followed on foot. Later lorries replaced bullock carts. As time marched on, the choral singing group reached larger audiences on radio.

A notable exception was Venerable Soma Thera of Vajirama Temple, Bambalapitiya. He was born to Colombo Chetty parents. He was christened Victor Pulle and educated at St. Benedict's College. After his ordination as a Buddhist monk he became an ardent follower of the faith. He was the first monk to carry the Buddha Dhamma to Germany. He travelled very widely by foot, by bus, by river-boats, trains and ships to Japan, China and Malaysia to propagate the Dhamma. He was considered a shining example to Bikkhus and lay-folk.

### **Distinct Costume**

Some of the dress of the Colombo Chetties was aptly described by John Capper in his "Sketches of

the Old Ceylon". He wrote that they appeared in peak cornered hats, short jackets, cloth and slippers or jutas. They had rings in their ears. Another picturesque description was by L. P. Leisching in his "Account of Ceylon". He described the educated class of Colombo Chetties of older times who were mostly employed in Government Services as wearing a neat dress consisting of a curiously folded turban of white cloth, a short bodied and full skirted white coat and white trousers with a silk handkerchief or scarf round their necks with socks and shoes. This was their regular costume. On important occasions they appeared in gold trimmed turbans and shawls and very rich material for their suits.

The Colombo Chetty ladies of that period were very conservative in their apparel and dressed gracefully without exposing their limbs. Their original dress consisted of a sort of cloak (Sarasa) worn over the head. It was a very heavily starched fabric of bluish black or deep reddish brown colour. This "Sarasa" had a overall printed floral pattern also of a very dull colour edged with a border of the same colour. The blouse was of white cotton material or could be lace if it is a special occasion. The sleeves were three quarter length with ruffled cuffs or edged with lace. They wore a camboy or cloth of similar colour as the "Sarasa" which had a decorative weave of gold or silver thread for special occasions like weddings. They wore no shoes but had ornamental rings on their toes. The neck was decked with gold ornaments. They wore a chain "Attiyal" with a jewelled pendant called "Padakkam". The married ladies wore the "Thali" different in design to the ones worn by married Tamil ladies. Their ears were pierced both on the upper and lower part. The "Koppu" a coin like ornament adorned the upper part and the lower lobe with earrings called "Thodu".

## Marriage Customs

According to Antong P. Aserappa, author of the 'Short History of the Colombo Chetty Community' published in 1930, the Colombo Chetties of older times were very fastidious in their matrimonial alliances. The absolute responsibility of the arrangement of marriages devolved on the parents or guardians on both sides.

The social status, moral worth, respectability of the parties were matters of utmost importance. While the bride's parents looked out for a young man endowed with Christian virtues and good social status, the bridegroom's kinsmen ascertained besides status and beauty, what the worth of the bride was, in pounds sterling, and lands, as well as jewels. When all parties were satisfied, a day was fixed for the betrothal and signing of the contract. The young man and woman were duly informed of the decision of the seniors, although the couple may not have previously set eyes on each other.

Elaborate preparations were made prior to the wedding with a pandal erected in front of the house and the house itself was illuminated and decorated for the betrothal ceremony on an auspicious day. The marriage contract was read out loud in the presence of the invited guests, mostly relatives. After the signing of the bond, the father of the young man presented the young lady with a ring, silk cloth and other suitable articles of personal adornment.

The invitees then went to the bridegroom's house for refreshments. The ladies of the house or others were set apart for the purpose of playing tunes vigorously on the "Rabana".

Chetty - Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 1870's



On an auspicious Sunday following the betrothal, the friends and relations of the would be couple were invited. The bridegroom dressed in his national costume with a gold coloured turban and a glittering shawl with a white silk or satin coat and trousers proceeded with his party to Church. The bridegroom sometimes would attire himself with the traditional peaked hat known as "Combu Thopi" earrings and cloth. The bride elect too arrived at the church decked in her national costume, in white glittering brocade with heavy gold jewellery. After the church ceremony was over the parties retired to the home of the bride elect to partake of a sumptuous feast.

The next event looked forward to was the wedding itself. The invitation list was prepared with great deliberation to safeguard against the mingling of lower grades of society with the higher. The list was entrusted to an aratchi, or some responsible person, who with a tray of lime and betel leaves, accompanied by the barber called on the invitees and presented an ola leaf invitation together with the betel leaves.

A ceremony prior to the wedding day was the shaving of the bridegroom elects beard for the first time in his life. For this event too friends and relations were invited and in their presence, a barber who had been in the family for years was entrusted with the task. A receptacle full of milk was placed close by into which gold coins were dropped after the shaving. This became the property of the barber who accepted this with his arms folded across the breast and bowing profoundly almost down to the ground.

After the shaving the bridegroom was dressed in a long white robe adorned with gold trimmings and a richly embroidered cloth of gold round his

waist. He was adorned with large circular earrings and a long golden chain with a valuable pendant round his neck and was conducted to specially prepared dais beneath a richly ornamented canopy. This ceremony was associated with the tying of the headgear consisting of a bleached white cloth placed on a silver salver and sprinkled with rose petals and rose water.

This was passed round to be touched by the assembled guests as a mark of respect. After the cloth was wrapped around the head, a ring was put on his finger by the father or guardian. He tenderly embraced and kissed him. The guests then made their presentations amidst the background of the din of musical instruments. After a rich repast, the guests got back to their respective homes.

After the lapse of a couple of days the wedding itself took place with all its paraphernalia and excitement. Its wasteful expenditure and intense fatigue, for whatever the individual views of the bride and bridegroom may have been, with regard to their dress and conveniences, the general society

## Colombo Chetty Jewellery

### Colombo Museum Exhibits

#### Jewellery







In those days would never let them dress as they pleased on that occasion. For one reason out of many, womenfolk would have felt that it would be robbing them of a public occasion. So the bride had tamely to submit to the ordeal of the hair being bedecked with beautiful sprigs of artificial flowers made of gold, set with precious stones and other ornaments adorning the hair knot. On her ears were about four gold eardrops, two in each, one in the upper and another in the lower lobe of each ear known as “thodu”. The neck was weighed down with the burden of seven golden chains and a pendant known as the “Pathakum” and milky white string of pearls and other jewellery. On her arms bangles and bracelets while she had also a dozen or more rings on her fingers and twinkling silver ornaments adorned her ankles and toes. Her dress consisted of a white silk jacket embroidered with gold and a silk cloth beautifully trimmed with gold lace. Both her jacket and cloth were adorned with tiny gold flowers and a thin rich veil on her head which complete the bridal trousseau.



The bride and bridegroom gorgeously arrayed proceeded to the church, the former in a palanquin or carriage attended by maids. The bridegroom was sometimes preceded by native musicians and walked on a white cloth spread on the ground known as a “pavada” under a canopy held over his head by persons set apart for this purpose. On arriving at the church, the parish priest duly solemnized the marriage and delivered a suitable homely. After the mass and blessing they withdrew into the bride’s home for a nuptial feast which took virtually a whole day of feasting.

## Customary Law

Many of the Customary laws of the Chetties were very similar to the Hindu ones with some variations, especially with regard to the inheritance. In more recent times it was made clear in the civil courts, that Chetties since they were not Tamils were not governed by Thesawalamai in the realm of personal law, the case in reference being Savundranayagam vs Savundranayagam 375 – D. C. Jaffna, 9706. December 19th, 1917 before Wood Renton C. J. and De Sampayo J. where the plaintiff Simon T. Savundranayagam MA, FA tracing his ancestry to Gabriel Pulle Tissera and Whillhelmina Jurgen Ondaatje both Colombo Chetties who had settled recently in Jaffna. Gabriel Pulle Tissera's father Philip Pulle Tissera being a scholar and educationist was a resident of Colombo. He took up an appointment in Jaffna and was also the private tutor to Rev. Daniel Poor, the founder of the famous Jaffna library. The courts held that since they were not Tamil inhabitants of Jaffna they were not governed by Thesawalamai law and as such judgement was given in favour of Simon T. Savundranayagam (whose grandson Shirley is presently Vice President of the Association) a reiteration of a justifiable Independent existence of the Colombo Chetties as a community.

## Cultural Identity

The Colombo Chetties have been classified as Tamils and in some instances Sinhalese, the British grouped them with the Tamils and labeled the group as "Malabars". This may be due to the fact that Chetties being originally Hindus have a cultural heritage common to the Tamils. However, in some instances they have been classified as a separate ethnic group eg: in the 1814, 1824 and 1871 National census the Colombo Chetties were shown alongside the Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors,

Burghers and Malays with figures of 2459, 8471 and 3114 respectively.

In 1983 the Sri Lanka Chetty Association made representations to the Government and submitted a historical account of the community written by its General Secretary Mr. Shirley Pulle Tissera. This was followed by many meetings with the Minister of Home Affairs Hon. K. V. Devanayagam and Secretary Mr. Cyril Gamage with a delegation from the Chetty Association comprising Mr. R. I. Fernandopulle, Mr. Shirley Pulle Tissera, Mr. Deva Fernandopulle, Mr. Richie Fernandopulle and Mr. Selva Perumal. These discussions led to official recognition of the Chetty Community as a distinct ethnic group on 14th January 1984 as per Government circular which also ensured that thereafter Chetties will be registered as such in all Government documents. A delegation from the Colombo Chetty Association of Sri Lanka comprising of Mr. Reggie Candappa, Mr. Shirley Pulle Tissera and Mr. Deva Fernandopulle met with H. E. the President Ranasinghe Premadasa and later with the Director of Census and Statistics. These discussion resulted in the decision that the Chetty Community which had in the recent past been enumerated as "other" be enumerated separately as a distinct ethnic group in future National Census.

## Communal Harmony

A close affinity existed between the Colombo Chetties and other major communities in the land. The respectable Sinhalese and Burgher families invited them for their weddings and other functions as they were considered socially on par with them.

Over the years many members of the community had got merged with the Sinhalese and Tamil

communities through inter-racial marriages. Despite this there are nearly 150,000 members of the community residing in Colombo, Chilaw, Puttalam, Negambo, Gampaha, Kelaniya and Galle and recognized officially as a distinct ethnic community today, ratified by the Registrar General on the instructions of Hon. K. W. Devanayagam, Minister of Home Affairs.

In the Southern Province, particularly in Galle, well-to-do families of the Colombo Chetties married into leading Sinhalese families like the Abeyesundere's who married the Costas. The

Chetties in Puttalam contacted marriages with the Vellalah caste of Tamils like the Muttucumaru's who married the Alles.

A case in point is that of Dr. S. C. Paul the eminent surgeon who married a sister of the distinguished Dr. Simon de Melho Aserappa, a Colombo Chetty. Several such unions between the elite families of the Colombo Chetties with the Sinhalese and Tamil caused the loss of their identity and their descendants merged into the major communities losing their Chetty ancestry and became either Sinhalese or Tamils.

*This article is extracted from "History of the Colombo Chetties"  
edited and compiled by Desabandu Reggie Candappa, Published on 10 December 2000 with the consent  
of Colombo Chetti Association.*

## Reference:

1. <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2013/07/14/the-colombo-chetties-of-sri-lanka-three-essays/>
2. Pictures – Courtesy of internet







# Sri Lankan Malayalam Community

Mr. R.G. Chanassery

## Introduction

During the 14th Century, Malayalee mercenary soldiers were being employed by the Kings to aid the besieged rulers who had to fight against the external invading forces and these Malayalees said to have quickly settled in Sri Lanka without returning to South Indian Kingdoms of Pandya, Chola and Chera. These soldiers have taken the opportunity to establish fraternal relations with the rulers of Lanka. Over the course of the centuries since ancient

times, people from the Malabar Coast, the present day Kerala migrated to Sri Lanka, then Ceylon for different reasons. Ancient Indian texts states that there was migration of people from the southern tip of the Indian Peninsula from the kingdoms of Pandya, Chola and Chera. The former two kingdoms are in present day Tamil Nadu; the latter was in the present day in the state of Kerala. Throughout the

first millennium, the Sinhala Kings of the Island enlisted mercenaries from throughout South India time to time, including the present day Kerala who joined the Sinhala forces who not only fought the mainland battles but also were part of the military expedition in Lanka. Lanka's external trade relations with Kerala was another source of Malayalee migration to the Island.

During the British rule, the Keralites migration began towards the 19th century and continued until and after World War II. The coffee, tea and rubber plantations created job opportunities and the Sinhala peasantries refusal to be incorporated on the plantations labour process; and on the height of this demand that the South Indians were brought to Ceylon.

The monetary growth and the economic development in Commerce and Industry of Ceylon created a labour demand in Colombo and its suburbs. The Malayalees who were in Ceylon were academics, medical professionals, professors, skilled, semi-skilled, non-skilled workers and also were in the hospitality industries who had earned a name for themselves apart from being small and medium businessmen who were thriving well in the chosen business field. These people adapted themselves very well to reach the required level of work discipline and were living in all parts of the Island in large houses in communities of 50 – 60 of different religious identities who were living in “boarding houses” and affiliated to different local political parties and majority of them with the left parties who were active among the workers to win their legitimate rights back through trade unions. The Malayalee workers had become an important part of the required human resources to fit into any job categories available here by the beginning of 1900s and majority of them were circumstance forced multi-lingual and could speak Sinhala, Tamil and their mother tongue Malayalam in addition to the English Language which they

studied attending Night Schools where English was given prime importance by the tutors due to white collar job demands.

The port city by the Arabian Sea got this name as ‘Kochi’ remains a mystery. Some say a Chinese gave this name after his own homeland, while others say that it is derived from the Malayalam word “Koch-azhi”, means small sea. For some period of time it was known Cochin, and now is called again as Kochi.

The majority of Malayalees who had come from this port and were addressed as ‘Kochiyas’ and even the hot chilly (Gandharamelaghu) that came from the port Kochi that is very hot and smart is called “kochimiris” by the majority Sri Lankans. Also, in the same tradition, the other identity is ‘KozhiKuttu Kesalgedi’, it is known in Kerala as the ‘PoovanPazham’. This plantain & the young plantain tree reached the shores of Ceylon via Calicut(Kozhikode) and in Tamil it is known as ‘kappalvazha’.

In Malayalam ‘shop’ is called as ‘kada’ and in Sinhala it is known as ‘kade’, hence the shops run by Malayalees who came from Kochi was known among the locals as “Kochiyagekade” and later on it became ‘Kochikade’, and there is a belief that the Kochikade in Colombo 13 and another place 25 miles north of Colombo in a location close to the vicinity of Negombo, was called Kochikade as well and both these names were derived from “KochiyageKade”. It is generally referred to someone of Malabar descent or ancestry as Kochiya. This word is used as a more decent form to denote that he is a Malayalee whether he comes from Kochi or any other district of present day Kerala.

Kalarippayatt is the ancient martial art of Kerala (Angampora in Sinhala) and is said to be the mother of all martial arts and dates back some thousands of years. It is believed that many travelling monks, merchants, and especially

Ksatriyas (warrior class), including the Buddhist monk, Bodhidharma studied this art and imparted these skills throughout South East Asia, and China. The ancient Sinhalese even practiced martial arts similar to KalariPayat. An earlier martial art form of Angampora had been believed to be introduced by Chera mercenaries which is the present day Kerala.

The Malayalees who were living in the country involved with left wing political parties and trade unions always wanted to be in the forefront to protect the worker rights. 'Samathuwadi' daily and 'Nawashakthi' weekly and many other daily and weekly Malayalam newspapers were circulated in Ceylon. Some of those newspapers were printed in Piachaud's Lane, Panchikawatte, Colombo – 10.

Several Sri Lankan Malayalees have knowingly or unknowingly made representation in the local bodies. At present, Mr Sukumaran Nair is a member of Haldumulla Pradeshiya Sabhawa and was the former vice chairman.

The members of the Malayalam community in Ceylon during those days had served in many

fields like Allopathy, Ayurveda, Education, Port & Railways, Government departments, Police and also in the private sector companies which were under European Management.

Ayurveda is the science of life. It is an ancient treatment that rejuvenates the body and the mind and follows the age-old traditional laws. The 1st Principal of the Ayurveda College in Rajagiriya was a Malayalee named Captain Dr.A N N Panicker. Even today some of the local ayurvedic practitioners travel to Kerala and work/study in Ayurvedicholistic wellness hospitals in Kerala and qualify themselves and return to Sri Lanka and perform specialized treatment.

In the Police Department too, Malayalees were working and have earned a name for themselves particularly in the Criminal Investigation Department and majority of them retired and settled in Ceylon and some returned to Kerala.

In the Education Sector too, Malayaleeshave made considerable contributions, they have taught very popular boys and girls schools in Sri Lanka, and some of them were Principals of some big girls schools in Colombo;



Visakha Vidyalaya was begun in 1917 to give Buddhist girls an English Education. This school reached to the present height was due to the amazing feats of late Mrs Susan George Pulimood, a Malayalee educationist who was the revered Principal of this school who worked tirelessly to raise the school from its nondescript background to provide young students with the required facilities to reach the pinnacle without lagging behind. She became the Principal in 1945 and retired in 1967. She was born to a Syrian Catholic family in 1907 in Kerala, who was determined to serve Visakha with vision and zeal. She was known as the undisputed architect of Visakha Vidyalaya.





A lady who changed the course of female Muslim education of Sri Lanka was none other than Mrs Ayesha Rauf who came from Malabar, Kerala and rekindled the interest in Muslim female education in Sri Lanka after the World War II in Muslim Ladies College which was closed in 1941 due to World War II. This Malayalee lady came from the state of Kerala which is until now a highly literate state in India. She worked tirelessly to set up the Muslim Ladies College in 1946 on a land donated by Sir Razik Fareed. Today it is the premier girls school that caters not only the elite Muslims but the common Muslims as well. She was the first Muslim woman Deputy Mayor of Colombo Municipality and was fighting for equal rights for women and wanted representation for women in the Parliament.



Dr Abraham Thomas Kovoov was a Keralite who was born in Saint Thomas Christian family in Thiruvalla, Kerala and was teaching botany in several colleges all over the country before retiring in 1959 as a teacher at Thurstan College, Colombo. He gained prominence after his retirement for his campaign in initiating new dynamics in the Rationalist movement in Sri Lanka and spent most of his time building up the Ceylon Rationalist Association and was its President until his demise in 1978.

The Malayalee Professors, Professor Thattil, Professor Vijayakumar and Professor Chandrasekhar currently remain involved diligently and continuously contribute to the betterment of the academic field of their expertise.





Fondly known by the acronym M G R, a Malayalee and popular South Indian actor, director, producer and politician who served as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Mr M G Ramachandran was born in Kandy, Ceylon in January 1917 to M G Menon and M Satyabhama. He was the first popular Indian Actor to serve as a Chief Minister of an Indian State.



K.C. Kuttan, doorman at Galle Face Hotel, Colombo was undoubtedly one of the oldest and most famous hotel employee in the world. He became an iconic mark in Sri Lankan Hospitality Industry and started as a Vegetable boy and later became a bell boy and finally a door man. He too hailed from Thrissur, Kerala and died in 2014 at the age of 94 as a Sri Lankan Malayalee.

Many Malayalees who were here in Sri Lanka got involved in Small and Medium business. The first branded bottled toddy was introduced by a Malayalee and the name of his product was 'Ambassador'. Hotel Nippon, Hotel Metrople, Colombo and Subhash Hotel in Jaffna were owned by prominent Malayalee business personalities.

Mr. V.K. Valson, son of late Mr V K Kumaran (Hotel Nippon) was one time the Deputy High Commissioner for Sri Lanka in Chennai and also was the Ambassador in Sweden some years back.



## Population & Geographical Distribution

Malayalees were scattered all over the island and as per 1981 Population Census there were around 43,378 living Island wide. Some of those Malayalees who were living in Sri Lanka got married here to Sinhalese and Tamil ladies and stayed behind. Their off-springs who were living in the Island got Sinhalese and Tamilized due to social reasons which dwindled the Malayalees population count except a few who had obtained Ceylon Citizenship by

that time or earlier. However, still approximately a total around twenty thousand Malayalees live in the Island in different districts.

Many toddy tappers were brought to Lanka to get engaged in this industry. Some of this people retained themselves in Lanka without returning to their home land Kerala.

Malayalapuram village was established in Kilinochchi.

## Language

The language Malayalam which diverged over a period of 4 or 5 centuries from Tamil and resulting the emergence of Malayalam as a language in the 9th century. Malayalam shows affinities to Sinhala language and there are similarities in the words and alphabets. In some instances, Malayalee characters resemble to Sinhala, as can be witnessed in graffiti on the rock fortress of Sigiriya. Around 25% of the Sinhala words are identical in both pronunciation and meaning to Malayalam. Even the Malayalam alphabets look like the Sinhala alphabet a lot more than Tamil. If you take a Sinhala Dictionary and readout the words to an educated Malayalee (from Kerala), he will give you the exact meaning of at least 60% of them, but if you speak to him in Sinhala colloquial, he may not understand a word. A close examination of the signatures of the Sinhala chieftains on the 1815 Kandyan Convention (between the British and the Kandyan chiefs) shows a mixture of Sinhala and Malayali characters.

However, some of the Malayalees who were sucked into the Tamil and Sinhala communities speak Tamil or Sinhala at home, and only a few businessmen who got married to Keralites from India and live in Sri Lanka with their families speak Malayalam. Nevertheless, few of the so called Tamils and Sinhalese address their parents "achchan" and "ammey" and one will find a few of the Malayalam words which they use in their day to day communication are from the Malayalam vocabulary.



## Religion

Malayalee community in Sri Lanka is a mix of people who followed different religions which scattered across the Island. Since some Malayalees married Sinhalese Buddhist and Christian ladies, and their children followed Buddhism or Christianity and have taken the Sinhalese

surnames of their mothers' and the same way with Christians and Hindu Tamil ladies. In the 3rd Century Buddhism was in Kerala and flourished in and around Thrissur, Allepey and Kollam.



## Costume



A Keralian influence that has its origins in the time when the kings of Kandy took on Nayakkar brides from across the water (complete with retinues) is still present in Sri Lankan society today. The *Osariya* or Kandyan sari, for instance, is very similar to its Keralian counterpart, but is today a symbol of authentic Sinhala-ness. The style of wearing saree by the early Kerala women was exactly what the Sinhalese women wear now (*Osariya*). The *Osari* and *Redhehetta* are still worn in some parts of Kerala, and the best part was the dress worn by the remote village women in Kerala, it was *redha / hetta* what the Sinhalese women wear. The two features the Malayalees and Sinhalese cannot deny is that they have their family name at the end of their name or in the beginning which some call as surname (Gey Name) in the present day.



The traditional dress the Malayalees wear is white Jubbah and Vesti, a long piece of cloth what they wrap around waist and it is long enough to reach the feet, like the Sinhalese wear. The present

day boys and girls wear long jeans with a T-shirt, shirt and now only at times in special function in a temple or in festival day they wear a vesti and shirt and go to the temple to worship.

## Food



Malayalees food is exactly similar to the Sinhalese food, and most of the food the Sinhalese cook/ eat including the sweet meats such as the Kavum, kokis is in Kerala's cultural cuisines. Kavum, kiribath, Kokis, pol sambol, aapa, idiappa, pittu,(you hardly find them in Tamil Nadu because the Tamil food is Thosai, iddli, vadai, etc) and most others were very similar. They add grounded coconut in most of their

curries like the Sri Lankans as they have enough and more coconuts unlike their other South Indian counter parts. Kozhikode famous halwa, originally the black confection what we call Kaludodol was introduced to Sri Lanka by the malayalees and now diversified into various colours and tastes which are now served in sherbert stalls in different colours and tastes in Sri Lanka.

## Culture

The people from Kerala who migrated to Sri Lanka have become part of the Sinhala community, adopting local names and Buddhist practices. Given the multiple shared features of the two communities, many have felt it easier to merge with the dominant local groups, rather than to try to maintain separations. In many areas in Sri Lanka, there are Sinhala people as majority of them are married to Sinhalese ladies as they carry names like Padmawathi, Seelawathie, Janaki, Karunawathie, and the males carry names like Jayasuriya, Dayananda, Weerakoon, Wishwananda and so forth for them easily get assimilated into the majority community. However, descendants of Malayalee migrants who initially married Tamil women have today become part of the Tamil community in towns along the west coast.

Maraikar is actually a Malayalee name. It was the Cochin Markar who traded with cinnamon in Sri Lanka and sold them to Portuguese in Cochin and Kozhikode. In Colombo, there are streets named after Malayalees in Colombo. Umbichy Place is named after a great Malayalee Muslim philanthropist Mr P B Umbichy who did great service to all communities irrespective

of their religious identity. He has built a mosque as well in Colombo. In the heart of Kandy too, there is Malabar street, that also represents that Malayalees had lived in there for a long time.

Malayalees by look have more resemblance to Sinhalese than Tamils. At one time when the caste discrimination was so extreme in Kerala many embraced Buddhism and migrated to Ceylon. It is also believed that the Sinhalese fisherman, toddy tappers, cinnamon peelers were descendants from Kerala who got naturalized(Sinhalized)during the course of time. More than the language, also one could find something strange when if he/she visits Kerala, that is when you go to the villages, they are exactly like Sri Lanka, with plenty of paddy fields and coconut trees, the people, their appearance, features and complexion are identical to Sinhalese.

Another important aspect of Malayalee is the ‘Malayala Gurukam’, which has spread to the most parts of the Island of Sri Lanka. Still some believe that with this gurukam certain favours could be gained. There are so many people making a living out of this, which raises many eyebrows among many people of Sri Lanka.





## Festivals

Some Malayalees living in Colombo and suburbs maintain their ethnic identities and celebrate Onam, Vishu, Christmas, Easter, EidUl-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha.

Onam is the most spectacular event of all malayalees living around the world. This festival that last for 10 days starts from 'Atham' star in the malayalam month of Sinham and will have

different multi-colour floral decorations in the front courtyard of the residence to convince their beloved King Mahabali who is said to visit his subjects who wants to show him that they are happy and prosperous. The most important aspect is the Onam Sadhya that is served on the Thiru Onam day which people sit down and eat on in banana leaves with new clothes.



Vishu (Sinhala Aluth Avurudha) is celebrated in the month of April. This festival is widely celebrated by Sri Lankan Malayalees. Nonagatheyy (Sankarantiya) is observed among Malayalees

and is called Sankaranti. Also, the head of the household will gift money to everyone including the servants and relative who visit them at home which is also a practice with Sinhalese Buddhists.





## Active Organizations Sree Narayana Guru Society of Sri Lanka

Sree Narayana Guru Society of Sri Lanka is the Mahagedera (Ancestral Home) of Malayalees in Sri Lanka. It took shape from Vignyanodaya Yogam in 1918 during the first visit of Sree Narayana Guru Dev. Sree Narayana Guru Society is a very active organization that gets continuously engaged in many social service work activities for the needy in the Colombo and suburbs. SNGS Malayalee Memorial Hall is the symbol of vitality and strength of the Sri Lankan Malayalees. Sree Narayana Guru Society of Malayalees is incorporated by an act of Parliament in Sri Lanka. (Act # 48 of 1980) in November 1980 by the Parliament of Sri Lanka.

It celebrates the Guru Jayanthi every year in the Malayalam month of Sinham (September/

October) by organizing cultural activities, donation of school books, and needs to physically challenged, orphans and destitutes around the areas, and also financial assistance to poor Malayalam families. The ‘Global Convention of Universal Brotherhood’ was held at the BMICH, Colombo on December 19 and 20, 2010, under the auspices of Sree Narayana Guru Society of Sri Lanka who commemorated the platinum jubilee year of Sree Narayana Guru Memorial Malayalee Hall that was completed in 1935. During the Independence Celebration of 2009 ‘Deyata Kirula’ held at BMICH premises, Sri Lankan Malayalees had a ‘Malayalee Mandir’ stall for Malayalees and the Sri Lankan Malayalee Community was recognized as a dignified community and was honoured by the Sri Lankan Government headed

by His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapakse as one of the Distinguished Communities of Sri Lanka. This society was found on the basis of philosophical foundation of 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Mankind'. This memorial building is sanctified by the presence of Sree Narayana Guru Dev who preached that 'Whatever

the religion man follows, it is suffice if it makes him a virtuous'. Also, to commemorate the 155th Birth Anniversary of Sree Narayana Guru Dev, a postage stamp in the denomination of Sri Lanka rupees 5.00 was issued on September 04, 2009. Sree Narayana Guru Society conducts Malayalam weekend classes as well.

## Kerala Samajam

**K**erala Samajam that was formed in 21 February 1959 is another active organization in Sri Lanka. Its sister organization Kerala Vanitha Samajam organizes Onam functions with cultural programmes to promote the Malayalam culture. This organization is still active and promotes cultural programmes. Dr A T Koor was one time President of the Samajam.

All Ceylon Malayalees Welfare Association, Sri Lanka Malayalees Association, Ceylon Malayalees Cultural & Welfare Association, Sri Lanka Malayalee Welfare Association, Malayala Kalalayam and several other organizations were there and all of them have now become defunct.

Many eminent personalities and several others from time to time held key positions in the above mentioned Malayalee organizations in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) like Shri K K Madhavan, Shri M K Krishnan, Shri E V Gopinath, Shri V VBhaskaran, Shri T P Kesavan, Shri M A Nair, Shri K N D Pillai, Shri N K Chandrasekharan, Shri V R Subramaniadas, Shri P B Unnithan, Shri K Jayakumar, Shrimathi Sarojini Sakuntala Chandrasekharan, Shrimathi Prabha Nair Nagalingam, Shri Nandan Nair, Shri Prince Thomas, Shri G Satish and Shri P C Balakrishnan and several others have demonstrated greatest commitment in executing their responsibilities.



# The Malays of Sri Lanka

Dr. B. A. Hussainmiya

## Introduction

The Malays of Sri Lanka, variously known as the Ja Minissu (in Sinhala) and Java Manusa and ‘Malai kaarar’ (in Tamil) are a microscopic minority well integrated into the ethnic mosaic of Sri Lanka and have long since played a vital role in both the history and culture of the Island nation. The Malays are an entity renowned for their glorious past, military honors, Art, language,

literature, couture and cuisine. Despite being an immigrant community, they have accepted since long Sri Lanka as their country of adoption, and during the recent ethnic war in Sri Lanka, many brave Malays who served in the security services have laid their lives in the defence of their motherland.



As followers of Islamic religion the Malays should be distinguished culturally from their other co-religionists especially the Tamil speaking Sri Lankan Moors, Borahs and Memons etc;. Whereas roots of the Muslim Moors are to be traced in the direction of the West from Arabia and South India, the Malays hailed from the direction Nusantara (lit: The land between the islands) in the Archipelagic East.

Who is Malay in Sri Lanka? There exists no clear cut answer to this ephemeral question in the same way as one tries to define other core Malay groups living elsewhere in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. Nonetheless the Malays in those countries are a constitutionally recognized category because they habitually speak Malay, practice Malay 'Adat' or custom and almost all are adherents of the religion of Islam. In the case of Sri Lanka the Malay identity, though derived

generally from one's parenthood especially on the father's side, a number of local Malays feel ambivalent about their community affiliation. In most instances they are conscious of a self-identity as Malays particularly among the offspring of mixed marriages between the Malays and other communities. In any case there exists an obvious identity marker which distinguishes the members of the community based on their ability to speak a variant of Malay colloquial in their homes despite the fact that most of the Malay customs of their forefathers have disappeared throughout more than three hundred years of existence in Sri Lanka. Even their dominant 'Mongolide' physical features too have transmuted considerably due to persistent inter-marriages with the other communities, chiefly the Muslim Moors whose customs and religious practices have been super imposed on Malay way of life in general.

## The Origins

An immigrant community in their roots, a first wave of Malay settlers came during the Portuguese occupation (1506-1656) of Sri Lanka. Large numbers were brought in during the period of the Dutch Rule (1658-1796). The Malay connection with the island, however, goes back to pre-colonial times. For instance, the Sri Lankan Chronicle of Culavamsa records a significant 'Malay' invasion by the Buddhist Javaka Ruler King Chandrabhanu of Nakhon Seri Dhammarat (in the Isthmus of Kra in the Northern Malay Peninsula) during the 12th year of the reign of King Parakramabahu II (1236-1270). The Javaka King's purpose was to take away the Alms Bowl of Lord Buddha, a venerated sacred object of

the Sinhalese Rulers. His followers stayed back in Sri Lanka, and according to stories in the Kadaiampota (local land deeds) mentioned by late Professor Senarat Paranaviatana, they were the original founders of the Jaffna (Javagama) Kingdom. Besides, it was very likely that the Malay-Indonesian seafarers who plied the Indian Ocean and populated the Malagasy Islands off Africa may have had sojourned in the southern coasts of Sri Lanka. Even if the Malays had settled in Sri Lanka in the medieval times, they would have been easily assimilated within the larger Sinhalese population.

Since early days the Eastern archipelagic people had been enlisted to serve the needs of the



European colonial rulers. The Dutch recruited them chiefly to fight their wars in Sri Lanka and to serve in their various establishments, a practice continued throughout the period of British period (1796-1948) as well. Once firmly rooted in Sri Lanka, their loyalties have remained primarily with the country of adoption as their distant memories of their fatherland had faded away.

Considering their preponderant origins from Java and other Indonesian islands, the term Malay to refer to this community can be a misnomer. At any rate the term 'Malay' has been generally recognized as a census category, ever since the British colonial administration first came across them in Sri Lanka. Their ancestors hailed from all over the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago representing a microcosm of virtually every national group from the East. Included among them were the Javanese, Sundanese, Achenese, Amboinese, Balinese, Tidorese, Banjarese, Madurese and not the least the Maleiers (Malays) and others. In the Dutch records they are collectively referred as 'Oosterlingen' which simply meant 'the Easterners.' Furthermore, the Dutch distinguished them based on their different national backgrounds, namely the Javaans, Amboinese, Atjers, Banjarese, Balinese and Malaeirs and so on. The British, on the other hand, lumped them together under the category of Malays which is justifiable in a sense because the Easterners spoke Malay as their lingua franca and bound by their ties to Islamic religion.

The early arrivals of Indonesian-Malays included people of various social strata such as Kings, royal exiles and members of higher nobility, soldiers, artisans, workers and (non-Muslim) slaves. The Dutch had resorted to the practice of banishing recalcitrant Kings, princes, and noblemen from the Eastern Archipelago to Sri Lanka, as well as to the Cape Town settlement in South Africa. As Sri Lanka gained notoriety as

a place of banishment, the Indonesian language coined a special word, 'Disailankan', meaning to be sent to Ceylon. Among those who were exiled to Sri Lanka included the former King of Java known as Susunan Mangkurat Mas, Batara Gowa Amas Medina of Gowa in the Celebes Island and Kings of Tidore, Bachan and Ternate and so on. The soldier levies were recruited mostly from the outer kampong or settlements of various Eastern national groups who had flocked as economic migrants living in the fringes of the newly formed (1619) Dutch Fort city of Batavia, later known as Jakarta. During British times, a further element of Malays came from the Malay Peninsula proper such as from the northern Kedah kingdom and periodically others arrived as military recruits from the Straits Settlements such, Singapore, Penang and Melaka.

Since the early days, the Malays in Sri Lanka were transformed into a 'martial' race like the Gurkhas of India and the Sikhs of Punjab by both the Dutch and the British colonial administration to serve in their military units as well as to police the island. There were specific regiments of Javanese-Malays raised by the Dutch to fight their wars in the island. Some exiled Indonesian princes headed those regiments which augmented their income and were able to instill genuine loyalty and service among their lower ranks of troops. When the British expelled the Dutch Government in the Maritime Provinces in 1796, their Malay companies were absorbed by the British military and were reorganized with better conditions and scales of regular pay just like the Indian Sepoy companies in the coasts of India. It was the first British Governor Lord Fredric North (1798-1805) who took special initiatives to expand the Malay Regiment by encouraging a permanent colony of Malays in the island. He initiated a firm policy to encourage migration of new families from the East by offering various incentives such as bounty money and facilities for education for the

immigrations' children and so on. Initially known as Ceylon Regiment, the 1st Regiment and Malay Regiment, the British renamed the battalion as the Ceylon Rifle Regiment in 1827. At its peak the Malays formed 12 companies out of the 16 companies of about 100 soldiers each in the CRR battalion. It was finally disbanded in 1873 because the service of the Malay troops were not needed as Sri Lanka was presumed to have entered an era of real peace as reported by the Governor Gregory to his superiors in London.

It was not just the colonial rulers who employed the Malays as soldiers, but also the local Sinhalese Rulers in Kandy too sought the service of the Malays. Thus a small number of Malays reaching at one time about 300 of them served in the Kandyan King's army. The Nayakka Ruler Kirti Sri Rajasinghe (1747-1782) formed them in a regular army called Padikara Peruva (Sinhala:paid levies) which continued to function until the end of the reign of the last King of Kandy, Sri Wickrema Rajasinghe (1797-1815) who was captured and exiled by the British in 1815. Many of the Malay soldiers did in fact served the Dutch masters but the aggrieved and disgruntled groups among them flocked to Kandy to serve the local ruler.

Overall the military service had remained as the mainstay of the economic and cultural livelihood of the community for many years in the past. Their demographic distribution in the island also coincided with the establishment of army garrison

towns in Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Kurunegalle, Badulla and Hambantota. A major segment of the community lived in the principal military cantonment of Slave Island in Colombo, known to the Malays as Kertel while smaller settlements were found in the Katukelle and Bogambara areas of Kandy, and other garrison towns. Hambantota, Kirinde and Palatupana in the Southern Coast were populated since 1798 by the Malay invalid companies which were sent to develop the salt pans of Mahagampattu when other locals refused to work in insalubrious conditions. Wherever they settled, the Malays were well nigh knit around a cohesive community life having built their own 'Malay' mosques to be comfortable in their cultural and religious practices.

The Ceylon Rifle Regiment sponsored a special a military school In Slave Island (Kertel) to educate children of soldiers to become cadets by learning three 'R's and with special provisions to teach the Malay language. In that sense, the Malays became a better literate people than their other Muslim compatriots. Once the Regimental past came to an end with the disbandment of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment in 1873, many Malays switched to other security occupations mainly the police force, Fire brigade, prison guards and security guards. The educated Malays found employment in the private mercantile sector. Other Malays followed their family careers in gardening, rattan works and various other crafts.

## Language and Literature

Many Sri Lankan Malays still use a creolized Malay language in their home. Linguistically this colloquial known as Sri Lanka Malay

(SLM) developed as the outcome of language contact between early Malay varieties, including vernaculars and lingua francas, brought over

from the Indonesian archipelago, with local languages, in particular Lankan Tamil, especially the variety spoken among the Muslim Moors. It is widely known that a lingua franca generally referred to as Bazaar Malay functioned as a wide-spread language of intercultural communication throughout the Indonesian and Malay world. It is such a language that would have allowed the early Malay settlers to communicate across their vernacular varieties as diverse as Javanese, Balinese, Amboinese, etc. The Sri Lankan variety of the language and the standard language i.e. spoken in Malaysia is mutually unintelligible. In Sri Lanka one finds similar creole languages spoken by smaller communities of Portuguese, Dakkinis (the Urdu speaking people from South India) etc;

Until about a century ago the Malay language had flourished as a literary language when they produced literature written in the traditional –Malay Jawi script just as their religious compatriots, the Moors used the Ariwi script, or popularly known as Arabu-Tamil which was Tamil written in Arabic script. Although known to be brawny people of military, the Malays were also a brainy lot. A cultured people, they left behind a remarkable legacy of a higher literary culture which died away at the early part of the twentieth century for lack of patronage. A chance discovery in 1974 of a large haul of handwritten Malay language manuscripts in the Gundul script (lit: meaning ‘bald’ in the Javanese language to indicate Arabic orthography written without vowel diacritical marks) and other lithographed texts has thrown important light on the literary accomplishments of this small community. It is remarkable to note that the first Malay newspaper in the world called ‘Alamat Langkapuri’ in the (Arabised) Jawi script was published in Colombo in 1869 by the learned Baba Ounus Saldin (1832-1906), the editor and publisher of this paper who also published other news papers called Unmai

(in Arabic Tamil) and Wajah Selong in 1900 and other lithographic booklets based in Colombo.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, there had been considerable intellectual interactions between the local Malays and the Archipelagic Malays through cultural and literary exchanges. In short the Malays of Sri Lanka participated in the same literary milieu shared by the larger Malay World spread out in the East. In the possession of the local Malay families were many famous Malay literary and religious works known as Hikayat (Epics), Syairs (Poetry) and Kitab (religious treatises) read widely throughout the Malay World. Some Malay soldiers who went on overseas duty brought back copies of Malay manuscripts from the Archipelago. Others copied them in Sri Lanka. Besides, the Sri Lankan Malays produced their own share of writers, and intellectuals. This vibrant literary tradition disappeared at the beginning of the 20th century with the slow passing away of the old Malay literati who thrived under the state patronage. The Malay commissioned officers learnt Malay while studying in the military schools, a facility not available to the new generation of post-regimental Malay youth. Evidence provided in the colophons of the Malay manuscripts reveals that most copyists and owners of the texts were ex-soldiers. Beginning from the early twentieth century the Jawi writing tradition gave away to writing in the romanised script which too was abandoned as the years passed by. The younger generations of Malays could not sustain their forefathers’ literary interests as they became literate only in English and local vernaculars. Thus from being a literary language once, the Malay today thus remains only as a spoken dialect, which is listed by the linguists as an endangered language because of ever decreasing numbers of the younger people using colloquial Malay to communicate with their elders.

## Entertainment and Occupations

The early Malay settlers introduced various handicrafts to the Island. Schweitzer (a 17th century visitor to the island ) referred to “the Malays who made all sorts of lovely baskets from rattan”. The Malays were the original cane workers who plied their trade in Slave Island. They were also expert masons and builders. All sorts of ‘Creeses’ (Malay daggers) were turned out by Malay and Javanese craftsmen, and their gold-smiths also produced lovely filigree work on a solid background for decoration of pendants, bracelets, ear studs and rings. The embroidery woven by their women folk was very popular among the local people. The men were also expert painters, woodcarvers and craftsmen.

The Malays enjoyed a vibrant cultural life. Since they originated from varied cultural backgrounds in the East, they must have engaged in various

forms of cultural entertainment. Such cultural past times helped to inject good communal spirit especially in cantonments where the military Malays wanted to escape a life of drudgery. They turned out their own musical instruments such as the Gamelan, violins, drums, etc., to be used in their song, music and dance performances. The sophisticated and artistic women excelled at dancing – ‘Tari Payong’ (Umbrella dance), ‘Tari Chinta Sayang’ (Dance of love), ‘Ronggeng’ (Dance to the lilt of Portuguese Kafringga) etc., which were all performed to the accompaniment of the ‘gamelan’, ‘rabana’, violin and cymbals. In its heyday, the Slave Island suburb became well known for its entertainment potential where members of other communities flocked to see music and dancing festivals conducted by the community on special occasions.

## Demography and Population

Originally at the end of the Dutch Rule in 1796, the Malay population had reached a figure of nearly 3000 which included the State Exiles. The latter group returned to their places of origins in 1808. The remaining population of the Malays received a boost by new arrivals from the Malay Peninsula and other Eastern encouraged by the British to join the Ceylon Malay Regiment. The early 20th century census figures indicate more than 12 thousand Malays living in various parts of the island. In 2001 the Sri Lankan Malays

constituted just 0.3 percent of the total population in Sri Lanka, numbering about 54,782 but in the latest Census of 2011, their numbers had come down to a little over 40 thousand people. This is somewhat difficult to explain, but presumably, to be attributed to the regular outbound migration of Malays to Western countries such as the U.K., Canada and Australia. Some faulty entries by the Census takers who might have enumerated the number of Malays under other Muslim categories, or may be that the Malays born to mixed marriages



themselves would have voluntarily declined to declare their status as Malays. Unofficially it can be surmised that there should be at least 60 to 70

thousand Malays living in Sri Lanka or some 05% of the total Muslim population.

### The Sri Lankan Malay Population

Year	Pop.	+%
1881	8,900	-
1891	10,100	+13.5%
1901	11,900	+17.8%
1911	13,000	+9.2%
1921	13,400	+3.1%
1931	16,000	+19.4%
1946	22,500	+40.6%
1853	25,400	+12.9%
1963	33,400	+31.5%
1971	43,500	+30.2%
1981	47,000	+8.0%
1989 (est.)	48,000	+2.1%
2001	54,800	+14.2%
2011	40,189	-26.70%

Source : Department of Census & Statistics  
Data is based on Sri Lankan Government Census

According to the Census figures of 2001, the Malays lived in the following districts as per percentage shown below.

Colombo	19,421	0.87%
Gampaha	12,333	0.60%
Hambantota	7,385	0.41%
Kandy	2,210	0.17%
Badulla	1390	0.19%
Kurunegala	1223	0.08%
Nuwaraeliya	600	0.09%

Traditionally the Malays chose to live close to their Moor neighbors due to religious affinities having to share their mosques and customs, but since of late the trend may be changing bringing demographic shift away from such common neighborhoods. More importantly the younger Malay population is slowly switching to Sinhala as their language of interaction when until recently their popular language would have been Tamil in their social environment which was also taught as their medium of instruction in schools. Furthermore, there seems to be a statistical increase in the inter-marriages between the Malay and the Sinhalese unlike in the earlier days when more of such inter-marriages took place between

the Malays with the Tamil-speaking Moors. It is also true that a considerable number of the Malay population who lived traditionally in the Colombo ward of Slave Island where land values are rising, have been moving out or pushed out due to Government policies. They now move to cheaper suburbs in the Gampaha district in places like Enderamulla, Akbar Town and Makola etc; The same trend is to be witnessed in places like Kandy in the Katukelle area as well as Hambantota and Kirinde in the South. The Southern Malays are now in occupation of a new Malay colony in the nearby Ambalantota area that has sprung up to accommodate the displaced population.

## Clubs and Associations

Since long the Malays were known to have formed their own groups, formal and informal. As early as 1869 the Malay newspaper *Alamat Lankapuri* highlights the beginnings of an effort to form an organization of Pensioners formed by the ex-regiment personnel in *Kampung Kertel*, i.e. Slave Island. In 1869 Baba Ounus Saldin and his pensioner associates from the old regiment began a movement to set up a separate Malay mosque in addition to the old *Wekande* mosque which came to be known as *Masjidul Jamiah* Mosque. They were also responsible for starting the *Jawatte* Muslim burial ground.

As scions of sportsmanship, the Malays were the promoters of various indoor and outdoor games. Having acquired skills from the regimental sports contests, they were the earliest to introduce snooker games in the Slave Island area. Importantly, the Malay soldiers showed dexterity in playing

cricket with their British military officers who showered a gift of an important piece of land in the northern part of the Rifle parade grounds in Slave Island which led to the formation in 1872 of the Malay Cricket Club (now the Colombo Malay Cricket Club), which was the oldest Ceylonese Cricket Club. The Malay Club cricketers added finesse to their play and in 1920 became Ceylon Club Champions. The premises of Malay Cricket Club, now named as Colombo Malay Cricket Club, in *Padanag* still serves the communal needs of Malays in Colombo in many ways.

Beginning from the 1920s at least, the Malays of the island became highly self-conscious of their separate political identity as a Muslim group vis-a-vis the Tamil Muslim Moors. This was exacerbated by Governor Sir William Manning's scheme in 1920 proposing communal electorates to elect representatives to the Ceylon Legislative Council. The Moorish leaders

staked their claim for the Muslim seats which included representation for the Malays as well. The Malay leaders did not accept this and began clamouring for their own seat in the proposed Legislative Council. Having become political minded like the other communities in the island, they passed a land mark resolution during their first a major political gathering held in Colombo on 6 November 1921. In the following year the All Ceylon Malay Association was founded with much fanfare in Padang, in the Slave Island, the heart of the Colombo Malay community. Other notable Malay associations followed in its wake such as the Malay Rupee Fund, as a charitable organization set up in 1954. The community enthusiasm for their self-importance overflowed when the golden jubilee of the founding of the Ceylon Malay cricket club was celebrated with much publicity in that year. Three of its past-presidents, M.K. Saldin, (1931-36), Dr. M.P. Drahan (1956-60), and M. Zahiere Lye (1960-65) was elected to the legislature.

Today All Ceylon Malay Association renamed (Sri Lanka Malay Association) is by far the most important organization of the island which been a symbol of Malay ethnicity for more than 90 years. Consequent to the loss of special Malay representation in the Ceylonese parliament since 1965, ACMA seemed to have lost its hold on the community and had declined in importance as the single, vocal representative of community's interest. Earlier, ACMA had tried to initiate several ambitious projects to revive the ethnic symbols of Malays. For example, special efforts were taken to collect oral and written literature; Also Malay dancing and music were revived. The Malays were urged to wear Malay dress, and cook their traditional meals and so on. Above all, ACMA had regularly played host to distinguished foreign Malay visitors, such as His Excellencies

Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak (Prime Ministers of Malaysia), Dr. Ali Sastroamidjojo and Dr Subandrio of Indonesia. A six-member delegation from the ACMA attended the Merdeka (Independence) celebrations in Kuala Lumpur on the special invitation of the Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman in 1962. In the previous year a youth delegation sponsored by the ACMA had visited Malaysia, especially to witness the installation of the Raja of Perlis as the Yang diPertuan Agong.

There were also some minor associations formed by interested groups to promote their political interests including the All Ceylon Malay Political Union (Persekutuan Politics Melayu Lankapuri) which merged in 1944 in the newly launched All Ceylon Malay Congress. The party sought to promote the rights of the Malay minority and gain parliamentary representation for the community. The party was led by M.P. Drahan and as a party leader, he was appointed as Member of Parliament in 1956-1960. His party also had actively supported the independence struggle in Indonesia.

In 1922 the renowned Saldin clan which included the kinship groups of Drahan, Dole, Sabar, Abdue, Lye and others formed their own elite family club known as UNIQUES which is still functional promoting close knit relationship among its extended family members.

In the post-independence Sri Lanka more organisations began to emerge. Mention must be made of the Ceylon Malay Research Organisation (CEMRO) founded by an Engineer, Mr Murad Jayah who made immense contributions to promote research on the Malays in the 1960s by publishing a xeroxed periodical. Lately in the 1980s an umbrella body of Sri Lankan Malay

organizations known as SLAMAC (Sri Lankan Malay Confederation) came into existence. Lately another new organization which is called COSLAM (Conference of Sri Lanka Malays) works actively to promote Sri Lankan Malay language and culture. In addition, the Malays run provincial level associations in Kandy, Nawalapitiya, Kurunegalle, Hambantota and so on to promote community's interests.

The Indonesian and Malaysian Embassies are also interested in the welfare of the community but their support is dependent upon government to government dealings. Nonetheless, the Malaysian activists are keen to impart Malay language education to the community members but their interest is rather lukewarm as they prefer to keep live their local variety of the Malay colloquial.

An important international event that took place in August 1985 under the patronage of the then Sri Lankan President, J. R. Jayawardena again

rejuvenated the identity consciousness among the Malays. It was the massive second Malay World Symposium held in Colombo organized by the above SLAMAC and the Malaysian Writer's Association (GAPENA) where hundreds of the Malay World delegates participated. The gathering was held in Sri Lanka in recognition of the role of Sri Lankan Malays as transmitters of Malay language and culture. Spurred by this conference, many Malay associations dormant in the provinces have become very active again. The event also encouraged a revival of regular community news bulletins such as 'Terang' and Wajah Selong.

Mention must also be made of smaller community organizations that flourish among the Sri Lanka Malay Diaspora groups in the world capitals of London, Melbourne, Toronto and so on which promote cultural and economic interest of the Malay families who have migrated from Sri Lanka.

## The Leaders

The Malay community can be proud of their own share of distinguished persons from all walks of life. Following are a selected list of them, but there were many others worthy of mention as well.

### **Baba Ounus Saldin**

Baba Ounus Saldin (1832-1906) was by far one of the best iconic figures among the Malays of Sri Lanka. His life and times symbolized the high point of community life in the 19th century. He achieved fame as an entrepreneur, a religious scholar, community leader, author, writer, copyist and publisher of books and periodicals in Malay

and Arabu-Tamil. More importantly, he linked the Malay world with Sri Lanka through his literacy efforts and propagating activities.

Saldin's grandfather, Panthasih, came to Sri Lanka in the late 18th century to join the Regiment along with 500 others from the area of Sumenap in Madura off the Java island. Initially Ounus also served in the Ceylon Rifle Regiment like others of his generation but after only eight years of service bought his discharge and joined as clerk in Venn and Co', a British Agency house. Later he also served in various other mercantile establishments



which helped him later to build his own import business of books and equipment.

The greater part of Saldin's life was spent in Colombo, the busy metropolis and port city of Sri Lanka. He also served brief spells in the hill country towns of Badulla, Peradeniya and Gampola on work. As a pensioner in Colombo, he rendered yeomen service by galvanizing other Malay pensioners to serve the community. Much of Saldin's energies were taken up by two important community causes espoused by him during the latter part of his life. The first was with regard to the up- grading of the small Java Lane Mosque , also known as 'Pensioners' Mosque', and second was to open a up a new burial ground in Jawatte.

*Baba Ounus SALDIN 1838 - 1906*



Saldin was a higher Malay intellectual of his times. He owned his own library of Malay and Islamic books and manuscripts. This collection suggests that he was fundamentally a religious-oriented

scholar. And his primary interests encompassed the fields of religion and Sufism. While he was still a young soldier in Badulla, he entered the order of Sufi Syaikh, by the name of Shaikh Lebbai Nainar Marikkar Ibnu Ahmad Lebbai who belonged to the school of Qadiriyya sect. Saldin's reputation as a Malay literary figure should rest largely on his printing enterprise of two Malay language newspapers, the first of which, *Alamat Langkapuri* (1869-70) was clearly well ahead in time not only in Sri Lanka but in the Malay World as well. Saldin was among the earliest Malays to own a lithographic printing press, a significant pioneering achievement as compared to his contemporaries in the Malay archipelago. It was only in 1876 that a similar press was set up in Singapore, by an association of Jawi Peranakans. Saldin's contributions to Malay literary matters, especially in journalism and printing trade had expanded the cultural boundary of the Malay world. His second newspaper called *Wajah Selong* (1895-1900) had subscribers from among the Malay readers from Singapore, Malaya, Jawa and Thailand.

Saldin's legacy was carried on by the businesses set up by him and passed on to his eldest son M. K. Saldin's company. Many other family members who followed in his footsteps emerged as top elites in Sri Lankan society in the years to come. His great grandson, Professor Dilano Saldin is currently a founder Professor of Physics in the Wisconsin University in the United States.

### **Al Haj T. B. Jayah**

Tuan Burhanuddin Jayah (1 January 1890 – 31 May 1960), was eminent Malay considered as a national hero in whose memory a national stamp had been released. He was an educationalist, politician, diplomat and Muslim community leader.

T.B. Jayah was born in Galagedara on 1 January 1890, as the son of Nona and Cassim Jayah. His father was employed in the police department as a sergeant. Jayah was educated at St. Thomas' College, Modera. He passed the Cambridge Junior examination and won a scholarship to study in England. He was a trained teacher by profession having passed his London Bachelor of Arts in Classics in 1911.

He started his career as a school teacher and retired after serving 27 years as the principal of Zahira College, Colombo. Under his stewardship, Zahira College became one of the leading schools in the country.

Jayah emerged as a leader of the Muslim community of the country. He entered the politics and became a prominent figure in pre-independence politics of Sri Lanka. He was elected to the legislative council, state council and parliament. He was also a founding member of the United National Party. He became the minister of Labour and Social Service of the first independent government of Sri Lanka. After retiring from politics, Jayah was appointed as the first high commissioner for Ceylon in Pakistan. He died in 1960, falling ill on pilgrimage to Mecca.

### **Al Haj M. P. Drahaman**

Al-Haji Dr Mohamed Purvis Drahaman (born November 5, 1889, Colombo, d. 1963, Mecca) was a Sri Lankan Malay who was a prominent medical doctor and politician. He was the leader of the All Ceylon Malay Congress, and was appointed as Member of Parliament in 1956 and 1960. Dr M. P. Drahaman was born on 5 November 1899 in Colombo to Malay parents whose ancestors had

migrated to Sri Lanka two generations ago from the island of Java. He received early education in All Saints College in Galle and later Wesley College in Colombo. After graduating from the Colombo medical college in 1928 he entered government service, a pioneering Malay to enter the noble profession of medicine. After five years he established his private surgery and dispensary in no 15, Rifle Street in the Slave Island ward of Colombo. Thus spurning a lucrative private practice amongst the elite, he set up his clinic among the deprived Malays of the area that began a life long commitment to work for the needy and the down trodden. There he provided care and hospitality not only to the locals but also many foreign Malays, pilgrims and travelers stranded en route and who flocked to seek his service.

He led many Malay organizations, such as the Ceylon Malay Youth League, the Malay Progressive Association and All Ceylon Malay Association, All Ceylon Malay Congress and the Ceylon Malay Cricket Club. Drahaman supported the struggle for Indonesian independence. He was made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 1953. By representing Malay interests in the Parliament from 1956 to 1959, and from 1960 to 1963 until his demise, he had ceaselessly highlighted the plight of the Malays all over the island, especially in Hambantota and Kirinde to seek redress from the government. His real outlook, however, was much broader than a narrow preoccupation with community issues.

During the Indonesian war of independence (1945-1949) Drahaman spearheaded the KRIS movement, the Union of Indonesian and Sri Lankan Malays in Colombo as the front organization to support the independence struggle of Indonesia. His clinic doubled up as a chancellery and operations

room for several exiled Indonesian fighters. Indonesian Government was especially grateful to the support he lent and invited him as a guest of honor during the first Republic of Indonesia Merdeka celebrations in 1949. Similarly in 1957 when Malaya gained 'Merdeka' independence he was again invited by the Malaysians for official celebrations. Dr Drahman's home at Guildford crescent, Colombo 7, appropriately named 'Merdeka' had played host to many international Malay/Indonesian leaders including the late Tunku Abdul Rahman the late Foreign Minister of Indonesia Adam Malik and others. When in 1957 Dr Drahman fell ill in Kuala Lumpur during the Merdeka celebrations, almost the entire Malayan Cabinet ministers headed by the Tunku visited him in his hospital bed in Bangsar Heart Centre.

## Justice M. J. Akbar



Justice Maas Thajoon Akbar, KC (June 15, 1880 – April 22, 1944) was a renowned judge and lawyer. He was a judge of the Supreme Court of Ceylon and Solicitor General of Ceylon.

Born to M. S. J. Akbar, a wealthy coconut planter, Akbar was educated at the Royal College, Colombo. After gaining a first class division pass at the London Matriculation, he won the coveted scholarship to University of Cambridge: he entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1897 where he did the Mechanical Science Tripos to qualify as an engineer. However, he subsequently switched over to law and was called to the bar at Gray's Inn. He returned to Ceylon in 1905, and while practicing law, he also worked as a lecturer and examiner at the Ceylon Law College. In 1907 he became a Crown Counsel in the Attorney General's Department and went on to become the Solicitor General of Ceylon and Acting Attorney General, when C.H. Elphinstone, the Attorney General at that time was away on furlough. As the Solicitor General he was a member of the Legislative Council and had served as a District Judge on occasions too.

Justice Akbar chaired the University Commission and became the first Muslim to adorn the Supreme Court Bench. When he was appointed as a King's Counsel, he was the first Ceylon Muslim to receive the honor. At the time of his retirement he was the senior-most Puisne Justice. Akbar was the Chairman of the University Commission on whose recommendation the Legislative Council resolved, in 1928, that the University should be of the unitary and residential type, and that it should be located in the Dumbara Valley near Kandy. He was the founder of the Ceylon Muslim Educational Society, that established the Hussainiya Boys' School and the Fathima Girls' School in Colombo.

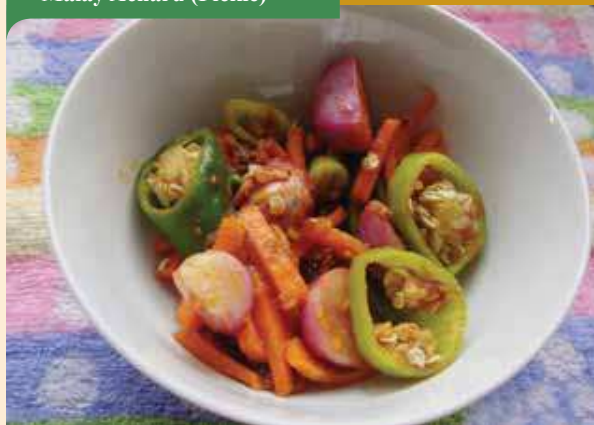
## Culinary Contributions

Having hailed from multi-national groups from the East the ancestors of the Malays introduced many new dishes to enrich the culinary cravings of the Sri Lankans. Their main dish-- the tripe (Babath) and Pittu combination are relished by all Sri Lankans. Following is a selected list of dishes attributable largely to the presence of the Malays in the island.

The rice puller ‘achchar’ or the Malay pickle is well known in Sri Lanka. They prepare dishes using different varieties of rice – Nasi K’mbooli (ghee Rice), Nasi Goreng (Fried Rice) and Nasi Kooning (Yellow Rice) etc.;. Among the curries, there is the richly spiced ‘Sathay Daging’ also served roasted in bamboo skewers and Daging Chuka’ – beef marinated in vinegar, spiced

and cooked with sliced onions. Pasthol (Malay Patties), Bibikkan (cake), Dodol and Cheena Kuey are some of the desserts served with afternoon tea.

Malay Acharu (Pickle)



## Malay Desserts & Sweetmeats

Malay Name	Brief Description	Current Local Name
SERIKAYA	Steamed egg & coconut milk pudding	Wattalapam (Tamil) Wattalapang (Sinhalese)
DODOL	A soft oily cake made of rice flour, coconut milk and palm jiggery/sugar	
KUEH SEGU (SEGU PUDDING)	Segu, coconut milk, jiggery/sugar & cardamon	Sauh Kanji (Tamil)
CUCUR Or Pinniyaram	Oil cakes	Kawung (Sinhalese) Panniyaram (Tamil)
KOKIS	Deep fried flour batter; in a mould	



KUEH CHEENA	Small glutinous cup cake; eaten with coconut scrapings	
CUCUR KACHANG	Rice flour, green gram, sugar & cardamon	Mung Ata Kawung (Sinhalese)
DOSI DONDONG	A preserve made of amberella fruit boiled in sugar syrup	
DOSI NANNAS	Preserve made with pineapple	
DOSI MANGGA	Preserve made of mango	
BIBIKKAN	Rice based cakes made of rice flour, sugar, coconut, Pounded green gram & sweet cumin	
KOSPANG	Mix of cooked scraped coconut, sago, juggery rolled and steamed in a stringhopper	Lavariya (Sinhalese)
PISANG GORENG aka PILUS also CUCUR PISANG	Fried bananas, sugar and coconut milk mixture	
BELINGAI SANTAN	Wood apple, juggery and coconut milk	Divul Kiri (Sinhalese)
DADAR GULUNG	Stuffed pancake with grated coconut, sugar, cinnamon stick	Surut Appam (Tamil)

## Main rice/savoury dishes

Malay Name	Brief Description	Current Local Name
NASI PUTIH	Boiled plain glutinous rice	
NASI GORENG	Fried rice; served with vegetable garnishing & fried egg	
NASI TUMIS	Usually left over rice that is stir fried with condiments; onions; chillies and bits of maldivian fish	

NASI KEBULI	Rice cooked in ghee or butter and served with side dishes	Dungthel Buth (Sinhalese) The Burghers have adopted this dish and call “Lamprais”
NASI KUNYIT	Nasi kebuli with turmeric for colouring	Kaha Buth (Sinhalese)
NASI SANTAN	Rice cooked in coconut milk	Pachor (Tamil) Kiri Buth (Sinhalese)

## Religious Practice and Customs

The Malays as a part of the larger Muslim fraternity interacted closely with the Muslim Moors and shared common religious practices and festivals. In almost every garrison town the Malays constructed their own mosques which are still known as Malay mosques which were also attended by the Moors. One of the earliest Malay mosques in Colombo was the Wekande mosque built in Bai Kandi, i.e., the Slave Island, through a munificence of one Pandan Bali, a rich Javanese nobleman in 1786. Colombo’s grand mosque was also an architectural creation of a Malay headman, known as Hulu Balang Kaya in the late 18th century. Originally it must have served the needs of the Javanese and other Indonesian nobility who had been domiciled in the Kampung Pengeran, an adjacent settlement near Moor Quarters in Colombo.

By associating closely with the ubiquitous Moor community in Sri Lanka, the Malays could sustain and reinforce their religious beliefs and practices in a better environment than those available to the Cape Malays in South Africa who too hailed from similar background in the Archipelago. The Dutch divided their banishees into two

groups, one to be sent to Sri Lanka and the other to the far away South Africa. Sometimes, those who were first exiled to Sri Lanka such as the renowned Islamic scholar namely Shaikh Yusuf Mengkasar of Banten (1629-1699) were re-exiled to South Africa because they were deemed to be security threats to the Dutch interests. He was a famous Sufi scholar who compiled several of his religious texts while spending time in Sri Lanka. As early as the 18th century according to Babad Mangkubumi, a royal Javanese chronicle, the Malay royal exiles were known to have patronized weekly Sufi (mystical) gatherings conducted by two great saints namely Ibrahim Asmara and Ngidrur and the story is related further as to how fruits such as Mangoosteen and Rambutan were flown magically to be served in the gatherings. It may be interesting to note that some of the exiled Javanese Princes who had studied Islam in Sri Lanka were coveted religious leaders in the court of Jogjakarta. In reading their religious literature, both the Malays and Moors used similar Arabic scripts, in Gundul (Jawi), and Arabu-Tamil (Ariwi) respectively. They exchanged among themselves Arabic religious and literary texts. Some Malays like Baba Oonus

Saldin was quite adept in the Arabu-Tamil in which he produced a newspaper called 'Unmai', (the Truth) in the year 1900.

The early Malays seemed to have practiced most aspects of their culture brought from the Indonesia-Malaya areas. They conducted pantomimes and played instruments including the Gongs and Angklungs. They also held Pantun or poetry recital competitions on special communal gatherings, for example, in their wedding houses. The men and women enjoyed dancing together known as joget to the accompaniment of rabanas. The women were attired in Javanese-Malay style indigenous attire of Baju and Kurong while the men wore the batik Setangan., a type of Javanese head gear. Most of these practices have ceased due to passage of time. Modernization in life has taken a toll from perpetuating the traditional customs and traditions.

At times the Malays are pejoratively compared with the Sri Lankan Burghers because of their free life styles. As Saybahn Samat, a Malay journalist once cynically remarked that the Malays 'chose tavern or heaven' indicating that

they can be religiously lax or in the opposite adopt highly spiritualistic mode of living. Lately, the rise of extremist teachings inspired by Wahabi ideology is promoting a kind of 'Arabized' way of life among certain sections of the Muslims including the Malays. One visible consequence of this development is when the Malay women who hitherto used to wear traditional Malay dress of Baju and Kurong and Indian Sarees do now slowly beginning to don the black Nikab and Hijab, symbolizing a strict adherence to Islamic dress code. The religious minded Malays even tend to play down their racial identity and instead emphasise their belongingness to 'Umma' or a larger Islamic community.

No doubt that the Sri Lankan Malay community is facing constant challenges to preserve their identity. Their language can play a critical role in it. If the Malay families are able to preserve their Malay 'language' in the years to come by communicating with each other at least in their homes, their progeny may be able to perpetuate their existence as a separate identifiable community in future.

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*Dutch attacking the Portuguese Fort of Colombo 1656, From the original at Port of Colombo Maritime Museum*

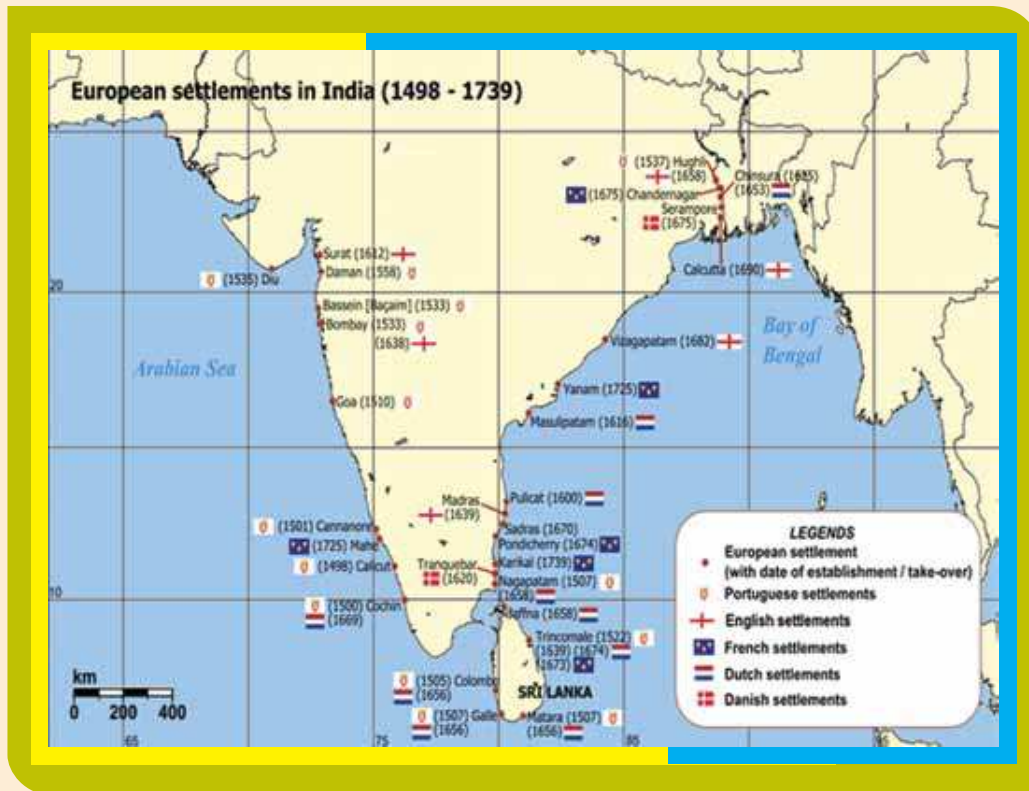
# The Dutch Burghers of Sri Lanka

Mr. Stephen Labrooy

## Introduction

From the 16th century, the maritime might and capability of Western Europe grew substantially. This began with Spain and Portugal in the 16th century, followed by Holland and Britain in the

17th and 18th (and to a lesser extent France and Denmark). By the 19th Century the others had fallen away and Britain had become master of the seas.



Sri Lanka's highly lucrative Cinnamon trade was a prize in itself to these Western Powers; and with its incomparable strategic location, the country became a highly desirable acquisition for aspiring empire builders. Consequently, Sri Lanka (or Ceylon as it was then known) became a colonial possession, consecutively under the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British for a period of approximately 450 years.

The colonial rule was in the following order & sequences.

- The Portuguese from 1505 to 1658 (when they surrendered to the Dutch)
- The Dutch from 1658 to 1796 - The Dutch
- The British from 1796 until Sri Lanka gained Independence in 1948.

## The Burghers

The Dutch Burghers form part of an Eurasian ethnic group generally referred to as "The Burghers" who are the descendants in the male line from the three European who had established their power in the Island.

The official and legal ethnic classification "Burgher" was defined in 1830 by Sir Richard Ottley, then Chief Justice of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as follows:

***“The name Burgher belongs to the descendants of the Dutch and Portuguese and other Europeans born in Ceylon; the right to this distinction must be decided by the country from which the father or paternal ancestors came. To whatever the number of generations through which the family had passed in the Island, if the male ancestor were Dutch, Portuguese or other Europeans, whoever may have been the female parents, if the parents were married, the offspring would be Burghers. If the parents were not married, the country of the mother would decide the question. If the right to be denominated Burgher be once lost by the legitimate father being a Cingalese or other Indian, It cannot be recovered.”***

Because of this definition, Burghers always have European surnames - not only of Portuguese, Dutch and British origin, but also from several countries all over Europe. The word “Burgher” itself is derived from the Dutch word “Burger” meaning a citizen of a town.

Within the general Burgher designation though, there are of course cultural differences between its three constituent parts. Long before Ottleys’ legal definition and for quite some time after it, these differences were in fact quite pronounced. For example, when it came to religion, the Portuguese were devoutly Catholic and the Dutch mainly ardent Calvinists - and vehemently anti Catholic - the British for their part, were mainly Church of England and for quite some time some of their descendants tended to hold themselves aloof from the “Burgher” designation, preferring to refer themselves as “Eurasian”. These differences, though quite inconsequential to any of the Burghers in today’s world, were very strong indeed historically. Because of the cultural differences, the Dutch Burghers had long sought their individual community identity which culminated in the formation of the Dutch Burgher Union in 1908. The Burghers of Portuguese descent formed their own Union in the 1920’s. Sadly, those of British descent never formed themselves into a Union or Association.

## The Dutch Burghers

The culture, attitudes and mind-set of the Dutch Burgher community are very much shaped by our history. To understand us therefore, it is worthwhile to re-visit our origins as well as looking at the history of our forebears - the V.O.C. Broadly speaking what we refer to here as the Dutch Period (1658- 1796) could equally- and perhaps even more appropriately- be called the “V.O.C. Period” \* for it was not the Netherlands nor the Dutch nation as such that came to Sri Lanka

but a Chartered Public Company, established and registered in Amsterdam: - the V.O.C (Vereenigde Oost- Indische Companie - literally translated as the United East India Company but much better known to the world as “The Dutch East India Company”. They came here, not as invaders seeking to subjugate the country under their rule, but, on the contrary, on the behest of and by treaty with the then King of Kandy Rajasingha 11 to drive out the Portuguese.



*\*Note Hereinafter in this chapter on the Dutch Burghers, the terms “Dutch” and “V.O.C” are to be considered interchangeable.*

*Also “Ceylon” wherever used shall mean Sri Lanka, and “Ceylonese” shall mean Sri Lankan.*

## The V.O.C



The V.O.C. was formed in 1602 in Amsterdam as a chartered public company by several trade houses combining together, and was granted a

Dutch Government monopoly to carry out trading activities between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan.

V.O.C. Headquarters in Amsterdam



Arguably the world's first multinational corporation, it had quasi-governmental powers viz; its own armies and navies, powers to establish colonies, coin its own currency, wage war, enter into treaties & establish legal systems. It's core

business, though, was international trading; Cinnamon and pepper from Ceylon, Cassia & Nutmeg and cloves from Indonesia, Cardamom and textiles from India, silk from China, precious metals from Japan and much more besides.



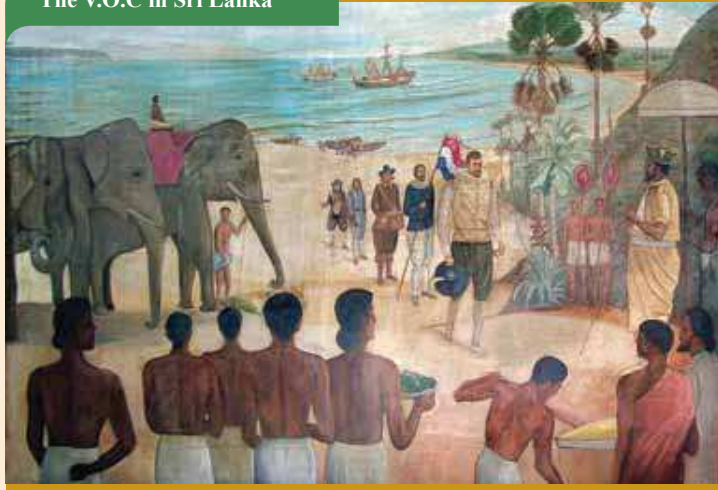
The shipyard of the V.O.C. in Amsterdam



Within a few decades the VOC controlled vast territories in South Africa, Ceylon and Indonesia - its main operations base - as well as establishing a considerable number of settlements in India, Malaysia, Japan and China. During its time, it sent out almost a million Europeans throughout Asia.

It also had the commercially enviable record of paying its shareholders a staggering average annual dividend of 18 percent for almost 200 years.

The V.O.C in Sri Lanka



*The Arrival in Batticaloa of Joris Van Spielbergen Admiral of the VOC in 1602  
by G Beling. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Dutch Burgher Union of Ceylon)*

## Early Contact prior to the Dutch Rule in the Maritime Provinces

Long before The Dutch Rule in the Maritime Provinces in Sri Lanka began - some 56 years before in fact - the V.O.C. had made three voyages to this country. The first two occurred in 1602 under the commands respectively of Admiral Joris Van Spielbergen and Admiral Sebalt De Weert. The first two promised much success for the Dutch: Van Spielbergen and the Kandyan King Vimala Dharma Suriya reportedly established a great rapport; the second voyage under De Weert of the same year resulted in a

basic agreement with the King to help to drive out the Portuguese. However, on the third trip when De Weert returned with 6 ships in 1603 to assist in the ousting of the Portuguese, it proved to be a catastrophe for the Dutch. De Weert and some 50 of his men were killed by the King's men for their failure to hold on to four captured Portuguese ships. After this, the VOC made it its policy to leave Sri Lanka well alone - which they did for more than three decades.

## 1636-1637 - prelude to the Dutch Rule in the Maritime Provinces

In 1636, the then King of Kandy - Rajasingha II - sought assistance from the Dutch. The Portuguese had become hated and feared, and nowhere more than in the Kingdom of Kandy itself. Apart from regular occurrences of atrocities against both Buddhists and Hindus - destruction of temples, forced conversions to Catholicism etc. the Portuguese military might on the Island had become too powerful for the King to take on himself.

These circumstances were exacerbated by his fears for his own position. He was at feud with his brother Vijayapala - Prince of the realms of Matale and Uva - who had laid his own claim to the Kandyan throne. Rajasinghe wrote to the Dutch Governor of the Coromandel Coast appealing for help. The Dutch Council of the East

Indies complied with his request and in 1637 sent four ships to Sri Lanka under the command of Captain Jan Payaart who signed an initial treaty with the king.

After this basic alliance was formed, the V.O.C responded swiftly. A fleet under the command of Admiral Westervolt arrived in Batticaloa in 1638 where their first target, the Portuguese Fort fell to a combined attack of Sinhalese troops on the ground and bombardment from the V.O.C ships.



Adam Westervolt



Rajasingha II

*Rajasingha II, from Robert Knox's  
A Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon, 1693*



Very shortly afterwards, a new and more comprehensive treaty was signed between the King and Admiral Westerwolt (on behalf of the States General, His Highness Prince Frederik Hendrik and the V.O.C). Basically, under the terms of this treaty, the Dutch were to be given a

virtual trading monopoly on completion of their military operation. The Westerwolt Treaty” of 1638, - as it came to be called - served as the basis for all future relations between the Dutch and the Kandyan kings.

Capture of some key Portuguese Forts around the Island ensued; Negombo, Trincomalee and Galle Forts fell in 1640.

The Portuguese though, did not give up easily - and an intervening 10 year truce made in Europe in 1641 between Portugal and the Dutch Republic led to a protracted situation. Battle resumed only in 1655.

Finally, after the fall of their most important Fort - that of Colombo in 1656,

followed by Manaar and Jaffna. The Portuguese formally surrendered to the Dutch in 1658 - twenty years after the Dutch military offensive began. Whilst the lucrative Cinnamon trade was certainly the commercial prize for the Dutch, an added motivation was probably the fact that the Dutch Republic had been at war with Spain (and therefore with their ally Portugal) over the Spanish occupation of the Netherlands (which only ended completely in 1714), and their hatred for Catholics a direct consequence. Interestingly their intolerance of Roman Catholicism was handed down to their descendants (I remember it being there up to my own Grandparents generation). Today it does not exist among us.

Willem Jacobszoon Coster



*Willem Jacobszoon Coster March 1640 - Aug 1640 - Conqueror of Negombo and Galle Forts - -Murdered In Kandy shortly after the Fall of Galle Fort to the Dutch.*



## Relations sour after victory

Mutual mistrust and bitter disagreements between the Dutch and the King followed their military success. This was owed to their varying respective interpretations of the provisions of the “Westerwolt Treaty”. The original treaty was written in Portuguese - a language that both signatories understood: but the Sinhalese held a Sinhala translation and the V.O.C, a Dutch translation. Differences arose from these translations. Failure by one party to carry out a certain function was seen by the other party as giving them the right to renege on something else

etc. Historians have since debated the rights and wrongs of the relative parties to the 1638 Treaty - which we are not going to involve ourselves with here. Suffice it to say that for decades that followed the fall of the Portuguese, relations between the Dutch and the Kandyan King and his successors were at best tenuous, and at worst openly hostile. Eventually, and much later, with a different Dutch Governor and a different Kandyan King, a peaceful and harmonious co-existence was achieved in a new treaty of 1766.

## Dutch Rule - the passion for Cinnamon

Dutch Rule took place mainly in the coastal areas as we can see from the map below. The areas marked as being under Dutch Control were,

incidentally, the areas of population for the early Dutch Burghers.



*Sri Lanka Mid 18th C Shaded areas denote Dutch Control*

Engraving of Colombo, circa 1680 Johannes Kip (1653-1722) and unknown engraver c. 1775



Dutch rule was characterized by commercialism and pragmatism. There was none of the messianic zeal of their predecessors the Portuguese - intent on making this country Catholic and part of Portugal, nor did they seek “glory in empire” or to “bring civilization to the natives” - as their successors here, the British. (Pragmatism, incidentally, forms a strong part of the Dutch Burgher character too.) Their focus was on the acquisition of Cinnamon and protection of their monopoly of its world-wide trade. Almost every action and policy of Dutch rule had Cinnamon at its heart, viz

- Dutch fervor to protect Cinnamon trees which grew in the wild gave rise to a widely unpopular land policy running contrary to population needs for food cultivation. The problem was somewhat eased by the V.O.C themselves commencing Cinnamon plantations in 1760's.
- The Forts they built around the country - some acquired from the Portuguese and improved upon - were primarily there to protect their

Cinnamon trade monopoly from Western competitors.

- Their administration was in fact basically the same indigenous administrative structure that the Portuguese had taken over from the Sinhalese - with the “headman” at its core. A cinnamon-oriented modification the Dutch made to it was the introduction of caste headmen with jurisdiction over their caste. The main beneficiaries were unsurprisingly, the Salagama (cinnamon peeler caste) with whom the Dutch had a close relationship. In fact, the Salagama - in the latter part of the Eighteenth century -were given more concessions than any other caste under Dutch rule. The result? Not only did the Salagama prosper but the V.O.C had a virtually uninterrupted supply of Cinnamon.
- The extensive Dutch-built canal systems, in Colombo, the West, East and South of the country might have been impressive works

of engineering in themselves and no doubt contributed to the general economy of the country, but the prime motivation behind them was the transport of produce- which of course was again largely Cinnamon<sup>1</sup>.

Ironically, arguably the greatest and most lasting contribution of the Dutch to this country was not Cinnamon driven; but it was the introduction of Roman-Dutch Law which made a great change to the social order - particularly marriage and property laws.

The Dutch continued to stay on until 1796 when the V.O.C collapsed into bankruptcy and Holland itself was occupied by France. The Dutch government eventually revoked the company's charter and took over its debts and possessions.

Ceylon was ceded to Britain in 1795 for "safe keeping" by the Stadt Holder of the Dutch Republic, Prince William V of Orange - who was himself taking refuge in London at the time. Sri Lanka along with South Africa was never returned to the Dutch though other Dutch possessions - Indonesia for example - were in fact returned to the Netherlands.

The legacies of the Dutch to this country were Roman - Dutch Law - which survives to this day as the basis of Sri Lanka's legal framework, their architecture, their furniture, the extensive canal system built to transport produce from inland areas to the ports, their food creations-most notably the "Lamprais" and last but not least the Dutch Burghers of Sri Lanka.

## The Early Dutch Burghers

When British rule began in 1796, there were an estimated 912 families left in this country by the V.O.C. Their attitude to the British in the early days was best summed up by a report from the First British Governor Lord North:

***"the Dutch inhabitants are inimical, being almost to a man ruined by our occupation of Ceylon"***

They were given a fairly stark choice by the new rulers; they could stay on here and swear allegiance to the British Crown or leave for Batavia (Jakarta) minus - for most of them - their

lands and properties. The British had made it especially difficult for them by bringing in a legal enactment prohibiting the purchase of houses and tenements by Europeans outside Colombo i.e. those Dutch descendants whose properties were outside Colombo i.e. in Jaffna, Trincomalee, Galle, Matara and Negombo could only therefore sell to indigenous buyers at huge losses.

Though some decided to leave, for most of these people the choice was to stay - quite apart from the sale of property restriction - this country had been their home for one and a half centuries; they had married into, or were mixed with the indigenous

<sup>1</sup> My own life experience is that the affinity between the Salagama and the Dutch- and consequently their descendants - continued long after Dutch Rule and the rich prize of a Cinnamon monopoly had passed into history. The writer distinctly remembers from his childhood that his own fathers' best friends were Salagama, many of whom had married Burgher women.

people whose language they spoke well and whose religion and customs they knew well. Many had their own properties here and had become used to a lifestyle which was unachievable in Europe. They also knew that their main employer, the V.O.C was bankrupt, that Holland itself was overrun by French troops and that if they went to Batavia - minus their personal wealth - they would face an uncertain future in starting all over again. Some might even have clung to the hope that Ceylon would be returned by the British to the Netherlands - a hope that was never fulfilled.

As for the new British administration, they had obtained for themselves potentially a wealth of useful and talented people with a century and a half of experience in this country, many of whom were mixed with local blood; some had been part of the former Dutch administration itself, a large number of them educated and professional people and others from all walks of life, down to simple artisans. They had though, a commonality- the European mindset with its sense of order and discipline, and the Protestant work ethic. Above all, their local knowledge gave them an ability to “get things done”. Bear in mind that after a 150 years in the country, they would have had appreciable “connections” with the Sinhala people in the South as well as the Tamil people in Jaffna.

Life though was not easy for the Burghers in those early days of British rule; many had to take up menial occupations to sustain themselves. Their circumstances are best described by Rev James Cordiner who was in Sri Lanka at the time:

***“The Dutch inhabitants of Ceylon are about nine hundred in number, and except a few families, are reduced to circumstances of great indigence; but by rigid and meritorious economy and some of the lesser labours of industry, they maintain an appearance in the eyes of the world, sometimes affluent and gay, always decent and respectable. They are chiefly composed of officers (prisoners of war) with their families and widows and daughters of deceased civil and military servants of the Dutch East India Company. The greater part of them are proprietors of houses which they let with considerable advantage to the English inhabitants. If a poor family should only possess one good house they retire into a smaller house or less convenient one, which they receive by relinquishing a more comfortable dwelling.”***

An initial hurdle for the early Dutch Burghers under British rule was that, for the most part, they did not speak English. Naturally, they spoke Dutch, and no doubt some of them would still have spoken their individual original European languages such as French and German; they also spoke and understood Sinhala and Tamil. The Dutch Burghers were quick to realise that the means to a better future was proficiency in English and they adopted English as their mother tongue but, as one can imagine, there was a considerable “learning curve” in the process - sometimes with humorous consequences! At the very beginning, for example, they were making literal translations of Sinhala into hilarious sounding “broken English phrases such as; “Almirah top got” (“Almaariya uda thiyanawa”) and “Border catch and go” (Eyenay allala yanda”). Phrases which we would still use today - in poking fun at ourselves.



## A Highly Successful Community - from the Mid 1800's to the early 1950's

From around the 1810's and onward Dutch Burghers gradually became more and more sought after. Some were appointed to magistracies, a few received commissions in the local newly formed regiments, others were employed in the revenue service, others took up commercial pursuits.

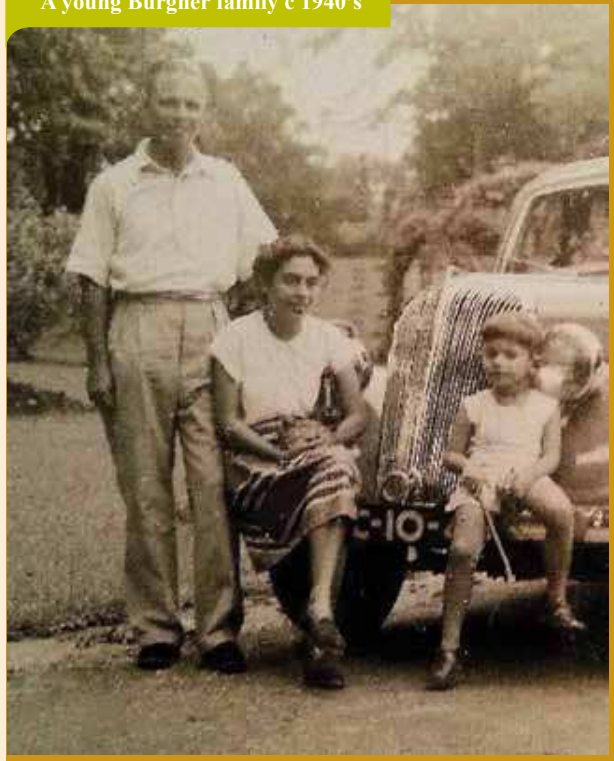
The poor education system in place at the time meant that Dutch Burghers filled the Clerical Service in posts of trust and responsibility. After the impetus of higher education - established from the 1830's - the Dutch Burghers rose to great prominence. In the words of Sir Emerson Tennent, Colonial Secretary on the Dutch Burghers in 1860:

*“They have risen to eminence at the Bar and occupied the highest positions on the Bench. They are largely engaged in mercantile pursuits, and as writers and clerks they fill places of trust in every administrative establishment from the Department of the Colonial Secretary to the humblest Police Court. It is not possible to speak too highly of this meritorious body of men by whom the whole machinery of Government is put into action. They may fairly be described in the language of Sir Robert Peel as the ‘brazen wheels’ of the executive which keep the golden hands in motion”*

A young Burgher wedding guest c 1930



A young Burgher family c 1940's



A Dutch Burgher Home in Colombo c 1915



The community grew and prospered under British rule and for the first eight years after Sri Lankan Independence in 1948

A young Burgher couple c 1900



## Remarkable achievements

**B**ear in mind that the Burgher population has rarely exceeded 46,000 in number and less than 1% of the total population. That their achievements in every field of human endeavor have belied their numbers is an understatement, they include:

- Four Chief Justices (Including Acting)
- 17 Supreme Court Judges: Arguably the most famous of these were Sir Francis Soertz K.C, 1886- 1951 who was also Acting Chief Justice of Ceylon on several occasions and Noel Gratiaen K.C. However, in the personal opinion of the author, the most remarkable achievement by a Burgher in terms of the Supreme Court must surely be that of Justice Percy Colin Thome', Supreme Court Judge in the late 1970's and early eighties, who though

very advanced in his legal career, literally "went back to school" to learn Sinhala to be sufficiently proficient to enable him conduct cases in Sinhala in the Supreme Court.

- Scores of District Court Judges, Magistrates, Advocates, Barristers & Proctors
- In the Medical field the list is no less impressive.

From the inception of the Sri Lanka Medical Association in 1887 up to 1972 (the height of the Burgher emigration from Sri Lanka), Dutch Burghers number 12 past Presidents of the Sri Association out of a total of 78. In fact, the Annual Memorial Lecture of the S.L.M.A is named after a very famous Burgher Doctor, Professor A.C.E Koch.

- Burghers are among the country's greatest names in Art. George Keyt is, of course the most famous artist our community produced and a memorable name from the famous Colombo '43 group. But let's not forget the other outstanding Burgher artists who also belonged to that group like Geoffrey Beling, George Claessen and Aubrey Collette. Neither can one fail to be impressed by the wonderful portraits by George de Niese, the quality of his son Terry's work or the huge talent of George Beven- still painting to-day.
- In Literature- Probably the three greatest Burgher names in the field of literature would be Michael Ondaatje, Sir Christopher Ondaatje

and Carl Muller. (Note: The Colombo Chetty Community also claim the Ondaatjes as their own. (As the saying goes- "success has many fathers").

- In Sport- World- class boxers in the 1950's like the Henricus brothers Basil & Barney- the latter being an Empire Games Gold medalist, and later, Malcolm Bulner in the 1960's. In cricket, David Heyn, Clive Inman, Vernon Prins and test cricketers Graham La Brooy and Michael Van Dort. famous Rugby players like Ian LaBrooy, Larry Foenander & "Letcho" Ephraums and world class athletes, Duncan White & C.T Van Geysel.

### Dr Richard Lionel Spittel (1881-1969)



A Surgeon - Author and Poet, Historian, anthropologist, Philanthropist, Environmentalist, Researcher and Campaigner for the Veddah Community

### George Keyt (1901-1993)



Considered to be Sri Lanka's most distinguished painter.

The greater part of his work was Cubist influenced though he himself claimed to be influenced by both Matisse as well as ancient Buddhist Art. In fact, Keyt frequently changed his styles.

### Lionel Wendt (1900-1944)



Musician, photographer, literature collector, critic, and cinematographer. The Lionel Wendt Art Theatre is dedicated to his memory.

### Duncan White M.B.E 1918-1998



Duncan White was the first Ceylonese to win an Olympic Medal (1948 - 400m Hurdles). In the 1950 British Empire Games in Auckland,

New Zealand, White won the 440-yard hurdles, only 0.3 seconds behind the world record.



## The early Nineteen Fifties - the “Burgher zenith”

By the early Nineteen Fifties, the Burgher Community was arguably at its zenith. Burghers were enjoying a success in inverted proportion to

their numbers. They held senior positions in all branches of Government Service as well as all the way down to the lower echelons.

## A montage of Dutch Burghers in the 1950's:

A Burgher Wedding in 1954



Engagement Photo of a Young Burgher couple 1948



Havelock Sports Club Champions 1951





Burghers virtually ran the Railways, the Customs, the Inland Revenue and the Port. They were top professionals: Lawyers, Judges, Doctors, Engineers, Surveyors, University Professors, Teachers & Accountants. In the business field, successful commercial personalities like Sam de Vos and Rosslyn Koch had emerged. If that were not enough they were making themselves renowned in Sport; Duncan White had won an Empire Games Gold Medal in 1950; for two seasons in 1951 & 52, The Havelocks Sports

Club (a club with an overwhelmingly Burgher membership at the time ) under the Captaincy of Ian LaBrooy won the Clifford Cup when no other team crossed their line - not only a feat unparalleled in Ceylonese Rugby Football - but made all the “sweeter” as many British expatriates formed a very large part of their competing teams at that time! Vernon Prins captained the All-Ceylon Cricket team and the public at large were enjoying international entertainment bought to them by Donovan Andree.

## 1956 and the Burgher “Exodus” from Sri Lanka

If all seemed perfect in the “Burgher universe” in the early 1950’s - it was about to end abruptly.

Both the British - at the time of giving us independence - and successive Sri Lankan administrations for 8 years after it, had completely overlooked if not ignored the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the Sinhala Buddhist population in this country who had had to put up with a poor education system, infrastructure and little chance of advancement. When they were enfranchised in 1948 and then, in 1956, were promised an “overnight” transformation of their situation by means of a single official language - they quite naturally they took it! The result was that in 1956, a strongly Ethno-Nationalistic Government was elected on the Promise of “Sinhala Only within 24 hours”. Hitherto, the language of the administration and the Courts had been English.

Burgher Government servants were now subject to proficiency tests in Sinhala - which most of them failed.

To make matters worse, under the Sinhala Only Act, the English medium of Education was to be abolished by being phased out. So now, not only did Burghers face losing their jobs in Government Service (at that time the most prized employment), they also faced the prospect that in time they would not be able to educate their children in their mother-tongue - English. Added to this were almost daily post 1956 utterances in the Press from the more “redneck” element of the new Government promising to “ban Western dancing” and “ban Western films” etc.

Unsurprisingly, the Burghers felt they were no longer wanted here. As one Foreign Newspaper put it “The Burghers felt that they were being outcast by the Sinhalese Language Act of 1956”.

The words of the late Justice Colin-Thome' describe the situation more even-handedly:

"We were ruined by the Sinhala-only Act, because by then English had become our mother tongue ..... We made mistakes too ....we were out of sympathy with Buddhism, the religion of most of the Sinhalese, and with their language and culture.....As we held a lot of jobs in proportion to our size, that also created a lot of antipathy towards us".

The community began to leave the country. Thousands applied as migrants to Australia, the U.K and Canada. In the Sixties and Seventies, emigration by the community turned into a flood. The main destination for most of them was Australia which was believed to be the country with the best opportunities. Soon after 1956, exchange control regulations began to be applied which restricted the money they could take with them but they still left. After the 1970 election of a regime which introduced draconian socialistic austerity - and a consequent foreign exchange allocation for emigrants of Stg 3.50 per person -and they still continued to leave.

To-day we estimate upwards of 80,000 Burghers (and their descendants) in Australia alone. They might have left this country determinedly but they did not leave without deep sadness in their hearts. The writer remembers the Nineteen Sixties when dozens of Burgher families who were either friends, relations or even employees of his parents, stopped by at our family home in Havelock Road to say goodbye to his parents en route to Australia. Without exception, they were unbelievably sad and many had tears in their eyes at the prospect of making a permanent farewell to their home land. Whatever their perceived shortcomings might have been, I believe one thing the Politicians overlooked was that the Burghers had an enormous love of this country- and still do.

I also firmly believe that had there not been an official policy of abolishing the English medium of education, most of my community would have not only remained here but survived and eventually thrived again.

## The Burghers today

To-day, the Burghers that are left in this country have long adapted to their much changed situation. Though many have been assimilated into the majority community there remain others who despite their education being in Sinhala have been kept in touch with their roots by the fact that English remained their language at home. Moreover, the restoration of the English stream of education in 2002, and the presence

of International schools over the past twenty years has helped. The younger Burghers of today have both a command of the Sinhala language that way outstrips their forbears as well as a general proficiency in English. As for the older generations who did not migrate (some of us even came back!), their roots are far too deeply embedded in this country for them to even think of leaving.

## What is a Dutch Burgher ?

The Dutch Burgher Union defines the terms “Dutch Descendants” or “Dutch Burghers” as being “descendants in the male line of all those from European countries, who were either in

the service of the rule of the Dutch East India Company (V.O.C) in Ceylon or Vrijburgers (those from European countries who emigrated to Ceylon under V.O.C Rule).”.

## Characteristics, Culture and Mindset of the Dutch Burghers

There are several characteristics of our community which come from our history.

**Our names** - and their origin are the most obvious example: Holland being a very small country, V.O.C. employees came here from all parts of Europe. It was the same with the “Vrijburgers” (people not directly employed by the V.O.C. but who came to live and settle here from Europe under V.O.C. rule). In point of fact would not be untrue to say that the greater part of the Dutch Burgher ancestors came in fact from outside the Netherlands. Our names reveal this:

Some of us obviously have Dutch names such as Anthonisz, Speldewinde, Wambeek, Beekmeyer, Bartholomeusz, Christoffelsz, Fretz\* Kriekenbeek\* Bulner\*, de Kretser, De Vos, Dircksze, Drieberg\*, Deutrom, De Neys, Jansz, Sela Scharenguivel & Henricus for example.

Others have Belgian names such as Toussaint\*, Thiedeman \*and Van Geyzel.

German names abound Dutch Burgher lineage, like: Moldrich, Beling, Francke, Heyn, Koch,

Kellar, Muller, Lorensz, Martensteyn, Dickman, Martensz\*and Von Bergheim.

France too, is represented: Grenier, La Brooy and Misso being some examples

Scandinavian names: Alvis, Foenander, Lourensz and Meurling.

Swiss names such as: Piachaud\* and Colin Thome’.

Austrian names, such as Ebert

British names like Morgan - of whom Sir Richard Morgan is one of our community’s most famous sons. Even some of the Brohier family came here from Jersey - UK’s Channel Islands , though the name is undoubtedly originally French.

Even Iberian names (legacies perhaps of the prior Spanish occupation of the Netherlands) came with the V.O.C. like D’Silva, Pereira, De Zilva and Pieres. To confuse matters even more, the V.O C even sent a few Fernando’s and De Silva’s too - two very well known Sinhalese names today.

\*Note :- The names marked with an asterisk are, sadly, now believed to be extinct in this country.

## **Mixed (and re-mixed) Ethnicity and Appearance**

As is evident, our ethnicity on the paternal side is mixed European, to which our ancestors added a “remix” with Portuguese descendants/Sinhalese and Tamils. The net result - an enormous gene pool - to say the least! Being of mixed race, in appearance we range from, on the one hand, a European complexion to that of being virtually indistinguishable from Sinhalese or Tamils on the other. It is not uncommon for siblings in the same family to be both fair and dark skinned.

## **Culture**

Our culture is best summed up as being more Western-oriented but with strong Eastern leanings too! The vast majority of our Community belong to the Christian faith - of all denominations - though like A.E Buultjens, and George Keyt - there are a few notable exceptions.

- Language: English remains our mother-tongue (which we adopted in 1796) and is always spoken in our homes. But this is not to say that we would not occasionally use the occasional Sinhala expression too - when it best expresses the circumstances of a situation. We listen to Western Music, read Western literature and English language newspapers, listen to English language Radio stations and watch English language TV Channels and Western Movies.
- Our dress is Western.
- Our homes are generally simply furnished but

would almost always have at least one piece of Antique (or reproduction) Dutch period furniture. Burgher housewives are noted for generally being house-proud. For example, even the smallest, poorest of one of our homes would boast a spotless toilet! Gardens too, however small, would generally be well tended. We are usually dog lovers too - so there would almost certainly be a dog as a family member.

- When it comes to food, however, there is a definite difference; “Sinhala Kaema” is a huge part of our gastronomy! Lunch in a Dutch Burgher home is almost inevitably Rice and Curry and a special Yellow Rice and Curry for Sunday lunch with perhaps a Burgher speciality curry - like a Black Pork curry. Dinner though is usually a different matter. Western dishes - some with a Burgher “twist” like Beef Smore, Rissoles, Crumb chops etc - are more likely to be order of the day. The exceptions for an evening meal being of course Hoppers and String hoppers. The most famous Dutch Burgher food creation- the Lamprais\* - is obviously especially dear to our hearts and this could be eaten either a lunch or dinner meal. Breakfast could be either Western-Eggs Bacon & Toast - or equally Sri Lankan - String-hoppers, Kiri Hodhi or Mollagthanni, egg “rulang”, curry and sambols. Tea time would include Patties (occasionally quite fiery ones too), Asparagus sandwiches and - another Burgher speciality - Love Cake.

*\*Note - The commercial availability of Lamprais today has, in most cases, altered its identity. Originally, Lamprais were made only in family homes - with*



*respective families claiming that “theirs” was the definitive recipe! However the three-meat stock and the three mixed meat curry, was always a “given”. Originally Lamprais were tiny in size- no more than a heaped palmful was deemed the optimum size for maximum flavour. Servings in those days would be 5 Lamprais for a man and 2-3 for a lady.*

A perfect example of our “mixed gastronomy” would be Christmas. I remember as a child that there was a gastronomic “ritual” which never varied. Christmas Eve dinner would always be String-hoppers and Mollagathanni. Christmas day breakfast would always consist of Breudher Cake - a Dutch Burgher speciality cake always baked in a fluted pan and made of flour, yeast, sugar, sultanas and an inordinately large quantity of eggs - and eaten with Dutch Cheese.

A late Christmas lunch actually followed the British tradition of Roast Turkey and Ham leaving no room for dinner! In between lunch and dinner would be visits to and from the relatives, during which time large amounts of Love Cake and Christmas cake would be consumed accompanied by a tippie of Milk- Wine (another Burgher concoction of Arrack/Milk/Juices and Spices)- or even something stronger.

- Our mindset: The hallmark of a Burgher would be what I would call the 50:50 mindset. In part European - disciplined, particularly with regard to work and duty, in part fun, enjoyment and with Asian warmth too ! Another characteristic is pragmatism. In more recent years we have reverted to the pragmatic attitude of our V.O.C. forbears

towards, for example, mixed marriages. Our ancestors came from all over Europe and many were of mixed European descent even to begin with. Here, European women were few or non-existent until very much later so they had no compunction in marriages (legal or de-facto) with and having families by local women- Portuguese descendants/Sinhalese / Tamil, etc. Unlike the British colonists who tended to look down their noses at people of mixed descent - even their own - the Dutch Burghers have accepted mixture as part of our heritage. There was indeed a period - particularly throughout the first half of the twentieth century - when the community went to inordinate lengths to attempt to preserve its cultural identity and Dutch Burghers were strongly discouraged from marrying outside their community - and at one time even discouraged from marrying Roman Catholics! That part of our history is long disappeared - unarguably helped on its way by the “Burgher Exodus from Sri Lanka” of the second half of the Twentieth Century.

- Apolitical: We are an apolitical community and pragmatism rules when it comes to politics. Our ancestors served the V.O.C., then the British, and, after Independence, the Government in power. As a community we have never had political affiliations and our representatives in Parliament, (and before that in the Legislative Council), have nearly always been Government appointed representatives of our community.
- Sociable: We generally have the reputation of generally being sociable and hospitable people. The epithet “work hard and play hard” could probably have been made for

us! Despite being driven by a strong work ethic, we Burghers love to enjoy ourselves too and have a strong sense of fun - or, as one would say in this country, “put a party”! Generally, Dutch Burghers get on well with all communities in this country. It would not be untrue to say that most of our best friends number non-Burghers. We do tend to feel “comfortable in our skins” and harbour no guilt about our heritage or our ethnicity. Perhaps this stems from the knowledge that our ancestors did not come here as would-

be conquerors but by invitation. We have a reputation for plain speech and speaking our minds - or in modern vernacular - “telling it like it is”.

We are proud of our own ethnic identity, our history and the achievements of our community but are especially proud to be Sri Lankan- a country we have always loved as our own - and still do! We are happy to be a part - albeit a small and ever- diminishing part - of this country’s incredibly rich cultural fabric.

## Population :

Sadly, there a few of us left in this country. Although the 2012 census put the overall Burgher population at 38,000, I believe this to be an over-estimate. The real overall number of Burghers, I believe is closer to 20,000 of which those of Dutch descent would probably number no more than about 8,000 most of whom live in the Western Province. The reason for the big discrepancy in

estimates is simply this: a great many with Burgher names have been completely assimilated into the majority community and no longer have any cultural links to the Burgher Community. Whilst the names might remain, culture has changed. If a mother-tongue changes then so too, inevitably and invariably, does the way of life and culture.

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# The Portuguese Burghers of Sri Lanka

Mr. Earl Barthelot

## Introduction

Sri Lanka is well known for its diversity with over 22 numerically small communities and majority communities such as Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. Burgher community is one of the numerically small communities. Large proportions

of the Burghers do live in the Batticaloa District and a small proportion live both in Trincomalee and Ampara District. At the same time there are Portuguese Burghers living in all parts of the country in small numbers.

The Portuguese era marked the end of medieval Sri Lanka and the beginning of modern Sri Lanka. It changed the island's orientation away from India and gave it a unique identity moulded by almost 500 years of Western influence due to the presence of three successive European powers : the Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796) and the British (1796-1948). The Portuguese cultural imprint can be analysed by examining: (a) those who claim Portuguese descent (the Portuguese Burghers), (b) those who do not claim Portuguese descent but who follow the Roman Catholic faith, (c) those who are neither of Portuguese descent nor follow the Catholic faith but nevertheless underwent a sociocultural transformation. Language is a necessary element in the set of culture. The other elements are subjective and could include religion, food, dress, music and dance.

The interaction of the Portuguese and the Sri Lankans led to the evolution of a new language, Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole, which flourished as

a lingua franca in the island for over three and a half centuries (16th to mid-19th). Pidgins and Creoles are contact languages; they evolve when people who do not speak each other's mother-tongue come into contact. Pidgins only survive as long as the interlingual contact lasts and are generally short-lived. The etymon of Pidgin is business. A Creole is a Pidgin which has become the mother-tongue of a speech community. Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole, a subset of Indo-Portuguese (the Portuguese Creole that flourished in coastal India), has been the solution to the inter-communication problems that arose when the Portuguese and Sri Lankans came into contact. In Sri Lanka, miscegenation reinforced the Creole as the mestiços (offspring of a Portuguese father and a Sri Lankan mother) were bilingual – they were proficient in the Creole and Sinhala or Tamil. Boxer (1961: 61) comments that the Eurasians (mestiços), or even slave women, kept alive the use of the Portuguese language in places like Batavia, Malacca and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), which were under Dutch control.

## Portuguese forts

There are several Portuguese built forts all around the island. They are:

### **Kalutara fort**

The Portuguese first built a fort in Kalutara and was surrendered to the Dutch in 1655 without a shot being fired; it was later enlarged by the conquering Dutch with the addition two bastions. Very little of it remains today.

### **Kayts Island fort and Delft Island fort**

Kayts Island Fort, also known as Urundai Fort, was built by the Portuguese in 1629 and was abandoned in 1651. In the late 1600s, the Dutch took control of the fort however they did not undertake any renovations, unlike many of the other former Portuguese forts. The fort is horseshoe shaped with four circular bastions, built to protect the Jaffna Peninsula.

## **Mannar fort**

Built on the island of Mannar by the Portuguese in 1560, it surrendered to the Dutch on 22 February 1658 and was rebuilt by the Dutch in 1696. On 5 October 1795 the Dutch surrendered to the British. The fort has four bastions and it's still in good condition.

## **Matara fort**

The fort was built by the Portuguese about 1550 but the actual fort was built by the Dutch when they took Matara, after the capture of Galle. The remains of the fort are in good preservation.

## **Menikkadawara fort**

Menikkadawara fort was built by Portuguese in 1599 with the intention of operations against Kandyan forces. It was not major fort, but it had strategical important. Dutch map indicates it as "Tontotte fort".

## **Negombo fort**

A small but important fort in the town of Negombo, north of Colombo was built by the Portuguese to defend Colombo. In 1640 the Dutch destroyed it and rebuilt it not on the usual square pattern, but on a pentagonal one, though it had only four bulwarks. The fort was located on a narrow strip of land between a lagoon and an inlet of the sea. It was surrounded by moats, and the gate was accessed via a drawbridge. The English occupied it in 1796. Today only part of the walls and an arched gateway remains of the fort. It is used as a prison by the Department of Prisons.

## **Pooneryn fort**

Built in the Pooneryn area of north portion of the island first by the Portuguese to protect its possessions in Jaffna, it was expanded by the

Dutch till in 1770 it was recorded that it was square shaped with two bastions at opposite corners; the rampart on each of the sides was about 30 metres and was garrisoned till the late 18th century. The British built a rest house in 1805. Since 1983 due to the civil war it was garrisoned by the Sri Lankan Army till it withdrew from the Pooneryn area in 1991; and recaptured in 2009. Ruins of the fort remains, however in bad condition.

## **Ratnapura fort**

The fort was built by the Portuguese, between 1618 and 1620, in Ratnapura. It was later captured and destroyed by the Kandyan king Kirti Sri Rajasinha.

## **Ruwanwella fort**

It was originally built as stockade in the 1590s by the Portuguese; however, the Dutch, in 1665, built a wooden fort. The British, in 1817, built a new fort with two bastions and used as an outpost. Today it remains in good condition and houses a police station.

## **Hanwella fort**

The original fort was built by the Portuguese in 1957, at Hanwella. The fort was subsequently captured by the Dutch, who constructed a larger fort. In 1786 it fell under the British rule and fell into disrepair. The site is currently occupied by the Hanwella Rest House and the ruins of the fort can still be identified.

## **Batticaloa Fort – 1628**

## **Jaffna fort – 1618**

The Portuguese forts which were captured by the Dutch were named as Dutch Forts and now they are called the Dutch Forts.

## 1.1 Historical background

The Portuguese who landed in this island at the beginning of the sixteenth century held sway over its maritime provinces for well over a century.

History reveals that Batticaloa was taken by the Portuguese and retained as part of their occupied territory until 1639 when the Dutch made themselves of this District.



About the 15th century, Batticaloa District formed part of the Kandyan Kingdom, when the Sinhala Kings held sway, and Batticaloa was known as 'Puliyanduwa'. Though known as Puliyanduwa in the days of old, Batticaloa did have another name of 'Mada Kalapuwa'. The Portuguese who came in gave this town a new name 'Batecalou' and this name was changed to 'Batticalou' by the Dutch and to 'Batticaloa' by the British who followed the Dutch. Joa and de Cote states that the District had much rice which they called Bate, hence the Portuguese called the Batticaloa District 'the Kingdom of Rice'. The British anglicised Batecalou to Batticaloa and called it the 'Greenery of the East'.

During this period, the Portuguese did build a Fort in Batticaloa on a site least vulnerable from sudden attack and inaccessible to big vessels from the sea. The fort was erected in a corner of Puliyantivu which was surrounded by the Batticaloa lagoon. This lagoon formed a natural barrier against attack on two flanks of the fort. The moat served as an adequate line of defence on the land side.

The Portuguese though overpowered in Batticaloa by the combined army of the Dutch and the Sinhalese were nevertheless fearless, brave and untiring warriors. During the Dutch and the British period, these Portuguese Burghers are said to have suffered much, and when the subsequent conquerors expelled these Portuguese descendant from their kingdom, they are believed to have been settled in certain parts of the Kandyan Kingdom.

The Sinhala Only Act, formally the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956, was an act passed in the Parliament of Ceylon in 1956. The act replaced Sinhalese as the official language of Ceylon. The act was controversial as supporters of the act saw it as an attempt by a community that had just gained independence to distance themselves from their colonial masters, while its opponents viewed it as an attempt by the linguistic majority to oppress and assert dominance on minorities. During this period most of the well-educated Burghers left the Island and migrated to other countries.



Then followed the prolonged war and tsunami which paved the way for the Burghers to internally displace and also migrate to other countries too. We would like to create links and establish connection with the Burghers who are displaced and migrated.

#### *What are the different names they are called*

It has been common practice in discussing the Burghers of Sri Lanka to distinguish between those of Dutch descent, the “Dutch Burghers”, and those of Portuguese descent, the “Portuguese Burghers”, or more derogatorily, the “Portuguese Mechanics” or “Dhurai”. In Tamil the term “Parangi” and Sinhala “Lanci” is used to address the Portuguese Burghers. Some of the locals address the Burghers as “Dhurai”

#### • **Leaders of respective communities**

The Batticaloa Burgher Union which was established in 1920s has been nurturing and preserving the culture, tradition and rituals of the Burghers up to date. The Burgher Union has established area committees in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka in the villages where the Burghers live. There are 15 area committees. The representatives of each area committees gather for meetings every month at the Burgher Union at No. 31, St. Sebastian’s Street, Batticaloa.

With the initiation of Mr. Earl Barthelot, Secretary (2010, 2012-2014) area committees formed in areas where Burghers are living in villages in the Eastern Province which now counts to 13 including of those from Trincomalee and Akkaraipattu. Over time the membership of The Burgher Union – Batticaloa has grown to include Burghers living on the East Coast,

from as far Trincomalee, Batticaloa and south as Akkaraipattu. Our aim is to extend our Burgher membership to those living in what is known as ‘outstation’ areas of Sri Lanka. We would especially like to welcome those living in Jaffna, Mannar, Matara, Kandy, Hambantota etc.

The Presidents of the Burgher Union – Batticaloa have included Messrs Barthelot, Peters, Cecil Ockersz, Ronald Rosario, Claver Ragel, Regis Ragel, Sonny Ockersz , Bonny Justin Vincent, Terrence Sellar and Terry Stockvas

#### • **Inter relationships**

Some commentators believe that the Burghers’ own mixed backgrounds have made their culture more tolerant and open. While inter-communal strife has been a feature of modern Sri Lankan life, some Burghers have worked to maintain good relations with other ethnic groups. However, prejudices within the community as a result of a condescending attitude outside of it, have caused some migrant Burghers to take on the traditions of the country in which they reside and disconnect from the ties to their country afterwards.

Many Sinhalese adopted Portuguese surnames-although most were modified to a degree-but this practice did not necessarily denote conversion to Roman Catholicism. Such names (and their Portuguese form) include Corea (Correia), Croos (Cruz), De Abrew (Abreu), De Alwis (Alves), De Mel (Melo), De Saram (Serra), De Silva (Da Silva), De Soysa or De Zoysa, Dias, De Fonseka or Fonseka (Fonseca), Fernando (Fernandes), Gomes or Gomis, Mendis (Mendes), Perera (Pereira), Peiris or Pieris (Peres), Rodrigo

(Rodrigues), Salgado, and Vaas (Vaz). The last example has become well-known in international cricket due to Chaminda Vaas, formerly Sri Lanka's most successful new-ball bowler.

- **Salient features**

Burghers may vary from generation to generation in physical characteristics; some intermarried with the British and produced descendants with predominantly European phenotypes, including fair skin and a heavier physique, while others were almost indistinguishable from Sinhalese or Tamils.

Phenotypically Burghers can be either light skinned or dark skinned, depending on their ancestral history it is common to find Burghers with dark to light brown skin (usually Portuguese Burghers) and possess European facial features common to the Mediterranean basin. In some Portuguese Burgher families it is common to have both, very dark children and children with fair skin.

- **Current status**



The Burgher population in the District of Batticaloa only forms 5% of the population,

while the Tamils are a majority community and the Muslims come a second. Hence very often the results of the election, quite naturally showed that the voters had always been community conscious. The first MP had always been a Tamil and very often the second MP was a Muslim. It is natural, probably, that after the elections, the 1st MP had to look after the interests of the Tamil population while the 2nd had to cater to the needs of the Muslims.

After the country gained independence, and when the Government decided that the children should be taught in the mother tongue and that children of parents who were neither Tamil nor Sinhala should be given the option to have their children education in Portuguese and English, and no provision was made here in Batticaloa for the community that formed five percent of the population. The parents were not given a choice. Whether they liked it or not, they were forced to send their children either to the Sinhala medium or Tamil medium schools.

These children had to learn one of these languages and compete with those whose mother tongue had been the national languages. Universities thus became out of bounds for these children. Job opportunities were nil, for they had not only to compete with the Tamil and Sinhala children, but also have had the need to make the necessary entries in the 'Race' column.

Presidential commission on constitutional reform in Sri Lanka recently visited Batticaloa to record the grievances. The Burgher Union highlighted the following:

1. As Burghers we feel and realize that the Burghers are not recognized as a community in Sri Lanka for following reasons.
  - a. In the census Burghers are mentioned as others, even in the District Secretariat statistical book too. Therefore it must be mentioned as “Burghers”.
  - b. Burghers are not allowed to wear our cultural or traditional dress at work place, this should be included in the constitution and if it is mentioned already, it should be reinstated.
  - c. We are not given equal ground or right to learn, teach and speak our mother tongue at school or any other places. Opportunities for Burghers should be created to study their mother tongue at schools.
  - d. Our existence and history is not taught at school or media. Other communities too should learn the history of Burghers, existence, culture, tradition, cuisine, dress, sports etc at school and at the University which will bring knowledge, understanding, acceptance, co-existence and unity in the country.
  - e. We are not given any opportunity or chances to practice, learn and to preserve our culture, heritage and tradition to our younger generation and to maintain the artefacts that remain the country. Opportunities should be given for these.
  - f. Our heritage and our traditional game is foot ball. Burghers are not given any facilities or motivation to play and practice the game of foot ball. We the Eastern Burghers need at least a play ground to play.
  - g. Burgher names are difficult to be written in the local languages. We prefer to write it in English. But our need is not recognized in this country at present. Birth certificate, Marriage certificate, National Identity card etc are the preferred documents.
  - h. Job opportunities for the Burghers at government institutions are not given. The percentage systems of giving job opportunities affect the Burghers, as the Burghers are numerically small and not even 1% of the entire population in Sri Lanka. This situation should be changed.
  - i. Election system in Sri Lanka does not give room for numerically small communities such as Burghers to represent at the parliament, municipality, provincial council or pradeshiya sabha. Numerically small communities should be treated equally and impartially as other communities.
  - j. We believe Sri Lankans have the right to practice any religion. The government does not recognize the religious rights of the numerically small communities. Therefore we do not enjoy the rights enjoyed by the majority communities.
  - k. War and tsunami has made the Burghers seek shelter in different parts of the country. No efforts taken towards gathering the Burghers at one place at least once in a year. We need a place such as Nelum Pokana for the Eastern Burghers.
2. Sri Lankan Government do not take any efforts maintaining ties with the Portuguese government to the extent it is done by the Indian government especially in Delhi and

Goa. As the SL government is allowing the Indian government to help the Tamils, if the Portuguese government is allowed to help the Portuguese Burghers in the East, it will help the country at large.

3. The National Flag should symbolize the diverse communities that live and the Unity and co-existence and peace in Sri Lanka.
4. Local industries that belong to each community must be recognized and embraced.

5. In the Independence Day celebrations and events Burghers also should be included.

The Burghers of Batticaloa are today a frustrated lot for these reasons.

We have problems unresolved. These problems are discussed quite regularly at our meetings of the Burgher Union. But, or what use of it? How far can our voices travel?

## 2. Population and Geographical distribution

At the 1981 Census, the Burghers (Dutch and Portuguese) were almost 40,000 (0.3% of the population of Sri Lanka). Many Burghers immigrated to other countries. There are still 100 families( 4888 in numbers) in Batticaloa and Trincomalee and 80 Kaffir families in Puttalam

that still speak the Portuguese Creole; they have been out of contact with Portugal since 1656. The Burgher population worldwide is approximated to be around 100,000, concentrated mostly in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

## 3. Language

This community of people have still not forgotten their language Portuguese. The Portuguese spoken by them has been described as Creole Portuguese. Ian R. Smith in his books has stated that the Portuguese spoken today has incorporated some distinctive features of the local Batticaloa Tamil dialect. The long and tenacious history of the Creole Portuguese speech in the island, Batticaloa harbours the only significant concentration of creole speakers now in Sri Lanka

and their fluency is being strongly threatened by the local emphasis on Tamil.”

The Portuguese descendants have not, to a great extent, followed the local Tamil/ Moor kinship structure. There is very little evidence of ‘close’ cross cousin marriage. Probably this may be due to the Catholic ban on marriage within the prohibited degrees of kinship.



## Sinhala words of Portuguese origin

This vocabulary influence was remarkable: there was a rapid absorption of perhaps a thousand Portuguese words into Sinhala and Tamil. These "loan words" as they termed by lexicographers rarely appear in the same form as the original; the vast majority have undergone naturalisation.

Examples include: almariya (wardrobe), annasi (pineapple), baldiya (bucket), bankuwa (bench),

bonikka (doll), bottama (button), gova (cabbage), kabuk (laterite, a building material), kalisama (trousers), Kamisaya (shirt), kussiya (kitchen), lensuwa (handkerchief), masaya (month), mesaya (table), narang (orange), nona (lady), paan (bread), pinturaya (picture), rodaya (wheel), rosa (pink), saban (soap), salada (salad), sapattuwa (shoe), simenti (cement), sumanaya (week), toppiya (hat), tuwaya (towel), viduruwa (glass).

## 4. Religion/s



The Portuguese Burghers are Catholic to a man and generally devoted Catholics too. The Catholic Church (Chapel) at the Sand Bar dedicated to the Our Lady of Voyage is believed to have been constructed by the Portuguese.

## 5. Life style



The majority of the Portuguese descendants are craftsmen. Among these mechanically gifted people are found expert black smiths, key smiths, leather product makers, master carpenters, tailors, printers, painters and mechanics. Out of cast – off pieces of iron, these gifted Burgher mechanics forge many articles noted in the town for their cheapness and high quality. These range from parts of heavy machinery to kitchen knives. With a long tradition of mechanical aptitudes behind them, there is practically nothing that is beyond capabilities of these black- smiths.

These Portuguese craftsmen are not only talented blacksmiths and gifted carpenters. Until recently when the Government decided to withdraw all firearms from the residents of Batticaloa for

security reasons, Batticaloa's only gunsmiths were Portuguese Burghers. With the withdrawal of guns, these men have been forced to put their shutters down or turn to other crafts like carpentry and cycle repairs.

Till recent times, the only owners of printing presses in Batticaloa have all been Burghers. Even in the Printing press managed by the Catholic clergy, the master printers and binders were all of Portuguese origin. It is an undeniable fact that Batticaloa's best painter and block maker was the later Clarence Hendrick, also a delightful musician. He was a violinist without whom no Burgher function was complete.

At a time when English was the medium of instruction in schools, the children of these Portuguese Burghers were in a better position to seek white collar jobs. The community had given the town some of its finest public servant and teachers and many Catholic priests. In addition to these priests, there are quite a number of nuns in the various congregations working both in the diocese and outside it.

In addition, there are a few of the members of the community who have been able to secure positions in the administrative and banking service.

### **a. Food and costume**

Most Burgher people have preserved Western customs; especially among those of Portuguese ancestry their European religion, language, and surnames are retained with pride.

Burgher culture is a rich mixture of East and West, reflecting their ancestry. They are the most Westernised of the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Most of them wear Western clothing, it is not common for a man to be seen wearing a sarong, or for a woman to wear a sari.

A number of elements in Burgher culture have become part of the cultures of other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. For example, baila music, which has its origin in the music of 16th-century Portugal, has found its way into mainstream popular Sinhalese music. Lacemaking, which began as a domestic pastime of Burgher women, is now a part of Sinhalese culture too. Even certain foods, such as love cake, bol fiado (layered cake), (savory meatballs) and lamprais, Thrutha, Bafal, Oil cake, Bread, Pickle, Milk toffee, Pasan, Popochi, Pemprethu, cookies, empatha, Pork curry, muskat, varieties of soup have become an integral part of Sri Lankan national cuisine.

Those who assume that Sri Lanka's hot curries were the creation of the Islanders will be surprised to learn that the Portuguese introduced chillies to the local cuisine. Until then, pepper had been the means by which curries were given a 'heaty' (Sri Lankan English) taste. Not so surprising, considering the local lack of knowledge regarding bread revealed in the comment that the Portuguese ate "hunks of white stone", is that they were responsible for the establishment of bread-making. They also introduced the tomato. The Islanders took to Portuguese cakes, such as the bolo fiado or bolo folhado, a layer cake filled with cadju (cashews), and sweets such as boruwa Oil cake, Bread, Pickle, Milk toffee and fuguete. And many of the Sri Lankan sweetmeats are of Portuguese origin

Illustrations in Portuguese and Dutch descriptions of the Island in the 16th and 17th centuries reveal that the Sinhalese soldier's dress was of Portuguese influence. There is an engraving from Description of Malabar and Ceylon (1672) by the Dutchman Philip Baldaeus that depicts the reception of his fellow-countryman, explorer Joris van Spilbergen, by King Vimaladharmasuriya I. The king's guards are shown wearing a Portuguese-type helmet, white jacket and kilt.

Moreover, the kings of the Portuguese, Dutch and British era invariably wore Portuguese costume, complete with hat and shoes. This is demonstrated in Robert Knox's "An Historical Relation of Ceylon" (1681), in which there is an illustration of King Rajasingha II (1635-1687). "His apparel is very strange," Knox remarks, "not after his own country. he has a long band hanging down his back of Portuguese fashion."



## 6. Important events (Social, Cultural practices etc)

Although the Portuguese have carefully maintained the traditions and customs of their ancestors, it must be admitted that today their

customs are a quaint and mixture of both East and West.





In time, the Dutch and Portuguese descendants intermarried. Under Dutch rule Portuguese was banned, but the Portuguese speaking community was so widespread that even the Dutch started to speak Portuguese.

In the 18th century, the Eurasian community (a mixture of Portuguese, Dutch, and Sinhalese as well as Tamil, known as the Burgher) grew, speaking Portuguese or Dutch.



*Sketch of baila dancers from frescoes at the Purvarama Vihara, Kataluwa (1886)*

The Portuguese Burghers were more mixed, following Catholicism and speaking a Portuguese creole language. Despite the socio-economic disadvantage, the Burghers maintained their Portuguese cultural identity. In Batticaloa, the Catholic Burgher Union reinforced this. The Portuguese Creole continued to be used amongst the Dutch Burghers families as the informal language until the end of the 19th century.



In today's Sri Lanka, the Creole is limited to the spoken form. Most of the speakers are the Burghers in the Eastern province (Batticaloa and Trincomalee). But there are also the Kaffirs (people of African origin) in the Northwestern province (Puttalam). The Portuguese, Dutch and British brought the Kaffirs to Sri Lanka, for labour purposes. They have assumed Portuguese culture and religion.

The members of the community have very carefully maintained their traditional Portuguese Drill (Kaffringha), and and Lancers dance. No wedding or even a smaller social function like a birthday party or coming of age function is complete without a dance and a meal together. The traditional custom of celebrating a wedding for four days is generally maintained.

A Wedding



## 7. Importance of respective communities towards national integration

The Burgher community had contributed largely to the survival of this country as a sovereign,

independent, nonaligned country. As mentioned earlier, the Burgher community had always

supported a political party which apparently stood for equal opportunities to all. We had, at every turn, opposed any division of the country. Though we, as a community, liked to maintain our identity, we lived very peacefully and advocated co-existence. Our children today can speak both the national languages quite fluently. We have made our own contribution, a rather substantial one, in the development of the district.

A great majority of the residents in Batticaloa Town are Catholics. It was the Portuguese who brought this faith in the shores of this island. St. Michael's College which is a leading school in the island and which has put Batticaloa on the map by successfully winning basketball tournaments have all had the support and assistance of the Burgher population.

The Burgher population of Batticaloa freely mixes with other communities. The Special Problems of the Community are varied. Although there is a Burgher Union to cater to the social and intellectual needs of the population, yet there are other urgent needs of the group.

For centuries, the Burgher population of Batticaloa have lived and died amidst the Batticaloa Tamil and Muslim population. But they still remain a distinct group, small but stubbornly separate. They love and respect the indigenous population, but they very seldom merge. Of course, there are rare instances of inter marriage. Some boys and girls have married from the Tamil and Sinhala population and sometimes even Muslim and Malay families.

There may be more than one reason why they do not wish to lose their identity as Burghers. Quite a

number of them are on preserving their language and culture. No wedding or funeral is complete without the traditional customs being followed. Probably, the Portuguese descendants feel that they are a small minority and cannot afford to mix, lose their identity and pave the way for the eventual extinction of the community that had preserved itself for such a long time.

It may be that eventually the race may face extinction, for besides being continually forced to grapple with economic problems, a form of inbreeding is slowly setting in, sapping the strength of this five-century old community in this country. Perhaps, there will be no help or assistance forthcoming from their country of origin, for the Embassy of Portugal was closed down in Colombo years back and New Delhi overlooks this island too.

The Portuguese descendants of Batticaloa have never played an active role in the Parliamentary politics of the island. They have had neither opportunity nor chance to put forward a candidate of their own for a seat in Parliament nor had an idea of forming a party of their own. This community has always stood for a United Sri Lanka and hence never had the intention of supporting any party opposed to this idea.

Even during the Referendum and the election of the First ever elected President of Sri Lanka, the Burghers supported the UNP. But what they got in return was only the satisfaction that the party they always supported won by an overwhelming majority

## 8. Other

### a. Cultural diversity

Batticaloa Burghers are a significant socio – cultural phenomenon of the Eastern part of Sri Lanka which is also enriching component of the socio –cultural aspect of Sri Lanka. The unique practices of the Burgher community contribute to the multicultural nature of both Batticaloa and Sri Lanka as a whole.

Engaging and involving Burgher community in Batticaloa and Sri Lanka is an act of establishing and celebrating differences in cultures and enriches the practices of equality and equity in every aspect of the social strata. Engaging the Burghers not only in Batticaloa but also Island wide would create more opportunities for the Burghers and other communities in Sri Lanka to know, understand and accept the multicultural aspect of Sri Lanka as well as for the unity, co-existence and peace in Sri Lanka. Not only the Burghers but also other numerically small communities should be given opportunities in the same way.

### b. Information about their organization 9 different associations sport association etc

#### Traditional Game:

Foot Ball is the Traditional game of the Portuguese Burghers. In Sri Lanka, it is the Portuguese

Burghers who introduced the game of football and at the District level football is very common and the Eastern Province is well known for the game of football too.

Burghers' Recreational Club which represents the Burghers of the Eastern Province in Batticaloa. With the ethnic conflict and 3 decades of war it faced with many challenges and after the tsunami in 2004 the club lost its resources and in the brink of extinct.

### c. List of key references

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgher\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgher_people))  
( McGilvray 2007 Portuguese Burghers & Tsunami (1)( Smith, IR. Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole Phonology. 1978. Dravidian Linguistics Association.)( [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese\\_Burghers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_Burghers)))  
(Photos – Men, Women, Children (with different age categories) different stages of their life, important events etc)  
Mr. Sonny Ockersz (Past President of the Burgher Union) Mrs. Rachel Outschoorn, Mr. Newton Sellar





# The Chinese Community of Sri Lanka

Mr. Thoun Chishu Jemson

## Introduction

Though Sri Lanka, surrounded by the ocean is small, it is a country populated by diverse communities. From ancient times the Sinhala Buddhist majority has made this country their habitat along with various races as well as people who follow different religions. The history of this country bears witness to the inhabitants of this

country having maintained relations with foreign countries since ancient times. A perusal of Sri Lanka's history would reveal a lot of evidence about the various transactions between the kings who ruled during ancient times and different foreign leaders.

Among them, the relations maintained between China and Sri Lanka is significant. While China is as large as approximately 5,800,000 square miles, its population exceeds 80,000,000. The relations between the two countries could be clearly evident through the historic information of the Chinese Buddhist monk Fa-hsien's arrival in Sri Lanka.

The 'Silk Road' is a route that established relations among countries over land and the sea. China and theater countries maintained their trade relations through this route. Relations existed from China to the East, West and the Mediterranean Sea

and from there to the European Continent. The relations established by China with the other countries in the world were overland to Japan, Bangladesh, India, Persia (Iran and Iraq) up to the Mediterranean Sea; and along the sea to Java, South India, West India, Sri Lanka and Saudi Arabia, via the red Sea to Egypt and from there to the African Continent.

The history of the Sri Lankan Chinese community began with the Chinese nationals who had arrived in India coming to Sri Lanka.

## Historical Background

They used the Silk Road for overland and maritime trade and tourism. This route came to be known as the Silk Route since mostly the world-wide trading of silk textiles manufactured in China had been carried out through this route. While China maintained trade relations with other countries by raising silk worms and producing silk textiles from the thread obtained from the worms, it also maintained trade relations through earthenware cutlery and minerals such as Jade.

It is evident that the Chinese nationals had arrived in this country for trade and tourism. The name of Chinese Buddhist monk Fa-hsien becomes significant when considering the historical background of the Chinese community in this country. A great deal of information about Sri Lanka has been gathered through his visit to the country. It is acknowledged that he had arrived in this country and resided at the Abhayagiri Viharaya. Though another Chinese Buddhist monk, Hyun Tsang too had written details about Sri Lanka, he does not gain

A Chinese Family in Sri Lanka



the same significance as Fa-hsien regarding the Sri Lankan Chinese community since he had not visited this country. Hyun Tsang had noted down the details only through what he had learned from the traders who had gone to India from Sri Lanka.

Fa-hsien had arrived in Sri Lanka some 1,480 years ago, between 412 – 414 AD. That is, Venerable Mal Mahanama Atuvachari Buddhagosha theravada translating the Hela (Sri Lankan) commentaries into the Pali language being contemporary to this visit is significant. Similar to the reports of Professor

Senarath Paranavithana and Ven. Hyun Tsang, Ven. Fa-hsien too, in his reports states that the human settlements in this country expanded through traders. While Fa-hsien had lived around a cave dwelling near Bulathsinhala in the Kalutara District while on pilgrimage to the Sri Pada peak, this cave has been named the Fa-hsien cave. Archaeological excavations around this cave have revealed certain facts regarding pre-historic mankind.

It is on record that subsequently, during the Yongle Empire, a person by the name Admiral Zheng He arrived in Sri Lanka during his explorations.

When Sri Lanka was under Portuguese rule, Chinese illegal immigrants were deported to Sri Lanka since it was necessary to control the population in Batavia (modern Jakarta). The Chinese national who arrived thus engaged in employment in Cinnamon

plantations in Sri Lanka.

While more and more Chinese labourers were brought to Sri Lanka during British rule, and the Galle and Trincomalee harbours, the Hamilton Canal etc were restored through their labour.

It is said that Chinese nationals obtained Sea Urchins and Shark Fins for Chinese foods from the seas off Trincomalee during the late 1840s and early 1850s.

While Chinese of the Hubei origin arrived in Sri Lanka during the latter half of 1920, refugees from China arrived here after 1940 due to World War II and the China-Japan war. The Chinese community which thus arrived in Sri Lanka is currently seen to have safeguarded its identity and adapted themselves to suit the nationality of this country.

## Population

The current population descendent from the Chinese community which arrived and settled down here since the 17th and 18th centuries, number around 3,000. However, due to the immigration and emigration laws being relaxed during the late 1990s and early 2000, more Chinese immigrants arrived in Sri Lanka. The Chinese arrived in this country on development related reasons as well as educational activities. While certain controls were introduced due to the increase of the Chinese population in the country, by now there are some 110,000 Chinese workers in the country. According to the census of 2010, there are 7,844 Chinese workers serving in Sri Lanka under one year visas. At times, Chinese nationals being specifically chosen for marriages

within the Chinese community in Sri Lanka could be noticed. For instance, if there are no suitable partners available within the community for a Chinese youth in Sri Lanka, the practice of a female partner being brought based on the relations with China, could be observed at present.

Instances of those from the new generation of the Chinese community in this country departing to settle down in foreign countries are a common sight at present. Since a large number from among the Sri Lanka Chinese community have at various instances migrated with their children to countries like England, the United States, Australia etc, the Chinese community in Sri Lanka cannot be exactly verified in numbers.

Due to the male and female youths of the modern Chinese community intermarrying from other communities, there are changes in the names of their children and even their physical appearances. However, there are some 200 individuals in this country who have not mixed with any other

community since the past and who have continued to safeguard their identities. Though this group has adapted itself to the culture and environment of this country, occasionally it gives prominence to their own cultural features and safeguards them.

## Demography

The presence of the Chinese community in Sri Lanka could be mostly observed within Colombo and its suburbs. This may be due to their arrival in the island mostly by sea. The presence of the Chinese community could be noticed in almost all main cities in the island.

If looked at district wise, they are resident in all districts except in the districts of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Mannar. Despite the presence of evidence that during the past the Chinese community had been residing in the

aforsaid districts like Jaffna, in recent history they had moved out to other districts due to various war related issues.

While the presence of the Chinese community could be seen in the districts of Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kegalle, Ratnapura, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Polonnaruwa, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Matara and Hambantota, the prominent districts here are Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara.

Similarly, there is a greater presence of the Chinese community within the Kandy and Trincomalee districts.

DISTRICT	CITIES WITH PRESENCE OF CHINESE COMMUNITY
Colombo	Fort, Maradana, Pettah, Borella, Slave Island, Modera, Dehiwala, Wellawatte, Ratmalana, Thimbirigasyaya, Bambalapitiya, Kollupitiya, Boralessgamuwa, Piliyandala, Avissawella, Maharagama, Nugegoda, Homagama, Rajagiriya, Moratuwa, Kottawa
Gampaha	Gampaha Town, Yakkala, Nittambuwa, Kiribathgoda, Negombo, Ja Ela
Kalutara	Kalutara Town, Aluthgama, Matugama, Horana
Ratnapura	Ratnapura Town, Balangoda
Kegalle	Kegalle Town
Galle	Galle Town
Matale	Matale Town
Matara	Matara Town
Hambantota	Hambantota Town



Moneragala	Moneragala Town
Ampara	Ampara Town
Batticaloa	Batticaloa Town
Polonnaruwa	Polonnaruwa Town
Anuradhapura	Anuradhapura, Thirappane
Kandy	Kandy Town, Katugastota
Kurunegala	Kurunegala Town
Puttalam	Puttalam Town
Badulla	Badulla Town, Welimada, Bandarawela
Nuwara Eliya	Nuwara Eliya, Talawakelle
Trincomalee	Trincomalee, Kantale

District wise presence of the Chinese community in Sri Lanka

## Lifestyle



The Chinese in Sri Lanka are mainly engaged in their various professions. The Chinese who arrived in the country during the past could be noted engaged mainly in the dental technology and related fields as well as the textile trade. Those who had arrived from the regions of Hubei and Shandong mainly engaged in these professions.

Dental technology is considered to have been introduced to Sri Lanka by the Chinese nationals who had arrived here. It is also said that this technique had been taught to Sri Lankans by the Chinese. Even today, there are Chinese nationals who professionally continue this traditional dental technology. Commonly identified as ‘Chinese dental specialists’, they still continue their profession in most main cities in the island.

Another livelihood method is the weaving of silk from the fibre obtained from silkworm cocoons. China is renowned the world over for this industry. The Silk Road used by Chinese traders to travel to other countries for this particular trade during early history contributed not only towards this industry but had also greatly assisted in the tourism industry and educational tours (especially in search of religious knowledge). Chinese traders who brought not only silk but even cotton woven

as well as other textiles from China and sold them in Sri Lanka were very popular during the past. They had gone from village to village and carried out this trade. They had gone from house to house while carrying bundles of these textiles either on their heads or shoulders. Though they had carried out this trade in the past by visiting villages on foot or on bicycles, currently they engage in this same profession from shops in or in close proximity to cities. Chinese textiles are popular not only among the Chinese but among all other people in Sri Lanka.

Chinese acupuncture is a world renowned form of medicine. This is a very ancient Chinese medical method. This medical system now resorted to in most countries in the world is practiced now at most Ayurveda hospitals as well as all other hospitals. Though this method of healing had been practiced only by Chinese doctors in the past, today this is a popular method of medicine among other medical practitioners too.

The Chinese show a liking towards sports to arrange their lifestyle. Despite the very young to the old being adept in sports, since the Chinese community is quantitatively a small group, they maintain a very low profile in the sports sector. However, sports persons who excel in team sports have been seen in the past and are seen even now. They excel in sports like soccer, volleyball, swimming, gymnastics as well as karate, boxing, table tennis, chess, carom etc.

Similarly, a large number of employment opportunities have opened up as a result of the world famous Chinese foods. Hotels established in Sri Lanka by Chinese nationals and still being maintained under their administration exists even

today. Chinese foods are included in the menus of star class hotels to an ordinary urban restaurant since Chinese foods are very popular in Sri Lanka.

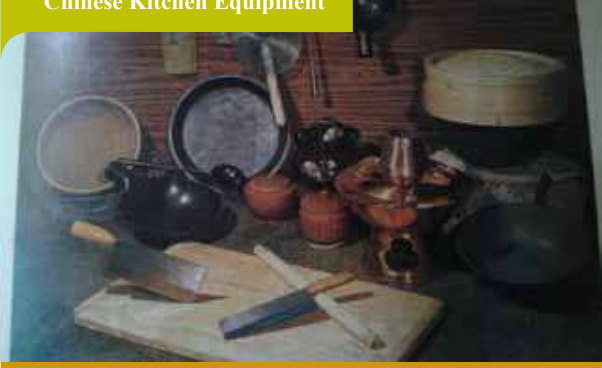
Import and export trade is another main lifestyle of the Chinese. Most among the world famous exporters are Chinese nationals. There are businessmen amidst the Chinese community in Sri Lanka who import and distribute goods needed for various sectors. Among them are various accessories related businesses like medical equipment, vehicles, infant products, machinery, motor spare parts etc. They also include agricultural and engineering related products and machinery.

Apart from the textile trade, the Chinese community also trade in special Chinese products like cutlery, ornaments, food stuff, fancy items, electrical equipment, bed linen and curtains. Despite these businesses being spread across the other communities too, the Chinese nationals show special capabilities regarding these.

The new generation offspring of these Chinese in Sri Lanka have completed school as well as university education and are employed in almost all sectors. They have engaged in all sectors like information technology, banks, teaching, medical, agricultural, music and dance etc. A unique feature is their presence within the apparels, technical as well as the security sectors.

While focusing attention on the lifestyle, the diet of the Chinese community could be identified as another special feature. The world renowned Chinese foods are popular among the Chinese community in Sri Lanka as well.

Chinese Kitchen Equipment

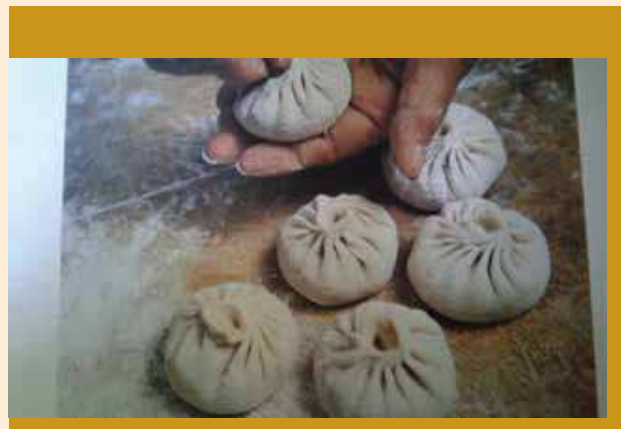
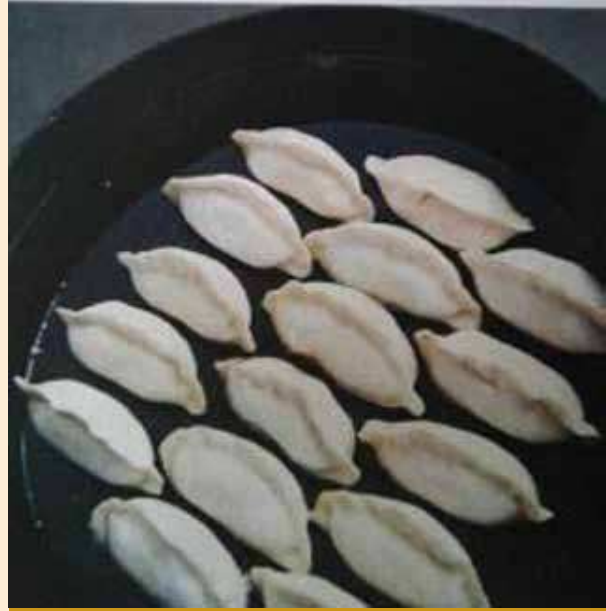


From children to adults, almost all love Chinese foods. They mostly show their prowess in preparing a wide array of tasty dishes with various meat and fish varieties. Similarly, when preparing a range of dishes with vegetables, mushrooms, flour based foods and also sweetmeats, the Chinese are clever in preparing them to the tastes inherent to the particular dishes. Without letting the spices used in cooking interfere with the inherent taste of the vegetables or meats; they are prepared while retaining their unique tastes. While both, the males and the females show the same capabilities in cooking, the preparation of food is not limited to a single gender. Similarly, unique foods could be observed being prepared for any unique function. Food prepared with Soya bean curd, bean sprouts, bamboo shoots etc are among them. Similarly, various meat varieties, soups, an array of tasty cooked rice are specialties during any functions or festivities. Wheat flour is mostly used when preparing various food items.

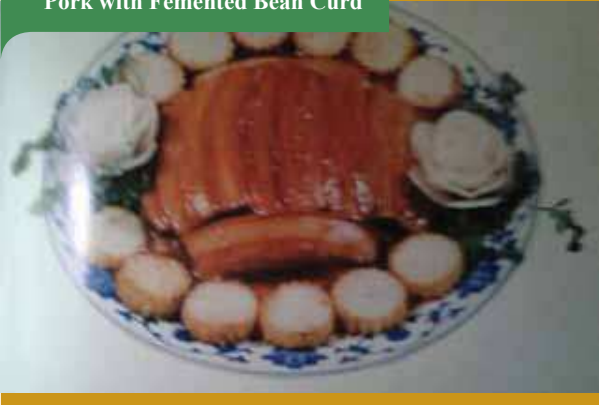
A Prawn Dish



Chinese Foods Prepared With Flour



Pork with Femented Bean Curd



## ATTIRE

Where the attire of the Chinese community in Sri Lanka is concerned, they always attire themselves in normal clothing unless during a unique event. Similar to the other communities in Sri Lanka which pay attention to costs as well as comfort, the Chinese too mostly prefer European (Western) clothing. However, by dressing themselves in traditional Chinese or some similar mode of clothing during their New Year, weddings or any other special functions, the Chinese safeguard their unique identity. Even during the wedding ceremonies of the new generation the bride and groom could be seen attired in traditional Chinese dresses. The bride wears a long dress with wrist length sleeves while the groom wears pants and a long-sleeved shirt.

When compared to the other races, the Chinese are seen to wear lesser ornaments. While Chinese girls wear a single necklace and or bracelets that suit her attire, the male wears a pair of footwear and an embroidered headdress. While mostly red, golden, white or light colours are chosen for dresses, black is rarely used for their attire.

Chinese Wedding



Even today, the main attire of the elder males among the Chinese is short sleeved white banians and long khaki trousers. This dress is worn mostly at home or at their work places. A noticeable feature among the Chinese community is their choice of clothing to suit the kind of work they engage in. Groups dressed in simple, light coloured dresses could be seen even at wedding receptions.



## Special Features (Social, Cultural, Colloquial Etc)



Chinese Dances



The Chinese New Year is the community's main social and cultural event. While this mostly falls within the month of February, a special feature is the preparation of various types of foods and decorations. Red and gold are the colours generally used for these decorations. Shiny golden colour Chinese characters, Chinese drawings on a red background are used in these decorations. Another main feature in these decorations is Chinese lanterns of varying sizes. Furthermore, drawings and pictures of dragons, lions, lotus flowers etc are embodied in these decorations. This New Year is grandly celebrated by the Chinese community in Sri Lanka as well. This even is celebrated annually in Sri Lanka with the participation of the Chinese embassy, institutions and the Cultural Ministry.

Cultural events specially brought down from China are a main feature observed during these events. Species of animals like dragons which is a main animal noticeable in Chinese folklore are depicted during these celebrations. Similarly, the Chinese New Year celebrated along with Sri Lankan cultural events takes the form of a grand festivity.

Similarly, the Chinese community grandly celebrates their New Year individually in each of their homes as well. The kith and kin widely dispersed in various locations return to the homes of their parents. They exchange gifts, prepare various foods and drinks and greet each other. Since this is an annual event, they celebrate this on a grand scale.

Apart from this, the National Heroes Day, the Chinese Revolution day etc are celebrated by the Chinese community in Sri Lanka with prominence being laid on cultural features. Similarly, the

common events in daily lives like birthdays, weddings etc are held while laying emphasis on Chinese cultural features.



While cultural features could be seen mixed into the Chinese food styles, a special feature is the pair of sticks – the chopsticks used to consume the food. While these assist in the consumption of food in small portions, it also helps in depicting the discipline among the Chinese. Their sitting round a single table and partaking of the food also depicts their unity and strengthens the bonds. However, due to today's busy schedules this core cultural system is hardly seen among certain Sri Lankan Chinese families. But this is evident during special functions even now.

When the religious practices observed in China are considered, there are three main religions. They

are namely the Confucius and Tao philosophies and Buddhism.

While various Chapters like Sun Lun Sung, Maan, Thienthai, Suvathi Viyuha, Lu Sung, Fa Tsun Tsun etc are mixed with Buddhism, by today Buddhism gains pride of place in China. This has influenced the majority of the Chinese community in Sri Lanka to be Buddhists. Also, the majority of the Chinese community is Buddhists since they have married Sinhalese Buddhist females. They have married persons from other religious denominations as well. Cultural conflicts are lesser among them since most from the Chinese community now marry others from among their own community. However, such issues are naturally scarce between countries like Sri Lanka and China which have similar cultural links.

The celebration of the most important cultural feature of the Chinese, the New Year is something that should be specially spoken about. There is a particular animal for each passing year. Hence, a particular year belongs to a particular animal. There are several animals like the horse, bull, monkey, goat, tiger, rabbit etc. Though there are 12 zodiac signs according to the Sinhala method, here it is accepted that the unique characteristics of these animals would influence the year. There are special characteristics to those born during a year belonging to each of these animals. For instance, a person born in the year of the tiger would show vastly different behaviours to that of a person born during the year of the bull. It is mostly like an astrological forecast. 2014 is the year of the horse and 2015 is the year of the goat.

## Language

Language could be considered a benchmark of a person's intelligence, culture and his/her higher knowledge. The absence of alphabets in the Chinese language is unique. While the Chinese calligraphy had begun before 5,000 years, during the initial period they had used hieroglyphs.

While there is evidence of the existence of hieroglyphs in China in 1850 BC during the reign of Emperor Fúxī, even by 1000 BC they had begun an advanced calligraphic writing system with conceptual alphabets. This had become a highly developed calligraphic art in 500 BC during the time of Confucius, becoming a tool to showcase China's cultural civilization while at the same time also becoming a strong thread binding the Chinese together. By now, a systematic Chinese

character has been created through a mix of hieroglyphs and conceptual alphabets. Since Chinese was an extension of hieroglyphs, it did not have any alphabets or tones and hence each word is considered a single unit, in language these words have only a single sound and tone.

Though there had been over 40,000 symbols during the Shi dynasty, today around 5,000 symbols are in common use. While the pronunciation gives prominence to the sound, the order in the Chinese dictionary depends on the length of the brush strokes on the particular letter. They use these hand letterings as symbols of greeting.

However, the Sri Lankan Chinese community limits its use of the Chinese language. Though

they have become used to resorting to Sinhalese, Tamil or English to suite the environment, during special occasions and greetings they use the Chinese language.

Similarly, the language they use varies according to the environment they live in, the employment they are engaged in and the social status. There are several individuals who use the Chinese language since they maintain direct links with China due to business activities or kinship.

Apart from these, special centres known as ‘Confucius Institutes’ are maintained at the Kelaniya University and at Narahenpita within the city of Colombo in order to improve the language intellect of the Chinese community.

The associations established together by the Chinese community in Sri Lanka and China:

- Sri Lanka Overseas Chinese Association
- Sri Lanka China Association
- Sri Lanka China Buddhist Friendship Association

- The Chinese Journalists’ Forum
- Chinese Lanka Traditional Dental Technicians’ Association
- China Cultural Center in Sri Lanka

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# The Memons of Sri Lanka

Mr. Asiff Hussein  
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## Introduction

We may ask what lured so many Memons to Sri Lanka, not only for trade but also for the purpose of permanent domicile. The answer is not a difficult one given Sri Lanka's reputation as an entrepot for free trade since time immemorial. The Arabs of yore who resorted to the island called it Sarandib or Saylan while the Greeks and Romans

called it Taprobane and the Indians Sinhala-dvipa. To the people of the island however it has always been known as Lanka which nowadays is often rendered as Sri Lanka, the name given to it when it became a sovereign Republic on 22nd May 1972.

There were others who visited the island to pay homage to a giant footprint widely believed to be that of Adam which could still be seen at the summit of Adam's Peak, a lofty mountain in the central highlands of the country. Yet others would have resorted here for a peaceful life of meditation amidst its calm caves and sylvan surroundings. Many eventually settled down here, giving rise to the Moors, a sizeable Muslim community who continue to exert a considerable influence on the country's national life.

There were besides other peoples from various parts of the Indian subcontinent who visited the island for trading purposes with some eventually settling down here, among them, the Sammankarars or Indian Moors originating from places like Kilakkarai in the coastal region of Tamil Nadu, the Chetties who also hailed from South India and the Memons, Bohras and Parsis from Gujarat in Western India.

This lure of trade is nothing new. It has been so for ages past. Cosmas Indicopleustes, the 6th century author of the *Topographia Christiana* could thus observe of Siedediba of Taprobane as the country was known to the Greeks: "From all India and Persia and Ethiopia many ships come to this island, and it likewise sends out many of its own, occupying as it does a kind of central position. And from the remoter regions, I speak of Tzinista and other places of export, the imports to Taprobane are silk, aloes wood, cloves, sandal wood, and so forth, according to the products of each place. These again are passed on from Siedediba to the marts on this side, such as Male where the pepper is grown and Kalliana, whence are exported brass, and sisam logs, and other wares, such as cloths; also to Sindu, where you

get the musk or castorin, and androstachya; also to Persia, Homerite and Adule, and the Island receives imports again from all those marts that I have been mentioning, and passes them on to the remoter ports, whilst at the same time it exports its own produce in both directions".

Besides serving the purpose of an entrepot for transit trade between the eastern and western parts of the Indian Ocean, the island's natural products such as gems, pearls and spices also meant that it became an important centre for exports. Among the local products mentioned by the famous 10th century Muslim writer Istakhri are spices, rubies, medicinal herbs and a treacle known as *dūshāb*. Ibn Shahryar's *Ajaib Al-Hind* also of the 10th century refers to cinnamon as a product of the island, while Kazwini of the 13th century tells us that the island produces wonderful things, among them sandalwood, cinnamon, cloves and various spices. Indeed so famed was the cinnamon of Sarandib that it even finds mention in the *Alf Layla Wa Layla*, that great compendium of mediaeval Arab stories commonly known as the *Thousand and One Nights*. The island's precious stones, particularly its rubies known to the Arabs as *yāqūt* were also well known and in the story of *Sindbad the Sailor* we have *Sindbad* telling us that the King of Sarandib sent as a present to the Caliph Harun Ar-Rashid a cup of ruby a span high and adorned with precious pearls.

However just as this resplendent island produced certain valuable products, it also lacked certain indispensable commodities which had to be imported and this is where the trading communities such as the Memons came in.

## The Memons of Sri Lanka Population and Distribution

The island, occupying as it does a central position in the waterways of the East, strategically placed as it is between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, would have no doubt attracted many foreign peoples who made it their home. Not least among them the Sinhalese led by Prince Vijaya of Bengal who arrived here around the 5th century B.C. thus giving rise to the majority community of the island today – the Sinhalese. The Tamils of the South Indian Cola Kingdom also looked upon the island as an attractive destination and arrived here in considerable numbers in the mediaeval period, particularly about the 13th century. Their descendants form the largest minority in the island.

The first Memon arrival in Ceylon is said to have been an individual named Abdul Rahman who arrived in 1870. This early migrant who was generally referred to as Manna Sath started as an itinerant pedlar of textiles in Jaffna in the northern extremity of the island before settling in the Pettah and building up a sizeable business<sup>1</sup>. It was however not before long that the Memons began steadily trickling into the country, the number of migrants rising dramatically with the partition of the subcontinent in 1947.

We have no means of ascertaining the exact Memon population in the island since the censuses ever since independence in 1948 have categorized them as ‘other. The early censuses however did enumerate them though at the time the Memons constituted a very small and insignificant

community who had come here not for purposes of settlement, but rather for trade.

The 1946 Census found a mere 180 Memons. It however has to be borne in mind that this was before the partition of the subcontinent took place in 1947 and the Memons of the time were moving to and fro from India to Sri Lanka in pursuit of their trading activities, a movement facilitated by the fact that both countries then formed part of the British empire. Their interest in the country at the time was largely based on commerce. It was only after 1947 that the Memons migrated here in larger numbers with their families with the definite purpose of settlement.

It would appear that in the years preceding World War II, it was only the males who arrived here, the womenfolk being left behind in their homes in Kathiawa. It was only with the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 that the Memons began to settle in the island with their families, thus leading to an increase in the Memon population domiciled here. Those Memons who chose to settle down here would have either been those who has previously had business connections with the island or had relatives by kinship or marriage. The partition of the subcontinent prompted many Memons to migrate not only to Sri Lanka, but also to Karachi where there still exists a large Memon community. The country gained independence from Britain in February 4, 1948 and citizenship in the newly-independent nation was obtained under the India-Pakistan Citizenship Act.

<sup>1</sup> See Recent arrival of Muslim Trading Communities in Sri Lanka. Asker S.Moosajee in Muslims of Sri Lanka.Avenues to Antiquity Ed.M.A.M.Shukri (1986)



A 1981 estimate indicated that there were 3000 Memons comprising 0.26 of the total Muslim population in the island<sup>2</sup>.

Although today, the vast majority of Memons live in Colombo, sizeable numbers of them are formerly known to have lived in areas like Jaffna,, Galle, Matara, Kandy, Matale and Hambantota. Until fairly recent times (1960s and 1970s), a large number of Memon families are known to have resided in the Hulftsdorp area (Colombo 12). In later times however they began to drift towards Colombo South, settling down in places like Kollupitiya, Bambalapitiya and Wellawatte. Matale Town, particularly the Main Street area also had a considerable number of Memon families in the olden days, though today there are only a few families still residing in the town. A few families are also known to have settled in Jaffna Town where there were a few Memon business concerns mainly dealing in textiles such as Haji Sulaiman Tayyoob, Adam Bhai stores and Gani Bhai Stores.

The vast majority of Memons domiciled in Sri Lanka are known to belong to the Halāi Memon community who are believed to have migrated from their homeland in Sind southwards to Halar in Gujarat before dispersing to localities like Kutiyana, Bhavnagar, Porbandar and Junagadh in Kathiawa. Many of those who migrated to Sri Lanka were textile merchants hailing from Kutiyana in Junagadh State. These include the prominent Memon families such as the Admanis, Bhailas, Bhojas, Chanas, Dangras, Gadars, Hingoras, Magooras and Nagariyas. The Fatanis however hailed from the village of Wadasada and the Somars from Ranavav near Kutiyana in Junagadh state.

These Halai Memons form a distinct group from the Kacchi Memons who evidently migrated to and settled down in the Kacch region, very probably in and around its olden day capital Bhuj. Only a few Kacchi Memons seem to have migrated to Sri Lanka and perhaps the only remaining Kacchi Memon family that made Sri Lanka its home is the ‘Arab’ family of which there are only a few members left.

Some Typical Memons of olden times



2 See The Muslim Minority of Sri Lanka.S.W.R.de A.Samarasinghe and Fazal Davood in Muslims of Sri Lanka. Avenues to Antiquity. Ed.M.A.M.Shukri (1986)



## Birth and Childhood

The customs of the Memons relating to the major events of life do not differ much from that of their co-religionists in India. The birth of an infant is an occasion for joy and thanksgiving among the Memons as of any other Muslim people. Childbirth (*pēdāish*) is followed by two important rituals that have their foundations in the Islamic faith. One is the *Aqīqa*, a religious rite involving the ritual sacrifice of an animal as a thanksgiving to God for blessing one with offspring which takes place on the seventh day after birth. According to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), this obligatory ritual involves the sacrifice of two sheep for a male child and one for a female child. However due to the want of sheep in the country, goats invariably take their place.

The meat thus obtained is distributed among relatives and the needy. It is also on this occasion that the child's head is shaved and the weight of its hair given in silver or gold to the needy.

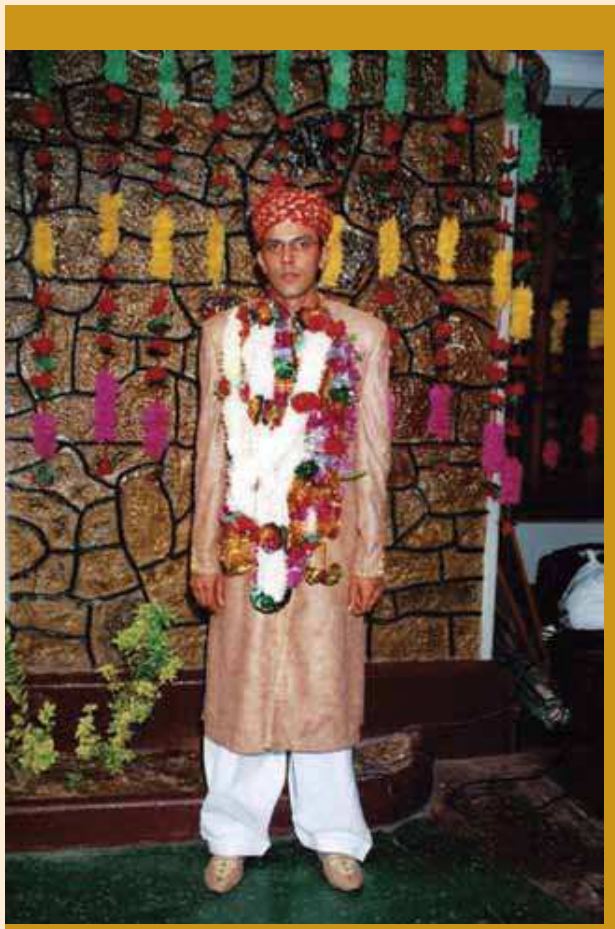
The *chatthi* or naming ceremony which is the equivalent of the Islamic *tasmiyya* is held sometime after the fortieth day when the mother has passed her period of ritual impurity following childbirth (*nifās*). The ceremony may also involve the parents of the mother presenting their grandchild with a cot. Circumcision (*khatna* or *sunnat*), another important religious rite, is performed in early childhood though there does not appear to be any fixed time for the operation.

## Marriage Customs

Marriage is strongly recommended in Islam which condones neither celibacy nor promiscuity, but the middle part of lawful wedlock. In fact marriage is regarded as a duty for the believing men and women. The Qur'ān which Muslims hold to be the Word of God declares in no uncertain terms "and among His Signs is this, that He has created you mates from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy". We also have the saying of

the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him): "We do not see a better resort for those who love each other than marriage". Marriage in Islam (*nikah*) is basically a civil contract dependent on the mutual consent of the man and woman concerned. It is entered into by a contract of offer or proposal (*ījāb*) on the part of the guardian or agent of the bride and acceptance (*qabūl*) on the part of the bridegroom in the presence of two male witnesses.

## A Memon Wedding



There are several preliminaries to marriage (viyāh or shādi) among the Memons who go to great pains when it comes to celebrating a marriage, even to the extent of indulging in various pre-nuptial ceremonies. The proposed match is usually initiated by the boy's parents who would make a proposal (ghāl) to the girl's parents, either directly or through relatives or friends. If accepted, there takes place what is known as the nāthrō or engagement which is confined to the immediate family circle and takes place at the girl's residence. The first ceremony relating to the engagement is what is known as mihōmu (Lit. sweetening of the mouth) where a sweetmeat known as khīr-kumā made of milk, sugar, almonds, pistachios, cashewnuts and vermicelli figures as the main item.

Then follows the vad do mit hōmu feast held on a larger scale with friend and the extended family being invited to the girl's residence or a public hall for lunch, dinner or a tea party. The proposed bridegroom also attends the function and is presented with gifts such as clothes and perfumes while his party would present his intended bride with jewellery. Then comes the sārē where the proposed bridegroom's parents invite the intended bride and her extended family for lunch. Then comes the ātō where the intended bride's family invites the proposed bridegroom and his extended family for lunch or dinner. Nowadays however it is not an uncommon practice to combine the ātō, sārē and vao mit hōmu into a single ceremony known as vad do mit hōmu and hosted by both parties, mainly due to convenience and economic reasons.

A few days or about a week before the wedding takes place, there takes place what is known as the vanna party where the bride's parents display

all the items they are giving to their daughter such as furniture, clothes and jewellery which are collectively known as dēj. It is during the course of this party that there takes place a custom known as dīn-ginan (Lit. giving and taking), an all-female affair which involves the bride's party making presentations of jewellery and/or cash to the bridegroom's mother and sisters as well as other female relatives. This is reciprocated by the bridegroom's party who likewise make presentations of gold or cash to the bride's party. It is on this occasion that the bridegroom's party brings with them the wedding attire (sarārā) and jewellery (dāgīnā) for the bride. These items which are presented to the bride along with coconuts and rock candy (crystalized sugar lumps) are collectively known as piro. It is also on this occasion that the dandiya is performed where young women get together and play with sticks known as dandiya, a practice very common in India as well.

Then follows the khōrō ceremony which is usually a lunch held at the bride's house and meant only for women. On this occasion the female relatives of the bridegroom pay a visit to the bride, bringing along with them items such as pistachio, almonds and rock candy which are then placed on a cloth placed on the bride's lap.

The day selected for the wedding is usually based on convenience such as availability of the wedding hall and the day so selected is usually a holiday or the eve of a holiday, very often weekends. Weddings however do not usually take place in the month of Safar, Ramazan or the first ten days of Muharram. About one or two days before the wedding, yellow turmeric paste known as pītih would be applied on the bride's body and on that night also takes place the mehendi

ceremony, an all-female affair which involves the application of henna on the bride's hands and feet. On this occasion, the womenfolk of the groom's family bring along with them mehendi, a moist preparation made with the crushed leaves of the Henna or Egyptian Privet (*Lawsonia Inermis*) as well as a cake and baskets of fruits and sweets. The bride would have in her palm an open betel leaf on which each member of the groom's family would apply a little mehendi as a symbolic gesture. The female relatives of the bride would then apply henna on one another while the bride herself is usually done by a professional female henna artist who would apply the mehendi in such a manner as to form intricate designs on her hands and feet. The bride may also be fed with a sweetmeat and garlanded with flowers on this occasion.

On the morning of the wedding day, the preliminaries to the nikah or the marriage proper takes place, beginning with the ritual known as the *viājī rajā* where the consent of the bride for the marriage is sought. This little ritual involves the agent or guardian of the bride and the two witnesses to the marriage contract seeking her

consent as it is they who would contract the marriage on her behalf. The nikah ceremony usually takes place in the Memon Hanafi Mosque in Third Cross Street, Pettah. The participants, all of whom are male, are served dates (*khajūr*) and rock candy (*śakkar*) and the nikah and registration takes place after the Asr prayers. This is followed by dinner at the Memon Hall in Kollupitiya or some other public hall or hotel. Here, both men and women participate though a strict segregation is followed with the males and females being accommodated in separate rooms. The bride (*dulan*) is seated in the same room occupied by the female guests while the bridegroom (*dulo* or *varrājhā*) is escorted by his retinue to the bridal throne where he takes his seat beside his bride. Then follows the *likhētī* where the bride is taken to the bridegroom's residence for the first night and this concludes the wedding. A few days after the wedding, a sort of homecoming ceremony known as *sattārō* takes place where the bride's party invites the bridegroom's family and the bride for lunch or dinner and this concludes the festivities associated with marriage among the Memons.

## Funeral Rites

Death is inevitable for man in this short worldly life. As the Qur'an put it: "Every soul shall taste of death". However at the same time, death is also an opening to the hereafter and the beginning of a journey towards eternal bliss for the believer. It therefore needs no lamentation. Memon funerals or *mawayat* as they are often termed by the community are characterized by a speed and simplicity perhaps unparalleled by even the

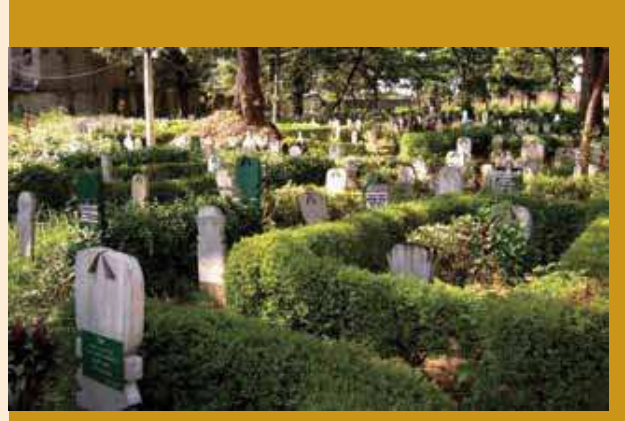
most orthodox Muslims. Such funerals are a very hasty affair and often take place a few hours after a person has breathed his or her last. In fact the deceased may even be buried at night and this practice takes place quite often.

Burial usually takes place at the Maligawatte Muslim Burial Grounds in Colombo, which serves as the cemetery (*qabrastān*) of the community,



though other Muslims are also commonly buried here. It usually happens that a ziyārat fātiha is announced and this takes place on the third day after the deceased has passed away. It is usually held in the morning around 11 am at the Memon Hanafi Mosque and involves the recitation of the Qur'ān (fātiha) and prayers (duā) for the deceased. Close relatives would then visit the grave of the deceased and return to the house where the deceased lived for lunch. It is said that in the olden days, the deceased's relatives would congregate on Thursday evenings and after four such meetings would host an almsgiving (cālīsō) where the Qur'ān was recited and relatives and the

needy invited to partake of a meal. This practice may still take place on rare occasions, though not as frequently as in the olden days.



## Dress and Ornamentation

Although the usual attire of Memon men today is shirt and trousers when outdoors or shirt and sarong when at home, many, particularly the more religiously inclined may wear the jubba, a long robe for an upper garment and trousers or sarong for a lower garment.. The men of an older generation, particularly those of a higher standing, are said to have worn the sherwāni, a long flowing overcoat of a black colour, white trousers known as ijār and a velvet jinnah cap in common with many of their more affluent co-religionists of the subcontinent. The middle classes usually wore a long shirt extending down to the knees known as qamīz and white trousers known as ijār. They also often wore when going outdoors a tall red fez cap with black tassel which they termed gōndā topi.

The usual dress of Memon women today is the salvār qamīz, a beautiful two-piece garment of Punjabi origin comprising of loose trousers (salvār) fastened by a string and a long tunic (qamīz) often long-sleeved and reaching down to the knees. It is usually worn with a dupat tā or shawl which is used to cover the

hair in keeping with Islamic norms. The more religiously inclined may wear a black over-garment (abāya) when going outdoors. The sarārā worn by Memon brides on their wedding day consists of a long skirt heavily worked in sequins and gold thread, a bodice and a shawl to match. The women of the older generation wear a long gown of a light colour known variously as ābo, farāk or gavan which is tightened at the waist and extends to the feet. Underneath this garment may be worn loose trousers known as pijāmā.



Local Memon women like their sisters in India are extremely fond of jewellery and take great pains to adorn themselves with a variety of ornament, among them necklaces (hār), bangles (cūrīū), rings (vīndī), ear-rings (ēran), ear-studs (kānfūl) and nose-studs (siri). The last named ornament, the nose stud is particularly popular even with young girls and not surprisingly as it is one ornament that truly enhances feminine beauty. In keeping with the Hindustani or North Indian custom, it is invariably worn on the left ala and not in the right ala which is the usual custom of the Muslim women in South India and Sri Lanka.

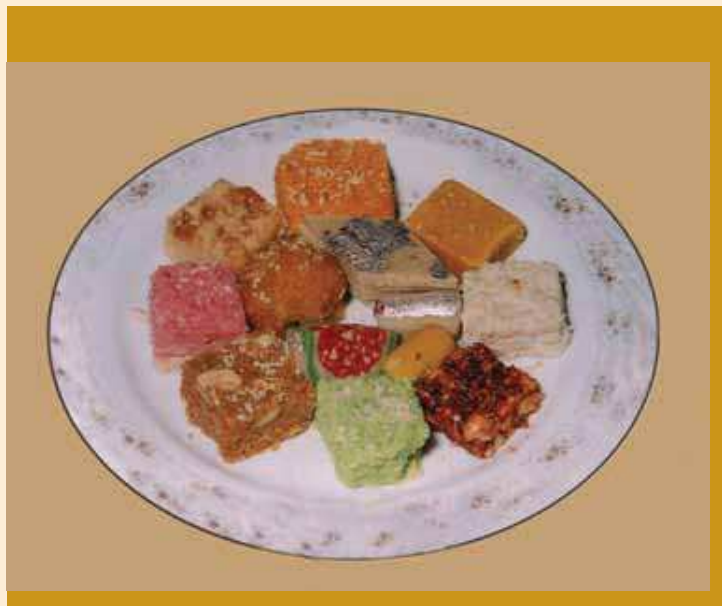
A Memon Couple



## Culinary Fare

The cuisine of local Memons does not differ much from that of their Indian co-religionists. That delectable Moghul meal, biryānī is well known and comprises of a rich rice dish prepared with fragrant bāsmati rice and embellished with some meat such as beef, mutton or chicken which in

keeping with Indian tradition may be arranged in alternate layers with the rice whilst being cooked. Another well known rice dish, aknī comprises of cooked rice dyed yellow with turmeric and embellished with beef and potatoes.





Besides these savoury rice dishes, one also finds a sweet rice dish among the Memons and that is the *jardā* or *mithōkhāo* prepared with rice cooked with ghee, sugar and saffron and embellished with raisins and cashewnuts. Among the prominent side dishes may be mentioned cucumber, an onion salad, and *raitā*, an onion and curd salad often consumed with *biryānī* and *aknī*. *Samōsā*, a triangular pastry filled with minced beef is also commonly consumed on festive occasions.

Sweetmeats include *barfi*, a delectable confection made of milk, sugar, crushed almonds and almond essence, *gajjar jo halwo* made with milk, sugar, ghee and grated carrots and *dūdle jo halwo* which is similarly prepared save that gourd is used instead of carrot. There is also *khīr-kumā*, a very special confection made of milk, sugar, almonds, pistachios, cashewnuts and vermicelli which is often partaken of in ceremonies leading to marriage.







*Pada Yatra to Kataragama in 2002*

# The Coast Veddas (Verdas) of Sri Lanka

Prof. Kalinga Tudor Silva

## Introduction

Largely based on their place of habitation and livelihoods, Veddas in Sri Lanka are divided into three subgroups. They are Rock or Forest-dwelling Veddas<sup>1</sup> (Gal Vedda), Village Veddas (Gam Vedda) and Coast Veddas (Mudu Vedda). Among the scholars, so far the primary attention has been focused on the so-called forest-dwelling Veddas, seen as the prototype of Veddas configuring them as the primitive and yet surviving aboriginal

people of Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup> (Seligmann and Seligmann 1911). This view is largely contested by recent ethnographers who recognize a gradation of Veddas, inclusive of settled and semi-nomadic with relatively fluid and shifting identities vis-à-vis the Sinhalese and Tamils, depending on who is the dominant group in their respective areas (Brow 1978, Obeyesekere 2001, 2014, Dart 1990).

1. Seligmanns sometimes used the word 'wild Veddas' to refer to this community.

2. Seligmann's referred to them as 'true Veddas'. E.g. "The Coast Vedda is darker, taller and more stoutly built than true Veddas" (1911: 332).

In this publication we treat Coast Veddas as a distinct social formation with a self-identification of their own as a distinct cultural group, geographically concentrated along the east coast, using Tamil as their mother tongue as distinct from other categories of Veddas who speak Sinhala side by side with Vedita language as and when necessary and resort to fishing in ocean, lagoon or inland waters as a primary livelihood pursued in combination with other distinctive Vedita occupations such as collection of forest products like bee honey and firewood, chena farming and shifting to wage labour as and when the situation demands and the opportunities exist. As part of the changing political dynamics in the country and depending on who wielded power in the local area at a given time, particularly during and after the war, there have been pressures on the coast Veddas to assimilate with the Tamil mainstream or assert their separate identity as bearers of an indigenous culture.

While this implies that they are a marginal social group with limited agency of their own and easily manipulated by external actors, the actual situation is rather more complex they being increasingly affected by struggle for living exacerbated by scarcity of land, forest clearing, state-imposed restrictions on hunting, fishing and collection of forest products and the emergence of a dynamic new leadership in the community.

In 1911 Seligmann's identified them as 'East Coast Veddas' (Seligmann & Seligmann 1911). Sometimes these communities identify themselves and are locally identified in Tamil as Verdass or

VeDar (Dart 1968). Many observers simply refer to them as Coast Veddass (Thangarajah 1995). As far back as 1911 Seligmann's clearly identified them as a vulnerable group in danger of being extinction due to their assimilation with the Tamils and the resulting decline of 'pure Veddass'. As Yuvi Thangarajah has pointed out, the LTTE efforts to create a homogenous and monolithic Tamil homeland had the effect of imposing an all-encompassing Tamil identity on the East Coast Veddass. While intermixture with Tamils, especially those of lower castes, has been a long-term trend among Coast Veddass, in 1994 Thangarajah noted "We all remember Seligmann's concern in 1911 that the Veddass were a fast disappearing group. In 1994, the Veddass of Vaharai are still proudly claiming to be Veddass (Thangarajah 1995: 193). Throughout history the local Veddass have used a situation of shifting and fluid identities to their own advantage, claiming to be Tamil just like others in the area or asserting their separate Vedita identity as and when it was expedient to do so. This should certainly warn us against essentializing coast Vedita identity or engaging in a wild goose chase for 'pure Veddass'. Given the fact that the term 'Vedita' or 'Verda' is often used in a derogatory sense locally implying backwardness and an 'uncivilized' lifestyle, local people are hesitant to use it as a self-identification or even as a descriptor of a third person. On the other hand, the word 'adivasi' (indigenous/aboriginal) tends to be more frequently used by leaders of the community and in official government documents as a non-discriminatory term and a self-identification asserting indigeneity and a notion of 'sons of the soil'.

## Historical Background

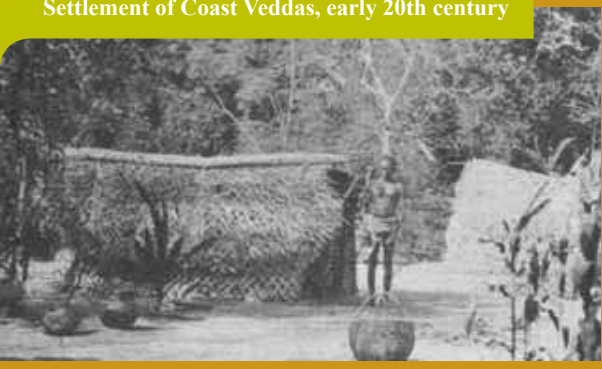
With no recorded history of their own, the history of East Coast Veddas is lost in legend, colonial anthropology and ethnocentric reports of surrounding communities. For instance, commenting on the origin of Coast Veddas, Seligmanns wrote:

The date of their first arrival on the coast and of their subsequent intermarriage with the Tamils is quite uncertain; the latter state that there have always been Veddas in the neighbourhood of the sites they now occupy, but the Vedita oral tradition holds that their original ancestors came from inland. Knox does not mention them, but Nevill considers that they come from Sabaragamuwa (Sufferagam), being driven thence in the 17th century. (1911: 331).

Coast Veddas Vaharai, early 20th century



Settlement of Coast Veddas, early 20th century



What relationship Coast Veddas had with Vedita Communities in Bintenna and Dambana is also uncertain. Dart, who conducted ethnographic research among Coast Veddas in 1960s, observed that these Coastal Veddas have little or no contact with Veddas of the interior (Dart 1990: 68). According to Hugh Neville Veddas in the interior parts of Sri Lanka denied any connection with Coast Veddas.

"The Vaeddas say that they never were related to these Coast Vaeddas, and do not know when they came to the Coast, or where they came from, nor did they ever hear that they belonged to any *waruge* of the race".

Further, Neville found that the Coast Veddas believed that their ancestors came from the western hinterland.

"The Coast Vaeddas do not know when they came or how they came, but they say that long ago their ancestors came from the Gala, far beyond the hills to the west. They also sometimes say they came from Kukulugammaeda and spread out along the Coast. Some say this is Kukulugam near the Verukal; others suppose it to be somewhere far away." (Neville 1888).

Seligmann's and others too confirmed this eastward movement of Coast Veddas. According to Thangarajah, the popular belief in the community held that the original ancestors of Coast Veddas had a semi-nomadic existence in the jungle making a living from a combination of hunting and gathering, chena cultivation and fishing in inland waters but they were compelled to settle down in specific locations due to the pressure



from the colonial authorities and subsequently from the post-independence political elite in the country to “colonize” and “civilize” them as part of their efforts to incorporate them into the Sri Lankan nation. In his view the Coast Veddas have a sense of victimhood under different regimes whether colonial, post-independent or pro-LTTE during the period war when they were mostly in so-called “unclear” areas.

During a visit to Muruththani in Koralai Pattu South in August 2016, the Tamil-speaking local Vedda leaders, however, claimed that their original ancestors had Sinhala names such as Appuhami and spoke Sinhala. The subsequent generations, however, exclusively spoke Tamil, the lingua franca in east coast. The present day east coast Vaddas speak Tamil as their home

language and as the language of communication with the neighbouring communities.

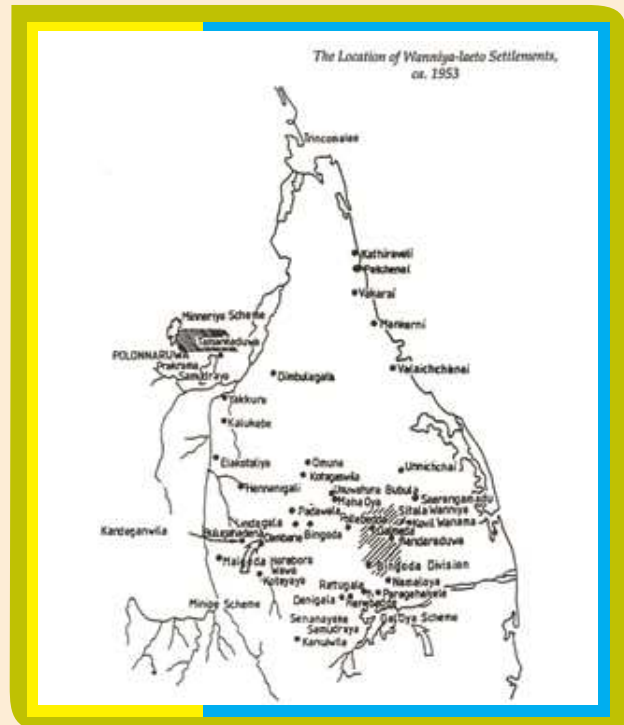
When assessing the current situation of coast Veddas, it is important to note the close relationship they had with the Sinhala speaking Veddas or the vanniya-naetto they got to opportunity to participate in the Adivasi day celebrated usually in Dambana on August 8 held each year and this gave them an opportunity to interact with Sinhala-speaking Veddas (typically referred to as ‘Vanniyala Etto’).

The coast Veddas and Vanniyala Etto had never met before and the bond between them seems to have cemented further when the Adivasi day was celebrated with many cultural activities in Vaharai area in 2014.

## Population and Distribution

The Coast Veddas are distributed in several villages, settlements or hamlets along the East Coast between Trincomalee in North and Valachchenai in the South.

The largest ‘Vedda’ settlements along the East Coast are Mankerny, Panichchenkerny, Kunchenkkulam and Muruththani surrounded by a large number of smaller hamlets. None of these communities, however, can be described as exclusively Vedda because of intermarriages with surrounding Tamil communities mostly from depressed caste backgrounds. Some of the local community leaders made a distinction between pure Vedda villages and those contaminated through intermarriages with those outside the community.





Mankerney Vedda Settlers, 1994



In June 1995 the Cultural Survival Trust<sup>3</sup> undertook an on-the-spot survey to determine where coastal Vedda hamlets are located and approximate populations. CST volunteers walked 85 kilometres from Mutur to Valaichchenai, speaking in Tamil with local coast Vedda villagers who provided estimates of their numbers in these villages: They identified a total of 18 communities with reported Vedda presence in the area scanned, but they could only get estimated Vedda populations for 6 of these communities only. The activities organized by this Trust included participation of 40 Veddas in the Pada Yatra to Kataragama in 2002.

Coast Veddas in Penichankerny



The largest number of Vedda communities in east coast are located in the Korale Pattu North (Vaharai) DS Division. In 2015 this division had a reported total population of 24,620 distributed in 12 GN Divisions. In the same year, a Vedda census was conducted by officers attached to this division in response to a request from the Human Rights Commission. This survey discovered a total Vedda population of 2460 within the entire DS division, comprising roughly about 10% of the total population in the DS Division.

<sup>3</sup> For details see <http://culturalsurvivaltrust.org/>. Patrick Harrigan, a European sympathizer of indigenous people has been instrumental in setting up this Trust as a means to promote the welfare of indigenous people of Sri Lanka.

## Reported Vedda Population in 12 GN Divisions in the Korale Pattu North DSD, 2015

GN Division	Number of Vedda Families	Vedda Population
Mankerny Central	50	190
Kayankerny	30	120
Panichehnikerny	35	125
Mathurankernykulam	106	424
Kirimichai	110	440
Mankerny South	95	360
Uriyankattu	7	28
Kathiraveli	42	168
Kattamarivu	60	240
Ammanthanavalu	15	60
Vaharai North	20	80
Punnai East	57	220
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>2460</b>

**Source :** Korale Pattu North DSD

There are several other Vedda communities in other DSDivisions in the area and we do not have reliable population figures for these other Vedda communities. For instance, in August 2016, we visited Muruththani village in Chenkaladi DS Division and that village situated in an interior part of this DS division had a reported Vedda population of 250 families.



## Social and Cultural Life of Coast Veddas

The religious life of East Coast Veddas was built around the ancestor worship (uttiyakali valipan). The spirits of the ancestor were invoked in annual festivals usually held in the jungle. The local priests went into trance during these rituals and they performed oracles after being possessed. They used a variety of drums at the times of calling of deities (mandadi alayittal). Even though they reportedly had a distinctive Vedda language in the past, we did not come across any instances of contemporary use of this language.

The east Coast Vedda communities did not have any community level organization or any higher level organization representing the

whole community. The leadership tended to be hereditary even though this pattern seems to have changed in recent years with a number of dynamic leaders emerging particularly in response to their displacement and the need to have a common platform vis-à-vis the state and various other relief organizations.

The men are more inclined to engage in outdoor activities while women engage in cooking, child care and other household activities. Some women engage in fresh water or lagoon fishing and collection of forest products such as yams. Honey collection, however, is an exclusive male activity, usually conducted by groups of men who walk long distances in search of honey.



Ummani and his grandchildren



Grill fish cooking



Vasanthi and her children



Ponnamma's mother

## Livelihoods of Coast Veddas

Coast Veddas pursue multiple livelihood options. They include collection of forest products, fishing, farming, animal husbandry and wage labour. Most economic activities are seasonal in character combined with a semi-nomadic existence in the past. In the post war era, nomadic lifestyle has given way to a more sedentary existence perhaps due to support for housing construction under various schemes.

In conclusion, coast Veddas have become more assertive about their distinctive identity in the post-war era. They certainly contribute to the rich social and cultural diversity in eastern Sri Lanka. They continue to remain socially marginal

because of their Vedda identity, poverty and lack of power and influence vis-à-vis other groups in society. The education levels remain very low due to poor access to educational opportunities, lack of parental encouragement for education of children, early marriage particularly among girls and absence of role models within their communities. They do make a valuable contribution to society by supplying valuable commodities like bee honey, herbal substances and protecting natural resources such as forests, mangroves and water resources. With required training they may also contribute new economic activities such as tourism (especially eco-tourism).

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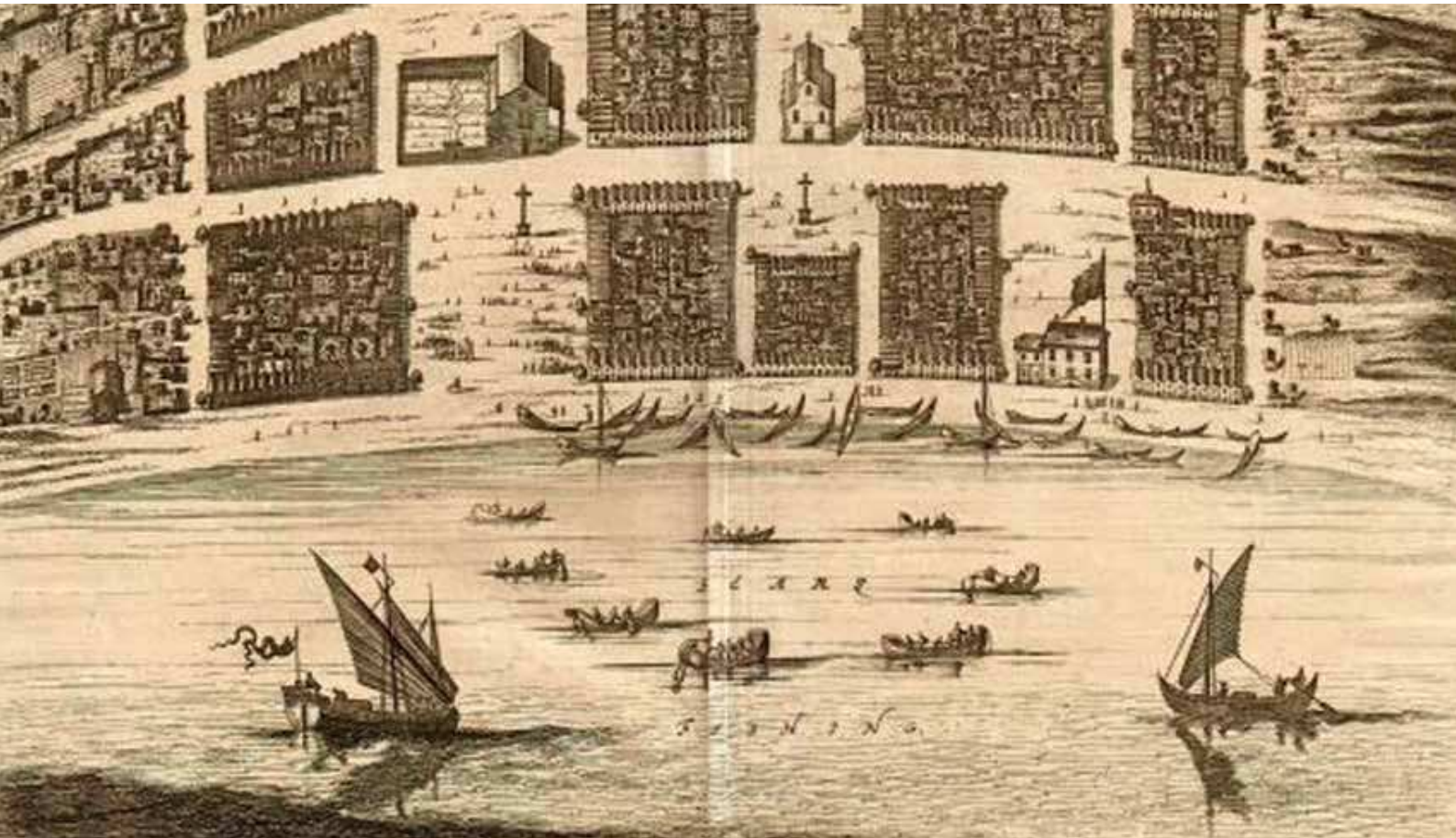
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# Sri Lanka Bharatha Community

Mr. J.V.C. Croos

## Introduction

Bharathas in Sri Lanka have always been a peaceful and law-abiding community that is socially and economically active. The Bharatha identity is maintained by a relatively prosperous merchant group from South India that settled amongst the Sinhalese in the coastal belt stretching from Mannar to Panadura. First they came to trade in pearls in Mannar and then even took to diving. Later another group of Bharathas who came to work in the Colombo Port fanned out, along the maritime belt

specialising in trade, especially coconut, dry fish, real estate development and arrack renting. Some of them also moved inland settling in areas like Kandy and Kurunegala. Yet another group settled down in Negombo and engaged in lucrative trade activities. Most of the older generation communicate in Tamil whilst the younger generation communicate in Sinhala and English due to integration with the main community. Majority of Bharathas are Roman Catholics.

## Community Names

**Bharatha** also known as **Paravara** or **Parava**, **Paravar** in Sri Lanka, is a caste originated in Southern India that in ancient times were coastal fishermen, as well as, according at least to one modern writer, "ferocious soldiers".

The first Bharatha Conference was held in Tuticorin in December 1915 and in January 1938, the 9th Bharatha Conference was held in Colombo, under the presidency of Mr. A.L.J. Croos Dabrera. It was at this conference that the name "Parava" was changed to Bharatha.

According to the census categories in July 2001, "Bharatha" has been moved out of Sri Lankan (Ceylon) Tamil category to simply stand as a separate ethnic group "Bharatha", thus currently they are neither Sinhalese nor Tamil.

Agitation, done diplomatically and with finesse, for recognition as a community started in 1937 by the Negombo Bharatha Association.

"Its minutes of November 1937 indicate that a memorandum had been submitted by a delegation of the association who had gone before the Royal Commission where the existence of the community called the Bharathas was accepted," says active member and former President of Negombo Bharatha Association Mr Selvam Croos Moraes. Then Ceylon was under British rule.

It didn't end there. A letter dated October 9, 1971 from the then Registrar-General to J.E. John Rodrigo, Appointed Member of Parliament talks of circular no. 49/1491 of October 5 where all Registrars of Marriages, Births and Deaths had been advised that, "the government has since 1940 recognised the Bharatha or in other words 'Parava' as a race". The Registrar-General's letter had come after Mr. Rodrigo, who represented the interests of the Bharatha community in Parliament, informed him that some Registrars were reluctant to accept "Bharatha" as an adequate entry in the 'race' cage of the forms used by his department.

## History – Bharathas in India

There are many theories as to the origins of Bharathas (Paravars) but their existence since ancient times been mostly recorded in South Indian history in the areas of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

In modern India, Paravars are concentrated along the coastal belt extending around the Gulf of Mannar, from Kilakarai through to Kanyakumari

(Cape Comorin) and then on almost as far as Trivandrum and their 60 or so villages are solely occupied by caste members and are interspersed with villages occupied by Muslims. There are also Paravar settlements on the outskirts of inland villages, and there has been a significant number among the population of Tuticorin, a major town, since the 1580s.



## Origin

Various myths and theories have been forwarded and expounded with regard to the origin of the Paravas.

Edgar Thurston quotes from *Historica Eccliasastica* that the Paravas and Parvaims referred to in the Bible are the same. He adds that in the time of King Solomon, the Paravas were famous among those who made voyages by sea. (Thurston)

One of the interviews of Patric . A.. Roche goes like this.” We, the Paravas, are the Parvaims (2 Chr 3:6), one of the last tribes of Israel and our present settlement of Uvari in Paravanadu is the Ophir (2 Chr 8:18, 9:10) of the Bible .”(Roche).

It is the general belief among the Paravas that their original country was Ayodhya or Oudh and it appears that before the Mahabharatha war, they inhabited the territory bordering Yamuna or Jamuna. (Thurston).

According to Edgar Thurston, the Paravars were once a very powerful people. They had a succession of kings among them distinguished by the title of "Adiarasan", some of whom seem to have resided in Uttarasakosamangai., a famous place of hindu pilgrimage in the neighbourhood of Ramanathapuram.(Thurston) .

Rev. Fr. Henry Heras throws fresh light on this issue, saying that the Paravas belonged to one of those ancient groups of people who derived their origin from the "Indus valley". The Moon Paravas as he mentions in the research findings, are likely to be the ancestors of the Pandyan kings of Madurai and of their Parava subjects of the fishery coast. (Heras)

*Leaving their birth place in the Indus valley the Paravas came down South in search of fortunes. They settled on the Southeast coast of India, the Coramandal coast on the one side and on the other side along the West Coast of Ceylon from Negombo to Mannar. (Heras)*

Here, they consolidated their position and became a distinct and important entity in South India. In an ancient Tamil inscription there is a reference to Parava men who fished pearls by paying tribute to Alli Arasani , daughter of Pandya king of Madurai. (Heras). They were probably the only people who fished pearls at that time.

Very few historical records are available with regard to their origin in North Indian as opposed to their South Indian origin.

In India historical records indicate that there are various names for Bharathas (Paravar) like Parathavar, Bharathar, Bharathavarma Pandiyar and Bharathakula Kshatriyar. The name Parathavar was the initial name and the later names of Paravar came because of their seafaring nature. In Tamil Paravai means sea and Bharathar because of their connection with the Bharathavamsa of Chandravanshi. The name Bharathavarma Pandiyar is given to them during the later Pandya regime, in order to distinguish from Maravarma Pandiyars (Maravars),who are their akin and front line defenders of Pandian army. The name Bharathakula kshatriya is to distinguish them as Kshatriyas, the ruling caste. Also, Kurukula Karaiyars seem to be from the same stock who dwell along Cholamandalam (Coromandel) coast. Later after the conversion to Christianity, they are called with the surnames as Fernandos, Fernandez etc. Paravar refers not only the people living on the coast of the Indian states

of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and in parts of northern and western Sri Lanka (Ceylon), it denotes the chiefs of Madurai Country. In Tamil language and literature, the coastal areas where they lived were called 'Neythal Thinai'. Also, Rev. Father Henry Heras S.J. gives the following description of the Paravars in his Mohenjo Daro, "The People and the Land". Paravanad – the country of the Paravas (Sea– in Tamil "Paravai"). They are still numerous in the Coromandel Coast in South India and in Ceylon.

### Occupations

They were Kings, Chieftains, Velirs, ferocious warriors and seafarers. They controlled the entire Tamil navy at all times and their armed forces were called as Parathavar Padai. Tuticorin city in Tamil Nadu, India which is still a stronghold of the Paravar community was the center of the pearl trade. The Paravars later diversified to sea based professions including pearl diving, fishing, navigating, and salt making. For centuries the Paravars had been pearl divers. However in the 19th century pearl oysters in the Gulf of Mannar, between India and Sri Lanka, became scarce. They were excellent shipbuilders. Their catamarans were the first type of ship encountered by the English with two hulls. It is known that during the visit of Francis Xavier the Paravars were using two different types of boat for net fishing, which he called the *vallam* and the *thoni*. Additionally, the Paravars grew palms and other dry plantation crops. The Paravars have a long tradition of learning and are one of the earliest communities to have a high literacy rate. This is attributed to their traditional profession of navigator and the influence of Christian missionaries. The riches brought through sea trips were incorporated into houses, including expensive woods such as teak.

### History of Paravars

Paravars are proud about their caste heritage. They are said to be the rulers of Pandiyan kingdom of Madurai . Tuticorin the port city of the Pandiyan kingdom, has always been a stronghold of the Paravars. The Paravars were the chiefs of the coastal region and also they ruled as subordinates Velirs of the Pandyas of the Sangam age. The Paravars headquarters was *Korkai harbour* during the regime of Pandiyan Kingdom and they all spread into 22 fishing hamlets namely Muttom, Pillaithoppu, Rajakka Mangalam thurai, Periyakadu, Pozhikkurai, Kesavan Puthanthurai, Puthanthurai, Kovalam, Kanyakumari, *Kumari Muttam, Kootapuli, Perumanal, Idinthakarai, Kuthenkuly, Uvari, Periathalai, Pudukarai, Manapad, Alanthalai, Thiruchendur, Virapandianpatnam, Thalambuli, Punnaikayal, Palayakayal, Tuticorin, Vaippar, Chethupar, Vembar & Mookur* in the pearl fishery coast of Gulf of Mannar and adjacent Comerin coast. The Paravars once a very powerful people and no doubt derived much of their ascendancy over other tribes from their knowledge of navigation and pearl fishery. They had a succession of kings among them, distinguished by the title *Adiarasen*. Some of these chiefs seem to have resided at *Uttara Kosmangay* near Ramnad. The story of this city itself is clear evidence to this fact. Later, the leaders were called by names *Thalaivan, Pattankattiyars, Araiylars* and *Adappannars*. Paravars lived along with Maravar (Thevar) in harmony, since they were blood related and from the same stock. Famous titles of "Rayar", has been shared by members of these two royal kshathriya clans of Pandya kingdom. As Muttom is the western boundary for the community. Villages Pillaithoppu and Muttom, there was a small settlements of Mukkuvar, which earlier multiplied and Parava community numbers at

present are small. Apart from Tuticorin, Manapadu and Pillaithoppu had the privilege of having the Vicariate of Jesuit Missionaries for sometime during the Dutch period.

## Religion

The first well-documented history of the South India is reflected in the literature of sangam which is found grouped in Ettuthogai and Pathupattu. These first three centuries sangam age works talk a lot about Paravar or Parathar community which extended from Rameswaram to Kanniyakumari. The main maritime profession of Paravars is fishing in the sea. In olden days they were even involved in manufacturing salt. They were experts in pearl and chank fishing. Ahananooru of the Sangam literature depicts of Paravar profession. Korkai, the famous harbour town of Pandya kingdom was thickly populated and ruled by Paravars. In olden days Paravars were engaged in trading with Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, Java, Burma and Ceylon. Korkai pearl was the most famous item exported from South India.

The fisherfolk call the sea as Mother Sea and revere her as Goddess. Ahananooru talks about sea Goddess. The records of the Travancore Census Report 1931 mentions about the inscription at the Cape Comorin temple. It talks about a Paravar King Villavaraya of Cape who ruled the coastal land. It is also believed that the temple at Cape was built by the Paravars for their Sea Goddess. The Paravars' natural attachment to Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple also can be attributed as a great sign of their reverence to their Mother Goddess.

When the southern people started changing their religion under the northern influence, Paravars

also followed suit. During the Cholas and later Pandiya kings regime Paravars were believers of Saivism. There were many highly learned and spiritually bolstered Saivites in Paravar Community.

## Pandiyan Kingdom

From 1311 onward the Muslim rulers began to invade Pandiyan Empire and continued repeated onslaught on them. In 1323 they captured the Pandian Kingdom. The Muslims being very powerful at sea and having the support of local Kings started forcing the Paravars to embrace Islam. But they failed every time. In 1516 the Muslims captivated whole pearl fishery on lease from Udaya Marthanda Varma and Paravars were brinked to the state of slavery. And for the first time ever in the history the Paravars lost their right over the pearl fishery

The Paravar belief of being the Paravaims of the biblical scriptures and the lost tribes of Israel added to the differences with the Arabs, which is acknowledged by Fr. Henrique Henriques (The Father of Tamil Press) by his claim of kinship.

Once the Paravars of Pearl Fishery Coast had a sharp dispute with the Muslims of this area regarding the right of Pearl Fishing. The Pattankattimar (The leaders of Parava villages) requested the Portuguese to rescue them from the cruelties of the Muslims and the Portuguese responded and the Muslims were routed. As a token of gratitude to their redeemers, the Portuguese, the Paravars from about 22 villages numbering about 30,000 embraced Christianity in the year 1535-37. Thus, nearly 30,000 Paravars got back their right over Pearl fishery. In October 1542, St. Francis Xavier arrived on the shores of the Pearl Fishery Coast to catechize them and strengthen them further in their faith.

Conversion of the Paravas by Francis Xavier



During the baptism of Paravars, the Portuguese happened to be God-fathers. So they had given their names to Paravars. These surnames are still prevalent in the Paravar community. 68 such names are existing amongst which Fernando, Fernandes are mostly used. Few Paravars embraced Islam too. The Tamil Muslims called Maraikkayars (Marakkala Arayar) are Paravar converts to Islam, they dwell around Kayalpattinam coastal belt.

The history of Shrine Our Lady of Snows Basilica is closely connected with the history of the conversion of the Paravars (Tuticorin), the indigenous people of the Pearl Fishery Coast. In fact, Our Lady of Snows, is fondly called in Portuguese Senhora, Das Nevis which means Our

Our Lady of Snows- Patrons Saint of Bharathas



Lady of Snows. She has been given the unique title of Yelu Kadalthurai, Yega Adikala Thai in Tamil which means the Mother of Refuge for the seven major coastal villages, viz Vembar, Vaippar, Thoothukudi (Snows Basilica, Tuticorin), Punnaikayal, Virapandianpatinam, Thiruchendur and Manapad (Thoothukkudi District).

*Chronology of events which impacted on the lively hood of Paravas in India*

712 AD- The Arab Muslim invasion began at the Sindh Valley and by around 1300 they had taken over the entire of northern India. However, even prior to the invasion there were Arabs in southern areas such as Calicut, Quilon and Malabar, chiefly traders interested in the spices, pearls, precious



stones and cottons which were available there. Another advantage of the location was that it was on a major sea trade route running through south-east Asia and on to China. Some of these Arabs were also pearl divers, having gained their experience in the waters of the Persian Gulf.

There are differences of opinion regarding events up to the early 1500s. Some believe that the Muslims gained influence over the Paravars to the point that the latter became at best hired labour and at worst enslaved.

1527 AD- The Paravars were being threatened by Arab fleets offshore. The Portuguese protection was granted on the condition that the leaders were immediately baptised as Christians and that they would encourage their people also to convert to Christianity; the Portuguese would also gain a strategic foothold and control of the pearl fisheries. The deal was agreed and some months later 20,000 Paravars were baptised en masse, and became subjects of Portugal, during the visit of Pedro Gonsalves, Vicar of Cochin.

1537AD- By the end the entire community had declared itself to be Christian, and the Portuguese proceeded to destroy the Arab fleet when they met fortuitously at Vedalai on 27 June 1538. From that point the Paravar people as a whole enjoyed renewed prosperity.

1542 AD- Francis Xavier, a Jesuit priest, had been working in Goa prior to his journey to Kanyakumari, where he arrived in October 1542, a further 10,000 Paravars were baptised during the first month of his mission, and 30,000 in total by its end.

1543 AD- was the year that the Portuguese first

settled in Tuticorin, and the point from which that port began to expand until it eventually became the hub of the pearl fishery and Paravas continued to prosper.

1658 AD- Dutch took over control of the fisheries from Portuguese along with sovereign over Paravas whom they tried to convert to Protestants but failed. During their period of control the Dutch also established a cloth factory in Tuticorin and this was a much appreciated venture — at some point the Paravars had also become traders in cloth.

1796 AD- The British took over control. After a period of gradual usurpation of Dutch authority along the coast and elsewhere by the East India Company. They had seized Tuticorin in 1785. Both sides had attempted to influence the Paravars, seeking to have their support to exploit the riches of the fishery waters. The new government continued to recognise the Paravar's hierarchical social structure, as the Dutch and Portuguese had done before them. However, until 1813 the Company did not officially allow Christian missionaries to operate in the areas under its control, bowing only then due to pressure from religious organisations in Britain.

1830 AD- Jesuit missionaries returned to further strengthening Christianity after the Society of Jesuits was dissolved in 1773.

1945 AD- Tuticorin becomes main cotton export activity center in South India and the Paravars also managed to prosper from the economic boom.

1947 AD- India gains independence. During Post independence the fishery industry became a monopoly of the new independent Indian

Government. Paravas gradually lost control over fishery trade.

### **Paravan in Other States/Countries**

In Kerala, Paravans are part of Hindus caste unlike Tamil Nadu. They are inland fishermen, mostly found in central and southern parts of the state. The President of India, K. R. Narayanan, served

from 1997 until 2002 and was born to a Paravan family of Kottayam, Kerala. But, Paravan in Kerala are entirely different from Paravan in Sri Lanka. Paravan in Sri Lanka are Aryan but, in Kerala they are scheduled caste. There are many place names derived from Paravan, like Paravoor in Kollam and Vadakkan Paravoor and Parur in Ernakulam.

## **History – Bharathas in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)**

In Sri Lanka they are primarily found in the commercial capital, Colombo and in towns north of it, particularly in the Western and North Western Provinces and Mannar in the Northern Province.

From the 12th to the early 15th century, the seafaring Paravar of the fishing coast of South India were recruited by the Sri Lankan Coastal kings to strengthen their armies. Mainly settled down the coastal areas (North of Colombo upto Chilaw) and latter during Portuguese times more Paravar came and settled.

There are two important Bharatha groups in Sri Lanka. One is the group of sea-faring families residing from around Chilaw down to Colombo. There is evidence that there had been Bharatha settlements up to Kalutara in the Colonial period.

Besides these indigenised littoral connected Bharathas, there are also Bharathas in the Colombo Municipality area who settled during the British rule, especially to work in the Colombo harbour. In fact the area opposite St. Anthony's Church in Kotahena, there has a heavy concentration of Bharathas.

The earliest records about the waves of migration are buried in the dim mists of time. Legend also connects them to the time of King Parakrama Bahu VI of Kotte way back in 1415, indicating that they came from Mohenjadarro led by eight Aryan warriors and 16 lieutenants whose objective as per the Royal Charter was to "drive away the Mukkuwars (Arab horse dealers) who were entrenched in Puttalam and were a threat to the King". The King overjoyed at the repulsion of the Mukkuwars allowed them to make their homes along the West coast, from Mannar to Moratuwa.

The last group of Paravar from south India came and settled in the British times. The cotton boom in 1850-60 more Paravar migration came from South India mainly from Paravaroor (towns) Alanthalai, Manapad, Punniyakayal, Tutucorin, Vembar, Vepar and Veerapandiapatnam from South India settled in Sri Lanka. They had the Portuguese connection so it made them comfortable to settle in Sri Lanka.

Many, many centuries later, how and when they came seem irrelevant, for they have well and truly integrated themselves into Sri Lankan society,

while at the same time retaining their distinct culture and identity. Yes, they have carved a niche for themselves- the Bharathas of Sri Lanka, who have been recognized as a separate community, without being lumped as 'Others' for the first time in the Census carried out in July 2001.

The word Parathar and its variant Parathavar have been in usage from the earliest period. The most ancient of Tamil literature, the Sangam anthology refers to them as a people from the maritime regions (Neithal). They are depicted as traders and fishermen in the Sangam classics. It is possible that as fishermen they were also interested in pearl diving which should explain their presence upto the northwestern shores of Sri Lanka, some place names of which like Silavathurai and Silapham are reminiscent of Muthusalapham which in Tamil means pearl oyster beds.

## Family Names

The Paravars were a primarily endogamous society, marrying only within their own caste and so keeping the tribal ties strong. Subsequently they became exogamous and from this came the use of names based on Portuguese origin since the arrival of the Portuguese in India. Family names such as Fernando, Costa, da Cruz and Roche are a direct consequence of these marriages, and familiar names, such as Susai (a Tamil translation of *Joseph*), reflect both the marriages and the general Portuguese influence.

There are four family names of non-Christian origin still in common use, these being Kalingarayan, Villavarayan, Poobalarayan and Rayan. These names are thought possibly to have their origin in *arayan*, which was used by Tamil

In the late medieval, pre-western period, the pearl fishery was controlled by Muslim traders. The Muslims employed the Parathavar mainly as their Pearl divers. Scholars like A. Sivasubramanian have shown how the Parathavar who were exploited by their Muslim masters converted enmasse to Catholicism in the 16th century. It is quite possible that the large number of them who came to settle on the northwestern coast were already Catholic.

The fact that these Bharathas continued to practice their religion and speak in Tamil tongue is testified to by the number Tamil schools and churches in the predominantly Catholic places of the Bharathas. From the late 20's there has been a slow process of Sinhalisation.

fishing groups as a caste title. *Arayan* is claimed by some modern descendants of the Paravars to be itself derived from *rayya* (rajah, king)

The Fernandos hailing from the parish of Vembar tucked in a corner of South East India, belonged to the Diocese of Tuticorin. Their community known as Bharathas were the converts of the Jesuits in the 16th century whose faith was enkindled by St. Francis Xavier. Through thick and thin, they cherished their faith even as they spread their wings to distant shores, to reach Mannar, Negombo, Colombo and beyond. They were astute business people who dominated petrol outlets, liquor business and textile trade in Ceylon, as our Country was then known

Common last names adopted by Bharathas in Sri Lanka include Fernando, Croos-Moraes, Peeris and Rubeiro. Coonghe, Pinghe, Moraes, Croos, Dabrera, Soza, Sosa, Rodrigo, Paldano, also Feldano, Figuarado, Mirando, Paiva, Victoria and

Raj Chandra, Corera, de Croos, Ferdinandes, Peeris, Miranda, Motha, Corera, Costa, Rayan, Rayen, Pereira , Roche, Gomez, Soris and Rubeiro. Fernando is the commonest last name, all are proud to be Bharathas.

## Religion & Language

Bharatha names also link them immediately to the Portuguese and Catholicism. Though their ancestors were Hindus, they became staunch Catholics when Portuguese missionaries came to Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and were bestowed Portuguese names.

From the late 20's there has been a slow process of Sinhalisation. By the sixties and seventies the place of Tamil among the Bharathas of the Western and Northwestern coast severely diminished. Only the Hindu coastal peoples in places such as Muneeswaram and Udappu retained their Tamilness amid this process of Sinhalisation.

## Population

Provisional estimates of the Census indicate there are about 1,688 Bharathas across the country, excluding the north and the east.

Historical population		
Year	Pop.	±%
2001	2,200	—
2011	1,688	-23.3%

**Source :** Department of Census & Statistics [4]  
Data is based on Sri Lankan Government Census.

Although the census indicate only 1,688 there are over 10,000 families scattered all over Sri Lanka. Most Bharathas particularly in the North & East still register under “ Sri Lanka (Ceylon) Tamil” category during census. Hence the difficulty in getting a reliable statistical figure of the Bharatha population in Sri Lanka.

Main areas of concentration are Colombo, Negombo, Mannar, Bolawatte, Puttalam, Chilaw, Kurunegala, Kandy, Panadura, Batticaloa, Galle.



# Contribution to the Society

## His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando

### The first Bharatha Bishop in Sri Lanka



Engineer Xavier Bastian Fernando and his beloved wife, with a flamboyant name, Gnanasorubi did beget eight children of whom four they gave to be consecrated to God's service.

Thus, Joe of the Diocese of Jaffna and Emmanuel of the Colombo Archdiocese became priests whilst the girls in between joined the Apostolic

Carmalite Congregation. More was in store for the Fernando Family who made Kotahena their cherished abode. Years later on 11th of February 2012 Emmanuel will be called to reach the fullness of priesthood - Sacerdotal Plenitude. Henceforth, he will be known as His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando and will don the Royal Purple. One wonders how this humble servant of God will bear the weight of grave title undoubtedly, the new Bishop will dedicate himself to serve God's people with renewed vigour and a burning passion.

## J.E. John Rodrigo



On February 7, 1980, John Rodrigo, distinguished son of Negombo, passed away leaving behind a vacuum in the city's leadership yet to be filled.

John Rodrigo was a versatile gentleman whose comparatively short lifespan of 62 years was eventful

and multifaceted - Educator, Administrator, Social Worker, Parliamentarian and Diplomat. In all these roles, John Rodrigo was a man of principle and a man of conscience who remained true to himself and his beliefs under all circumstances and at all times.

As commerce teacher at Maris Stella, as Administrative Secretary of the Ceylon National Chamber of Commerce, as Mayor of Negombo, whatever the era, whatever the circumstances, he performed his duties with honesty, sincerity and commitment and won for himself national recognition when Madame Sirimavo Bandaranaike,

Prime Minister, appointed him as Member of Parliament from 1970 – 1972 representing minority interests. His speeches in Parliament were always delivered with a fine sense of professionalism and focus, bereft of petty acrimony and abuse.

The people of Negombo rejoiced when he was appointed the country's ambassador to Italy – an assignment he served with distinction from 1973 to 1977. John Rodrigo's role as ambassador was

embellished by the elegance, the grace and the magnanimity of his wife, Mignonne – A Lady whom all hold in much affection and respect. These are the qualities which endeared himself to a wide circle of friends with whom he interacted as Secretary of the Maris Stella OBA, Charter **President of the Lions Club of Negombo and President of the Negombo Bharatha Association.**

## Bharathas in Negombo

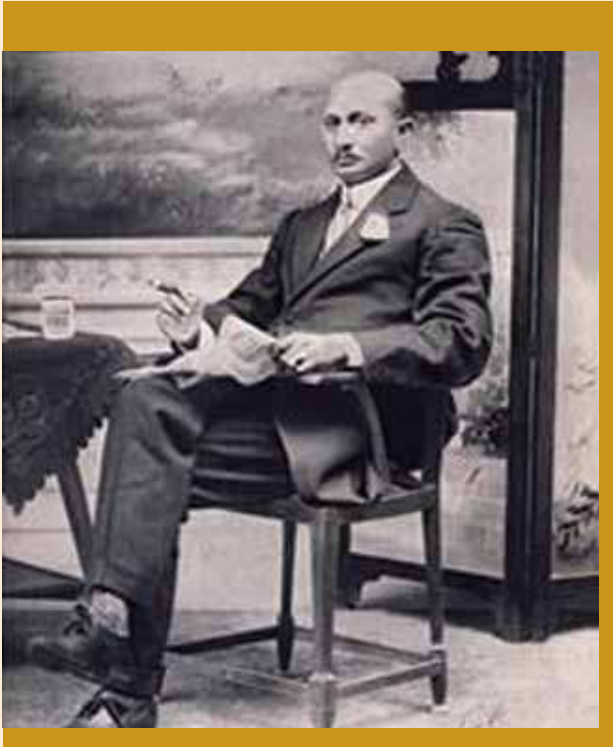
Negombo has an unbroken and strongly bonded community of Bharathas who have staunchly preserved the cherished traditions of their forefathers in this part of the country.

They are active members of the Catholic Church, but have moved away from the traditional businesses of land owning and renting. "More and more youth are taking to professions and have moved away from their ancestral lands. There are priests, doctors, engineers and other professionals. Some have married from other communities. The young ones are also very fluent in Sinhala. Things have changed," says Mr. Selvam Croos Moraes former President of Negombo Bharatha Association.

The President of the Negombo Bharatha Association,-2015/16 Mr. Gehan Croos Moraes adds "We are still a very close-knit community and the association has about 200 families, but would like to have closer links with Bharathas all over the country. Then we can preserve our identity while at the same time contributing much to the growth of the country."

The Negombo Bharatha Association with a recorded history of over 75 years has become a unifying force for the pockets of Bharathas scattered all over the country.

## First President of Negombo Bharatha Association



Nicholas Emmanuel De Croos was the only son of John De Croos, landed proprietor and merchant of Negombo. He was born at Negombo in 1880 and educated at St. Mary's High School and St. Thomas's and St. Joseph's Colleges, in Colombo. His business operations as an arrack renter of Ratnapura and expanded to Chilaw and parts of Colombo as well. He had huge stores in

Kalutara and Chilaw and drew his supplies from the former. He was one of the largest land owners in the western province at that time. His principal properties were St. John's Yaya, Kandangamuwa, Divulapitya, Noel's Mead and Kahatewila. He also had smaller properties closer to his home in Negombo that were the Nicksford Group and Thornwood estate. On the latter he was known to have one of the finest country residences ever erected on the island. (Quote from 20th century impressions of Ceylon) He is also said to have one of the finest town residences in the Western Province according to the same source. He had been an elected member of the Negombo local council since 1905 for a period of 15 years. He was the President of the Negombo Town council and also the First President of the Negombo Bharatha Association.

Negombo Bharathas are Roman Catholics and religion plays an important part in their lives. The Bharathas living in the Negombo city consider St. Joseph as their patron saint and celebrate the feast with pomp and pageantry at St. Mary's Church, Grand Street, Negombo. Their contributions towards religion have not only been physical, in the form of churches, altars, etc., but also spiritual by gifting their children to serve God.

Our Lady of Snows Church,  
Periyamulla, Negombo-1910 AD



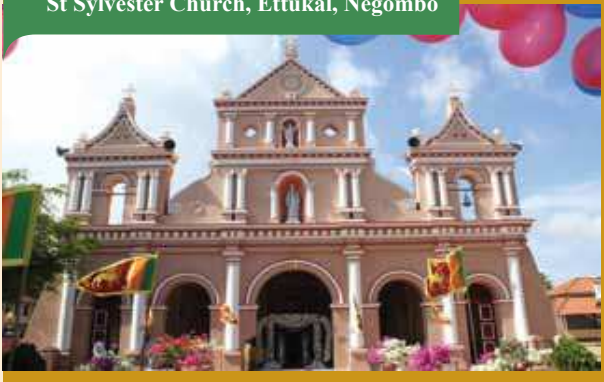
Periyamulla village, within Negombo known as “Little Rome” all over Sri Lanka. It should be noted that even before the construction of this historical church, the ethnic community known as “Bharatha” of Indian origin was living in Periyamulla fostering best of relationship with the Negombo Catholics. Those merchants who came from Tuticorin in India and settled down in Negombo, have been called the “Negombo Barathas”. Their exact date and period of their arrival is not known. However, since they had come to Negombo as Catholics, they are a part the growth of Catholic population in Negombo. There exists a Basilica dedicated to “Our Lady of

St Mary’s Church, Grand  
Street, Negombo-1874 AD



Snows in Tuticorin, India, built in 1582 A.D., by the Portuguese. When the Bharatha community arrived and settled down in Periyamulla, they brought with them a statue of Our Lady of Snows and set it up in front of the Periyamulla church, under the cover of a tiny attic to be honoured by the public.

St Sylvester Church, Ettukal, Negombo



This church is maintained solely by the Bharathas living in the Ettukal village.

St Mary’s Church, Bolawatte – 1742 AD





A few Bharathas settled in Bolawatte in the neighbourhood of St Mary's Church, where lies the tomb of Rev. Fr. Jacome Gonsalvez who also came from India. The most illustrious companion of Rev. Fr. Joseph Vaz and was called "Father of Catholic Literature" who mastered the main two local languages in Sri Lanka namely Sinhala and

Tamil, He produced a very rich catholic literature of almost 42 books and composed prayers, hymns and passion plays which are used even today in many parts of the island. A Cross used by Fr. Gonsalvez has left an indelible mark at Bolawatte.

## Bharathas in Colombo

The Bharathas with their long trading links with Sri Lanka then known as Ceylon, were among the first to establish themselves in business in the Pettah. Imported textiles to clothe the well-to-do and the middle class of urban Sri Lanka, was one of the main businesses the Bharathas went onto. Many of them established themselves on the main shopping thoroughfare in the Pettah, Main Street and its Cross Streets.

Santiago Aiyya Thamby de Mel, S Miguel Fernando, J L Carwallio's some of the old business people who were involved in Clothing .Dry fish, Arrack, Land sale, Imports and Exports, Kerosene (Rising Sun), Hotels were popular biz..

Contribution of Bharathas to Sri Lanka was immense, particularly through the retail stores they established in small towns throughout the island, to provide the middle class and the wealthy, imported household goods from food and drink to furnishing and clothing.

Despite being staunch Roman Catholics, the Bharathas still follow several of the ancient Hindu traditions, adapting them to their present rituals. Most of them settled in Kotahena a town bordering the sea in the capital city of Colombo. The first Bharatha Conference was held in

Tuticorin in December 1915. In January 1938, the 9th Bharatha Conference Conference was held in Colombo, under the presidency of Mr A.L.J. Croos Dabrera. Mr J.P.A. De Mel, wrote a welcome poem which was delivered to the Indian delegates, on Galle Face green before a crowd of 3,000. The illuminated grounds of St Benedict's College was the venue on the first day. A publication entitled "Milestones in Bharatha Progress" was made available to the delegates on that day recalls Ms Therese Motha

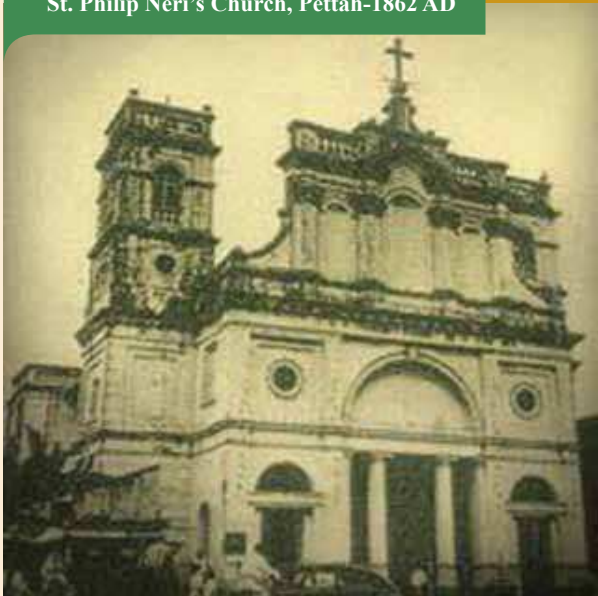
In 1937, due to the initiative of Mr I.X.Pereira, a Rest Home was constructed in Tuticorin , for the benefit of Bharathas who came from Ceylon or the outlying villages. It is known today as the Bharatha Home.

Today, the descendants of these traders, number less than 1,000, have moved into modern businesses and the professions. But a few still carry on their traditional trade activities.

"We organize several social and religious programs during the year in order to keep our community united together and also to keep the present generation aware of the history and traditions of Bharathas. Our patron saints is Our Lady of Snows and the feast is celebrated annually

at St Philip Neri's Church, Pettah". says Mr Pius Lopez, President- 2015/16 of the All Ceylon Bharatha Association an organization established in the year 1966 by the Bharathas in Colombo.

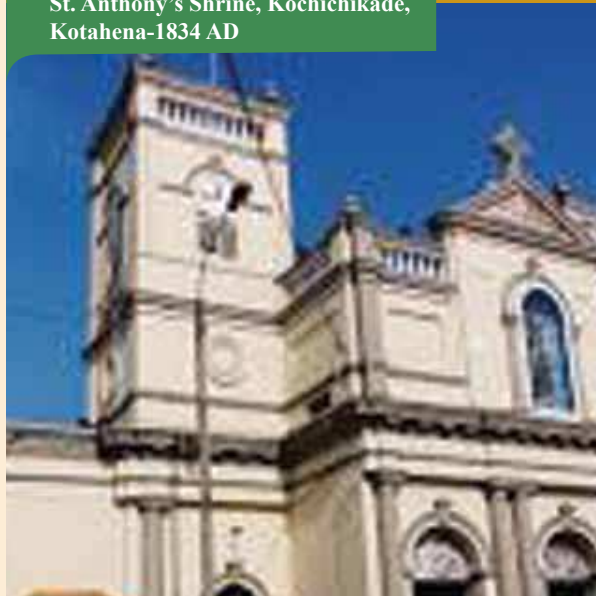
St. Philip Neri's Church, Pettah-1862 AD



Since Bharathas in Sri Lanka wanted to venerate Our Lady of Snows Mr. A P Gomez made a replica of the statue in Tuticorin and installed at

Churches mainly patronized by Bharathas residing in Colombo

St. Anthony's Shrine, Kochichikade, Kotahena-1834 AD



St. Philip Neri's Church, Pettah and celebrate the feast annually on 05th of August.

## Bharathas in Mannar

History relates how the Bharathas were encouraged to settle in Mannar in the 16th and 17th Century in large numbers by the Portuguese for pearl fishing activity and also to strengthen the Roman Catholic faith in a community already under threat from the Jaffna king Sankili.

In his paper The Kingdom of Jaffna before the Portuguese conquest (Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka) Prof S Pathmanathan of the University of Peradeniya gives an account of the political

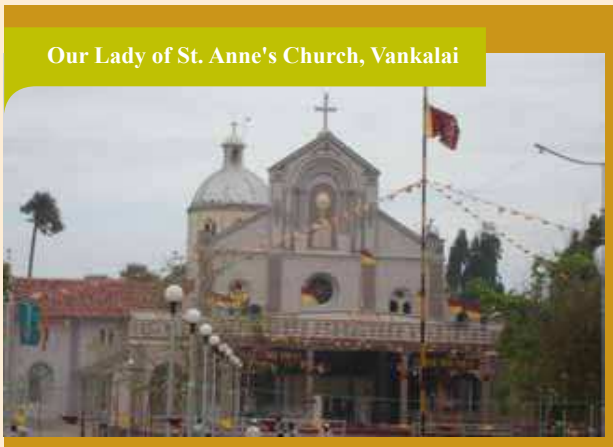
history of Jaffna before the Portuguese take over. The Portuguese intervened in Jaffna for the first time in 1543, when Sankili, the King of Jaffna, seized some wrecked Portuguese cargo vessels and began persecuting Christian converts in Mannar.

In 1543, St Francis Xavier had visited Mannar, on the Western coast, and converted 600 Paravas, a caste of fishermen and pearl divers there.

The Paravas were a depressed class, oppressed by Jaffna's rapacious officials and persecuted by Arab Muslim traders, who eyed the pearl fisheries. Since the converts were automatically deemed to be Portuguese subjects, Sankili was alarmed.

He saw in this a grave threat to Jaffna's economy and security. The immensely valuable pearl fisheries would be out of his control. The Parava area in Mannar could become a bridgehead for a Portuguese invading army.

Therefore, in 1543 itself, Sankili sent an expedition to Mannar and slaughtered the Parava converts. St. Francis Xavier promptly appealed to the Portuguese state to punish the Jaffna King.



Our Lady of St. Anne's Church, Vankalai

Vankalai is a village with more than 99% Roman Catholics. Vankalai has become now one of the largest villages in Mannar. Currently its population figure is a little over 8,000. Vankalai is inhabited mainly by members of the Bharatha community. The Portuguese invasion and destruction of the Tamil territories between 1505–1658 caused most of Mannar including villages such as Vankalai to become Catholic villages.

In the center of this village is a huge ancient

But it was only in 1558 that Constantine de Braganca captured Jaffna. Sankili escaped to Trincomalee.

Subsequently, he made peace with the Portuguese and came back to power, but without control over Mannar.

Today there is a heavy concentration of Bharathas in the Mannar District. Particularly in villages such as Pesali, Thalupadu, Parapankandal, Pandiparichan, Silvathura, Vankalai, Most of them are Roman Catholics and speak in Tamil.

In the July 2012 census there are no “Bharathas” recorded as almost all of them have registered under “Sri Lanka Tamil” category in the Mannar district.



Church Feast Day, Vankalai (mainly Bharathas)

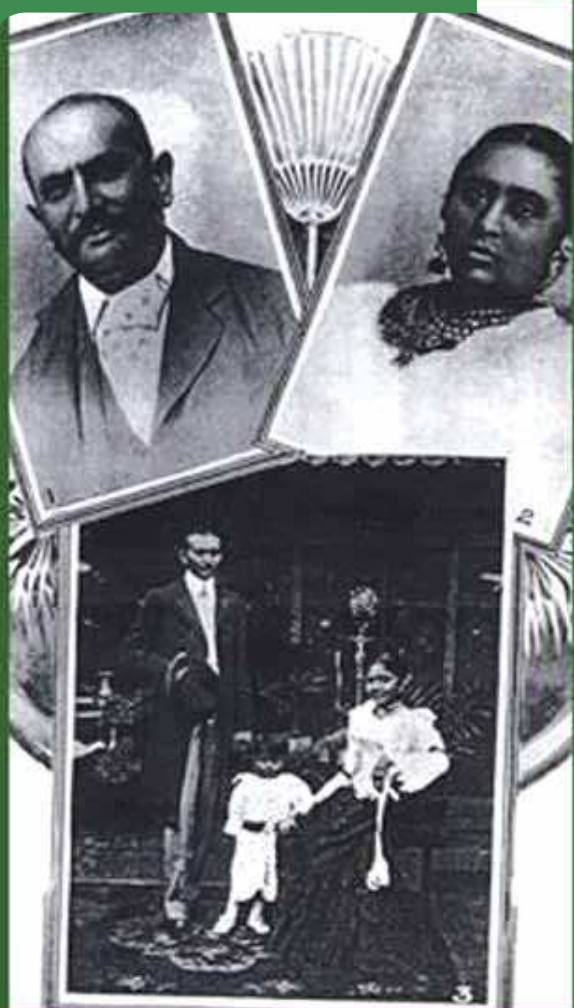
Catholic Church called Our Lady of St Anne's Church, originally built during the Portuguese colonial period, an important landmark in Vankalai.

Mr. Pilesiyan Sosai Soosaihasa former Member of Parliament hails from Vankalai. He contested the 1977 parliamentary elections and won the election and entered parliament. Prior to it he was the Chief Accountant at Lanka Salu Sala, the state owned handloom and textile trader.

# Life Style

## Traditional Costumes

Bharatha Family in traditional costumes





## Jewellery



## Traditional goodies

Though most are Catholics vestiges of Hindu culture still remain, for they tie the thali round the bride's neck during the marriage ceremony. Older generations speaking mostly Tamil.

"We cook our roast pork, a must for any festive occasion, in toddy instead of vinegar," says Ms.Lavinia Croos Moraes a Bharatha lady. "It does give a better flavour."

Explaining the recipes handed down from her grandmother, she says they also have a special 'moju' rice-puller (pickle) made of prawns or dried fish. "Unlike other communities we use equal quantities of onion and maldive fish in our seeni sambol to make it really crunchy," she says.



She displayed the family cutlery and crockery - a beautiful rice plate, large rice spoon and other utensils - preserved for posterity by her grandparents and in-laws. "Profegi was a sweet fried in oil, like a cutlet and chatti dosi was one made with rulang, ghee, sugar, cadju and raisins. We also make all those Portuguese sweetmeats like bibikkan and kavun," she says relating a marriage custom connected to food.

Three days before a marriage, all the relatives would get together and cook kavun, but not take a single bite until the wedding was over. Another custom was to join three athiraha together to ensure a blissful life for the couple.

## Cultural

### **Bharatha Cultural Fellowship**

This social organisation has been formed by the Bharathas mainly residing in Colombo and suburbs to gather the widely dispersed members of the once thriving community of traders and professionals in Sri Lanka. It conducts special programs to foster and nurture the needs of all Bharatha families in Sri Lanka

Bharatha Cultural Fellowship, which brings together the Bharatha community members spread across the country, has formed a separate Ladies Forum. The Ladies Forum adds colour and vigour to the association's service projects, enhance networking while sharing their talents and expertise says the Mr Joy Roche, President-2015/16.

The Bharatha Cultural Fellowship has chosen to adopt a pair of fish stylishly inter twined to proclaim the venturing spirit of our people across the seas. Depicted atop is a star the symbol of Mother Mary often who they invoked as “ Star of the Sea” or in latin “ Maris Stella”. The people

of Bharatha community also known as Paravars have been inhabiting the Southern areas of eastern coast of India, since ancient times. They lived and thrived within the realm of the Pandiyan kings whose ensignia was a slimmering fish. These kings claimed a significant dominion of the coastal regions and the high seas to amass wealth. The Paravars maintained a dominant role in this endeavour and reached far and wide in their sturdy merchant vessels known as “Thoni”, even until recent times.

Bharathas have also for centuries considered “Our Lady of Snows” as their beloved patron.

The motto “ per aspera ad astra” (a popular Latin phrase meaning "through hardships to the stars") scripted below urges us all to strive to reach the stars of success.

Our unique logo clearly links very graphically the historic past of our community with its cherished spiritual heritage.

## Core Values

### **The Triangle for Support for Community Development**

#### **Family Values**

Bharathas are a very close knit community. Having settled down mainly on the western coast of Sri Lanka,

they could be seen in numbers in particular towns such as Negombo, Colombo, Mannar, Kochchikade, Kurunegala, Ratnapura, Kandy and Batticaloa. The family gatherings include participation of the general community."''

## Education

The legend is that Bharathas arrived in Sri Lanka as warriors and traders during the sixteenth century. When the Dutch were controlling the Maritime provinces, the Negombo bazaar was lined with what were known as “Chetty Boutiques”. The land around Coppara Junction was donated by Rosa Isabella de Croos and Mary Christina de Croos to the Marist Brothers for the purpose of building Maris Stella College. To date this college is one of the premier educational institutions in Sri Lanka and has produced many professionals in all fields.

## Creating & Sharing Wealth

Bharathas have historically shared wealth with not only their own community but also with the

community in general. There are interesting landmarks of their generosity to date.

Today, people of various communities are in search of their historical roots. But here is a community which has retained the name of its occupation, way of life, religious practices and certain characteristics like militancy and hospitality for quite a long period. One is amazed at this special community living mainly along the coastal belt for their unique culture that has been preserved and nurtured very carefully for so long. These people are called the Paravas in the Sangam literature and Bharathas in the modern era.

## Contacts

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## Definitions

Bible Quotes:–

2 Chr 3:6 He adorned the temple with precious stones. And the gold he used was gold of Parvaim. Parvaim people who lived in Parvaim.

2 Chr 8:18 Hiram, (Phoenician King of Tyre) had his servants send him ships and his own servants, expert seamen; they went with Solomon's servants to Ophir, and obtained there four hundred and fifty talents of gold and brought it to King Solomon.

2 Chr 9:10 The servants of Hiram and of Solomon who brought gold from Ophir also brought cabinet wood and precious

Uvari is situated down south towards Kanyakumari on the Fishery Coast.

Sangam Age-The three rulers of the Sangam Age were the Cheras, the Cholas and the

Pandyas. They ruled Tamil Nadu during the first three centuries of the Christian era.

Rajayyan, K., History of Tamil Nadu - Past to Present, Kanjiramkulam, 1995, p. 29.

“Our lady Of Snows”-The apparition of Our Lady goes back to the 4th century. A couple known as Juwan Pathriyas, who lived in Rome had no children. The couple being greatly devoted to Our Lady wanted to spend their wealth for the glory of God but didn't know how to do it, as they had no directions. Meanwhile in prayer. Our Lady appeared to them on 4th , 5th, August 352 A.D and revealed to them that they should build a church on the hill of “Ascolin”, one of those well – known mountains. Rt. Rev. Dr. Anthony Coudert OMI, the Archbishop of Colombo consecrated the first church dedicated to Our Lady of Snows at Periyamulla, Sri Lanka in 1910





# The Kaffirs of Sri Lanka

Dr. Sarath Ananda

## Introduction

The history provides evidence to establish that the Sri Lankan community of Kaffirs is an ethnic group that has come into being as an offshoot of the colonialism of the Western nations (Jayasooriya and Pankhust 2001, Danver 2013). Although it consists of comparatively a small number, its biological and cultural identity, political history

and physical existence are much attractive and absorbing. Perhaps it may be seen that there is no other group in Sri Lanka like Kaffirs who had been subjected so much to disbursement, cultural conflicts, ethnic intermixture etc. like the Kaffirs in Sri Lanka. Believed to be the descendants of the great grandparents who had come (or

rather brought) here from Far-East (Africa) are possessed with only the verbal traditions brought from generation to generation about their history. However despite all those difficulties and obstacles they have been brave enough to retain to the best of their ability their ethnical identity and the cultural heritage.

The Sri Lankan Kaffirs community known in English as Kaffirs, in Sinhalese as Kapiri and in Tamil as Kapili are descending from the human groups brought from East African countries headed by Mozambique originally in the 16th and 17th centuries by Portuguese and even by Arab traders followed by the Dutch and Englishmen as house servants, navigational assistants and perhaps as soldiers into the areas under their domination. (as found in [http://www. biyokulule. com](http://www.biyokulule.com):2016). When considering, specially the Sri Lankan community of Kaffirs, there are evidences to establish that they had been brought here by the Portuguese as their domestic servants, navigational assistants as well as soldiers to serve them at wars against the Sinhala kings. When considering the general behavior and outward appearance, they show much similarities to the Zanj community in Iraq and Kuwait and Sheedis and Siddis living in Pakistan and India. (<http://originalpeople.org>: 2016). Accordingly it can be assumed that these human groups are members of a larger group with one common historical root and planted by the Portuguese and Arabs in various centers in the Asian region in order to provide the services required by their masters. The language of the Sri Lankan Kaffirs is Creole a language branching off from the Portuguese language but by now owing to the integration with various indigenous cultures it is gradually fading away from general use.

The Sinhala word Kapiri is derived from the

English word Kaffir but it is generally used to introduce the entire population that lives around the area called Great Lakes and the South African zones. Sometimes this word is been used in a derogatory manner to run down and also to insult the people in South Africa. However the philologists consider that the word Kaffir in English has its roots in the Kafir of the Arabic language which means the “Mystic” or Non-believer in Islam (<http://originalpeople.org>:2016). It can be concluded that perhaps it is their refusal or the unpreparedness to change their traditional belief system even after been uprooted from their original homes and taken into faraway places in the Arabian zone as domestic servants that prompted them to identify them as such. However even at present it is with great pride that they introduce themselves as Sri Lankan Kapiris or as African Sri Lankans.

The Creole culture in Sri Lanka begins its evolution subsequent to the Portuguese invasions in the early parts of 16th century. Portuguese managed to gain control in the main of the coastal zones covering Kolamba (Colombo), Madakalapuwa (Batticaloa), Meegamuwa (Negambo), Thirikunamalaya (Trincomalee), Galla (Galle), and Yapanaya (Jaffna). According to the legends, Portuguese had brought about 3000 African people to the country and were employed in various functions within the Portuguese areas of dominance. The Portuguese period of rule which started from about 1501-05 lasted for little over one and half centuries and it ended in 1658 with the defeat at the hands of Dutch who took over the coastal areas from the control of the Portuguese. Dutch too are reported to have brought about 5000 Africans to the Island employed them as soldiers, slaves working in the plantations, labourers engaged in construction of fortresses and domestic

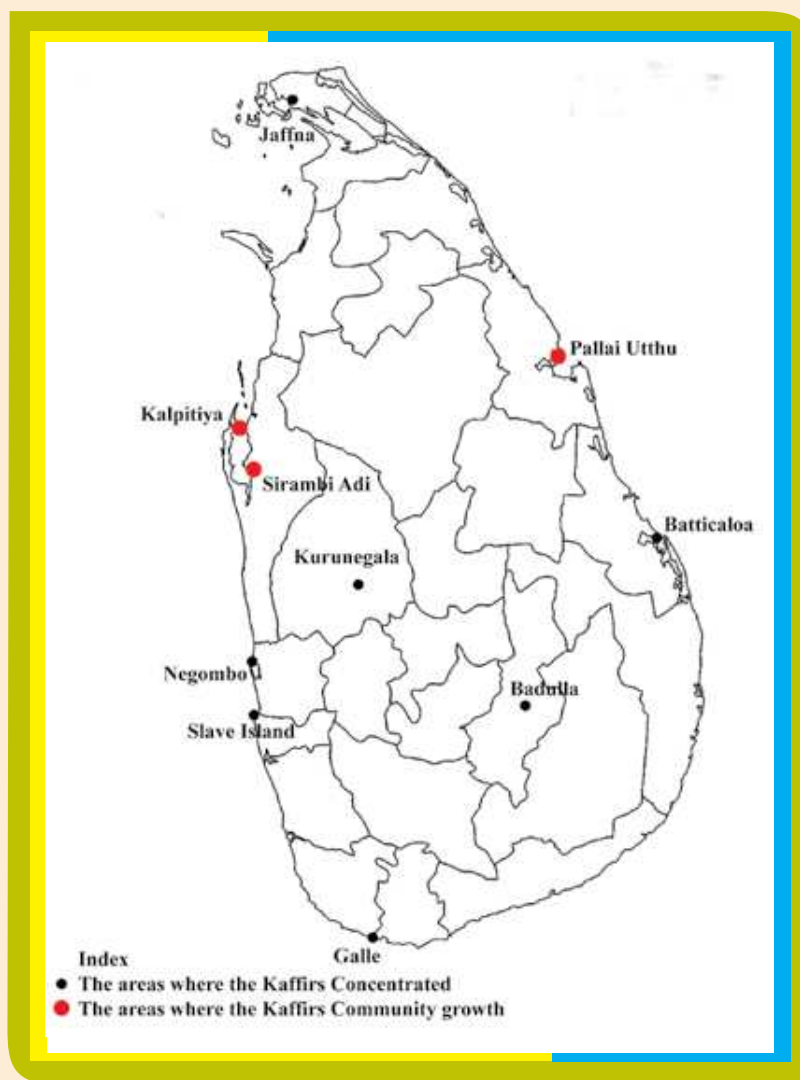


servants (as shown in <http://nation.ac> 2016). Since the defeat of the Portuguese at the battles between them and the Dutch, Portuguese armies retreated and vanished but the Africans who had served for Portuguese crossed over to the Dutch. Some others like civil persons got attached to the job opportunities found in the plantation sector as well as in the trading field (Ibid). According to the information found in certain primary sources some of these Africans who managed to escape from the battles between the Sinhala, Portuguese and Dutch Armies found their way into the Kingdom of the Upcountry for safety. Sinhala Kings who received them very cordially employed them in the battle against the foreign invaders (Ibid).

By now the Sri Lankan Kaffirs are basically concentrated within the coastal areas with a very few in other areas but covering the entire country. When considering the population figures it is estimated that the number of male and females is more or less around one thousand (1000) and even if those who are much assimilated into other communities and hence the original identity is beyond recognition are also added still the number of Kaffirs distributed throughout the country may not exceed 1500.

The Kaffirs of Sri Lanka are mainly concentrated in few places like Sirambiadi in Putthalama (Puttalam), Pallai Utthu in Thirikunamalaya (Trincomalee), Kalpitiya, Madakalapuwa

(Batticaloa), Meegamuwa (Negambo) while only few numbers can be found domiciled in places like Yapanaya (Jaffna), Kolamba (Colombo), Anuradhapura, Badulla etc. Among these only Sirambaadi in Putthalama (Puttalam), Pallai Utthu in Thirikunamale, Kalpitiya can be considered as special since a considerable groups of Kaffirs with claims for a common history, similar experiences and intergroup relationships do reside in those areas.



*The Map showing the geographical zones where the Sri Lankan Kaffirs reside*

## Sirambi adi



Travelling from Putthalama (Puttlam) along Anuradhapura route for about 5 kilometers, there is to the right a byway which leads Sirambiadi which is very close by. Common feature of the area is its hot climate and the aridness of the land. In this area within a specific boundary there are 22 houses whose inmates live here. Every house in the village displays the lower-middle class

appearance with minimum of furniture required for day to day living. Majority of the community are Catholics by religion but few have of late become Buddhists due to their matrimonial relationships. The inmates here have been successful in maintaining cordial relations with members of other communities.



## Ethnological information about the Kaffir community

Although exact statistics of the population figures of the Kaffirs in this island initially brought by the Arab traders and then principally by the Portuguese and subsequently by Dutch and finally by the English from time to time are not available, when taking into consideration the natural increase as well into count it can be assumed when considered analytically that there appears to be a larger Kaffir population in the island. According to the opinion of certain historians (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2001), from about 20,000 people who had entered the island at the time from the ships, Portuguese had been a mere 1000. Others belonged to the various indigenous groups of Asian and African Portuguese colonies. Though it is not definite as to which ethnic groups they belonged to it is certain that considerable number of them would have been of African origin. The Dutch who defeated the Portuguese to capture the littoral sections of the country in the 16th century brought specially in the year 1658, 5000 Africans to serve in their military services. (<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2011>). Same source reports that after the end of the Dutch rule in Sri Lanka, the English brought 6000 Africans to

swell its Kaffir Regiment in the 18th century (ibid). Hence it would be useful to examine as to why their population had dwindled to such low numbers.

The reasons for the dwindling of the Kaffir population in the island can be lined up in several ways on the basis of the guesses made according to the historical factors. With the implementation of the enactment of the Slavery Abolishing Act in 1845 by the British rule it is reported that 9000 Africans were freed from slavery. (Ibid). Subsequent it can be surmised that some of them with the concurrence of their masters or on their own wish had left the island. Also there is evidence to prove that considerable number of them who had been in military service with the Portuguese or Dutch or the British had died in battles against the native Sri Lankan kings. The well known historic battles of the Sinhalese against the Portuguese like Battle of Mulleriyawa 1562, Battle of Randeniwela 1630, Battle of Gannoruwa 1638 are foremost among them. History records that the heavily weakened Portuguese specially after the heavy losses at the hands of the Sinhala armies

incurred at the Randeniwela Battle, were compelled to rush down Portuguese regiments from Goa in their preparation to face the impending mighty attacks by the overjoyed Sinhala armies to capture the Colombo fort.

Apart from these, there were various battles and revolts that developed during the times of Dutch and the British. The support of the Kaffir regiments was solicited in these instances as well. Thus it can be argued with justification that a considerable number of Kaffirs lost their lives in these instances. Since it is reported that specially after the disastrous battle of Randeniwela, the number of Kaffirs left was estimated to be mere 84 one may be able to visualize the gravity of the disaster befallen on them (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst,2001)

According to the records of the Dutch Governor Van Goyans (junior) there had been a Kaffir population of over 4000 during the contemporary time. The revolts by the Kaffirs against their masters here in Sri Lanka have not been rare as been proved by Dutch Governor Isaac Rumph’s reports about such revolt against his own regime which he claim to have crushed most ruthlessly and the Kaffirs underwent very heavy losses to lives and properties. (<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2011/05/08/fea40.asp>). Also it is reported that since a Dutch Officer, Barrant Vandor Steron and his wife were murdered by the Kaffir rioters, the Dutch had subjected the Kaffir community to ruthless punishments (Ibid).

Various natural illnesses as well as old-age in addition to the nature of slavery undoubtedly would have been a very painful experience to them. Presently the area in Colombo known as “Kompanga Veediya” is used in English as “Slave Island” to mean the island where the slaves were kept but in fact according to historical facts it had been a place for confinement of the sick and old-aged Kaffirs (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk> 2016). Furthermore, except for the areas where they were living as groups (like Sirambi Adi, Tirikunamalaya (Trincomalee) and Kalpitiya) where ever they lived in solitude in other areas where they had migrated in search of employment or for any other reason had integrated with the communities of those areas after having entered into matrimonial relations. Owing to the matrimonial relations established other communities they had integrated and continue to do so to the extent that by way of adopting the ge names etc of the Sinhala, Tamil or Burgher communities with which they had integrated Hence it can be concluded that the population of Kaffir community in this country has come to be owing several such factors.

As for the ethnological information regarding the Kaffirs of Sri Lanka, it can be seen that from about 1870 ethnological data regarding them have been collected. What is special is that these information had been collected on the basis of gender.

## Population

District	Year			
	1973	1881	1892	1901
Colombo	40	-		60
Colombo Muni.	-	73	71	
Colombo-outside	-	16		-



Kurunegala	20	11	20	21
Meegamuwa/Negambo		18	-	-
Puttalam	70	101	115	93
Mahanuwara(Kandy)	43	55	63	49
Badulla	17	19	22	
Tirikunamalaya (Trincomalee)	}	30	31	39
Nuwaraeliya		-	46	24
Galle	-	10	-	14
Nuwara Kalaviya and Thamankaduwa	--	20	20	
Halawatha (Chilaw)	-	-	-	13
Anuradhapura	-	-	-	25

The statistics of Williams as found quoted by Jayasuriya

(Williams 1873:100) Jayasuriya,2008:164)

(Lee 1882)- (Jayasuriya, 2008: 164)

(Lee 1882,Jayasuriya,2008:165)

Few are reported from other Districts as well. However the non-inclusion of several thousands of Africans who were employed in the ships that were launched with Sri Lanka as the base and essentially those who were employed in the military services under the colonial governments appears to be large drawback in the statistics maintained by the these authorities. The submission of the statistics of the population under the gender basis in the respective years is as follows.

The Kaffir population under gender basis for the respective years 1873, 1892 and 1901 is as follows

Year	Females	Males	Total
1873	113	132	245
1892	204	204	408
1901	152	166	318

Data, Jayasuriya, Shihan de Silva and Jean-Pierre Angenot 2008. (Williams 1873: 100], [Lee 1882], Uncovering the History of Africans in Asia, Leiden; Boston, Brill.

## Body Features

The Kaffirs of both genders, males and females are generally strong and comparatively tall and of well built physique. The majority of the community has mostly thick and curly hair in addition to possessing thick lips. As for the colour of the skin still the majority seem to be retaining their original early African character of dark

colour in the skin. However owing to the long association with the other ethnic groups specially the intermixture with the Sinhalese, there is the tendency of fading away the traditional inheritance of body characteristics as well as the skin-colour and hence it is a common sight to see much fair skinned children among them at present.

## Employment and life pattern

Although no representation of the Kaffirs is found in the elite class and in similar employment sectors a considerable section of the community can be found among the service suppliers in the defence sector of the Island. According to certain studies the dry farming (Chena cultivation) is found to be a primary source of income of the Kaffirs of Sri Lanka specially in the case of the people of Sirambi Adi. (www.lankalibrary.com:2016) Although there is no historical records showing the traditional Kaffirs engaging in Chena cultivation their adaptation to the new situations

since coming to Sirambu Adi and integrating with the Sinhala community there they had been accustomed to chena cultivation. In addition to them some residents of Sirambi Adi have been able to find employment in the government institutions like Puttalam Salterns, Puttalam General Hospital and other government as well as private sector institutions as office helpers, labourers and other positions. Majority of the people of Sirambi Adi earn their daily bread through various uncertain odd jobs and means in the area.

## Dress and Ornaments

From the beginning of the period Kaffirs came here their dress fashion had been more or less influenced by the traditional Portuguese and Dutch fashions. Specially the most popular of the female dress form was the Kimona, that resembles the traditional Portuguese dress by that name, a

variety of gowns that falls down up to the ankle level of the person wearing it.

They who are fond of to be in single-coloured gowns with long sleeves on festival occasions and at ceremonies, are very delighted to be on

he occasions of normal domestic life in dresses of short sleeves, very simple but of different patterns and colours. In Sirambi Adi it is not uncommon to see specially the elderly ladies, under the influence of the native ladies wearing the jacket and clothe (Redda and Hettaya) in their normal life. Ladies are accustomed to keep their short and thick hair combed backward and tied. On

ceremonial occasions they love to wear generally larger thodu or earrings. Although the dress of the males at present does not display any significant difference from the general dress of the males of the other ethnic groups in the island there appears a preference among the males of the Kaffirs for dark colours in their dress.

## Cultural characteristics

The contribution of the Kaffir community towards the colorfulness or the diversity is immense. Although numerically they are a small group the share of cultural contribution is widespread within a broad spectrum from the historic warfare techniques to fields of music and singing. For example, it was the Kaffi soldiers who introduced the war weapon of Assagi into our ancient war weaponry collection. This is a weapon very similar to a javelin but not a javelin, with a wooden handle and a sharp point which was meant to be aimed at the enemy from a distance. They were very skilled in using this weapon at war. Neither can we consider the contribution from the Kaffir community in the field of construction industry in Sri Lanka as small or insignificant. Chief among their contributions could be found in association with the construction of fortresses, movement of the ships repairs and in the construction of railway lines (Jayasuriya.2001). Much evidence can be adduced to prove that their contributions had been mostly harnessed in the construction of what is been considered today as a world heritage namely, the Galle Dutch Fortress, and constructions of the colonial period like the Colombo and Jaffna fortresses.

The unique and inherent feature of the Kaffir culture is their language, Criole (Portuguese Criole) and the

culture associated with it. Their language Criole, derived from Portuguese has not reached the level of a written language, instead it remains at the level of a spoken language (Kohl. 2012). The Criole language that initially used for communication between the Portuguese and the Kaffirs subsequently came to be used in exchanging and communicating ideas with the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims among whom they spend their lives.

They had been using this language, Criole for their inter-communication till the end of 18th century when English was made the official language medium for all ethnic groups as well as the administrative language of the country. Of all the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka Kaffirs compared with other groups can be identified as those who had integrated the music, singing and dancing to their daily lifestyle more than anybody else. These cultural features are very meaningfully made use of at their various ceremonial occasions in the families and hence the survival of these cultural features is well guaranteed. Although these cultural features may from the point of view of their academic value appear to be short of much depth still it must be appreciated that these singing and dancing fulfill a great service in helping them forget about their difficulties they are compelled to face in their day

to day life and acquire maximum satisfaction and enjoyment of the life. Hence these cultural events of the Kaffirs are undoubtedly much progressive in their functional value.

This writer was once afforded an opportunity to watch a musical show of these people in Sirambi Adi in Puttalam. It was an occasion where the Kapffrinha Dance considered to be a mixture of the Portuguese music called Fado and an African music called Manja was performed by men, women, girls, boys young and old, all taking part with much enthusiasm and delight and it happened to be most absorbing experience. In the present time they organized into a musical group called “Ceylon African Manja” and often participate in musical shows on invitation. The presentation of Manja that takes the form of a very high musical fiesta is conspicuous by its free flow introduction. The musical instruments used by them in these performances display their cultural intermixture they had been subjected to in the social process at international level.

In the three key activities of singing, playing instruments and dancing the young and old, males and females, all participate in equal enthusiasm and interest. The dancing contribution of the women in particular is seen as an attempt of rejecting the cultural ideals like the concept of shyness that perhaps is instrumental in keeping the women in the south Asian societies away from such activities. (<http://www.sundaytimes.lk:2016>). It is a common feature to see them all commonly using and playing the instruments representing the African folk tradition turned out from primary objects collected locally like table spoons, coconut shells, empty bottles, etc as well as the instruments that can be identified as inter- continental musical instruments like violin, mandalin, Dolak, Rabanas, Spanish Gitar, indigenous drums etc . Their songs are free of high academic standards and are void of deep literally

meanings but they fall in line with musical rhythms and contain much repetitions. They are simple and reflect their corrus of daily life like the sorrow, pain, joy, love and the environmental factors like the sea, animals, nature, birds etc (Ibid).

The singing that generally starts at a low key (with slow beats) end up in very fast rhythms that provide ideal stage (environment) for highly provocative dancing. The Overjoyed by the response of the onlookers they invite the audience as well to join the group singing and dancing. Almost all the songs are restricted to about 6 to 7 lines but since they repeat the singing of the same song under several rhythms with loud shouting and clapping the songs have the capacity to prolong as much as they wish. Although generally none of the groups and none in a group have had prior training or knowledge of Eastern or Western or any other musical tradition it is a common sight to see the presence of Tambourine, Guitar, or any other musical instrument in all the homes. Although they lack the knowledge of language sufficient to express the full meaning of the songs Ms. Juliet Joshepin, a member of the community claims that she possesses the capacity to memorize 35-40 Manja songs that they have inherited from their older generations.

*"Mathura chika chika chika minela  
Minja kavu yawanda rekathu  
Awana sinnathu  
cho cho chochu kudai  
Kinam padaya  
Wenthe sonthai na muraya  
Wende muraya*

(My daughter! getting married and leaving the village of Mathura  
Protect your good family like the ring on your hand)



*Ayo lumara – sthrailatha thiyathe*  
*Minja lumara - sthrailatha thiyathe*  
*Sarungalatha pidmenthu*  
*Mama osa gasamenthu*

(Dear Mother! Make me a kite,  
To fly it into the wedding-like sky where the  
beautiful moon and stars shine,

And where the glittering rainbow appears  
Dear Mother! Make me a kite)

Ms. Sherin, a member of the Manja music group, interpreted according to her understanding the meaning of two songs sung by her. The above adaptation of her interpretation was prepared by us.

## Summery

The Sri Lankan African community, despite being subjected to various social, economic, geographical and contemporary changes continue to live here from a long time. The various cultural identities and talents have been contributing towards making the Sri Lankan society more attractive while at the same time all the ethnic communities of the country have accepted them very well. Though the Sri Lankans identify this group of people as Kaffirs, it is never deposited in the traditional wisdom in a derogatory. They live in very close harmony and friendship with the neighbours and they have never been subjected to any threat or discomfort owing to any political, cultural or other troublesome situation and that itself is a proof of their friendly way of living very

much peculiar to them. By now except for in some biological characteristics Kaffirs have been fully integrated into the Sri Lankan society. The mixture or non-mixture with the other communities from biological or cultural sense is an individual based occurrence that will be determined by the time and the occasions. It is the responsibility of the rulers to provide the opportunity for them to develop their standard of living while at the same time maintaining according to their wishes their identity. Although there are plenty of documentary information about them through the internet there is hardly any academic studies undertaken about them. It is pertinent here to emphasize that the attention of the intellectuals is a very urgent need of the time.

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1 Kaffirs have been introduced as Kawsika in the 19th poem, in Konstantinu Satana a book of poetry compiled by a popular poet who lived in the 16th century in Sri Lanka, Don Jeanimo Alagiyawanna (Alagiyawanna Mukaweti)

Furthermore, the Kaffirs' Battalion who had fought along with the armies of the Sinhala Kings had been known as Kawsipanne belonging to Pandikara hewapanne in Dumbara as is proved by the letter sent to the Secretary of Kawsipanne by Ehelepolla Adigar in 1724 (Sunday Observer, May 8, 2008)

11 According to Prof. Tennakoon Wimalananda Portuguese had brought the Kaffirs to Sri Lanka because of the belief that they possessed a genetical power that could

withstand the Malaria epidemic situation. (<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2011/05/08/fea40.asp>).

111 From the decade of 1940 there sprang up a separate branch of art called Bailla in Sri Lanka under the influence of the Kapringna music. The word Bailla has been derived from the Spanish word Bailar in the way it had been pronounced locally. Although it had been developed locally as a sort of singing style, it had evolved as a dance form mixed with music within the zone of Spain, Portugal etc Since the decade of 1970, the Bailla that came into the entertainment stage under a variety of styles became very popular among the common man. For this achievement it had the patronage of several well-known Bailla singers and artists.



# The Dawoodi Bohras of Sri Lanka

Mr. Yusuf Mamujee

## Introduction

The Dawoodi Bohras are domiciled in Sri Lanka for almost two centuries. The first Bohra to set foot in this island nation was Jafferjee Esajee from Mandvi in the North Western Indian region of Kutch. This was around the year 1830 AD. During one of his voyages between Kutch and Maldives the sailing craft got caught to a storm and the vessel was blown off coast and landed at Galle. Perceiving the trading opportunities prevailing there, Jafferjee Esajee set up a trading establishment in Galle. Soon this pioneer trader brought many of his relatives and associates from Kutch Mandvi to this newly founded trading centre. Soon Bohras from towns of Kathiawar came looking for greener pastures. They came from Morbi, Bagasra, Jamnagar, Surat and Bhavnagar.

Carimjee Jafferjee the son of Jafferjee Easajee did trading with Maldives taking rice from Ceylon and bringing Maldivian fish from the Maldives. His business flourished substantially and he soon acquired a position of a leading business magnate. Carimjee Jafferjee built the first mosque of the Dawoodi Bohras at Galle which still exists and is now a heritage building.

In 1850 the early settlers moved to Colombo when it became a port of call. Most of the business houses were established in Pettah. A notable feature of Bohra settlers was that they brought with them their wives and family and lived in the upper floors of their business premises. The Bohras were mainly involved in the Import- Export trade dealing in food items like rice, pulses, sugar and also kerosene and textiles.

Among the early Bohra settlers, Carimjee Jafferjee, son of the pioneer settler Jafferjee Esajee was a prominent and notable figure who generously contributed for the wellbeing of the community and country. Carimjee Jafferjee built a mosque for the community at 4th Cross Street in Pettah in 1905 and around 1935 this was extended by M/s. E.G. Adamally & Co., Of the other prominent Bohra merchants who made noteworthy commercial contribution were the families of Adamjee Luqmanjee, E.G. Adamally, M.S.Hebtullabhoy, Adamjee Kadibhoy, Hassanally Dawoodbhai, T.A.J.Noorbhoy, M. Esufally, Jafferjee Brothers, Galely Brothers and Akber Brothers, In the early part of last century other families settled in Colombo were Hassanally Kadibhoy, the Hassanally Brothers (Ebrahimjee, Mamujee, Valibhoy and Dosajee)

In the beginning of the 20th century the Bohras moved also to other towns to pursue trading activities. In the beginning the Firm of Abdulhusain Jafferjee opened an office in Jaffna for distribution of foodstuff brought from Colombo. The firm of Esmailjee Amiji was established in Jaffna in 1904 and later Mohamadally Abdually started trading in Jaffna.

The Dawoodi Bohras are traditionally a business community and in Sri Lanka from the inception they have carried commercial activities observing strictly business ethics as enjoined by their religious leaders.

In early days the community mainly dealt in Import/Export business dealing mainly in tea/ rubber/coconut products, rice/sugar/textiles/ pulses spices and all local produce.

Now they have diversified trading into paper, hardware, plastics, chemicals and paints.

In the Industrial sector the Dawoodi Bohras are in the manufacture of plastic products, readymade garments for exports, Iron and steel products.

The first to settle in hill capital Kandy was Valibhoy Hassanally in 1928. Many others followed him and in 1950 there were about 10 families. The religious and social gatherings took place at the picturesque residence of Valibhoy Hassanally. Valibhoy Hassanally contributed generously towards the welfare of the citizens of Kandy and he was a well known personality in the hill city.

Esmaljee Karimbhoy was the first Bohra merchant to start business in Badulla. Valibhoy Hassanally before moving to Kandy had originally commenced business in Badulla. The two Abukhan brothers Hassanaly and Abdulhusain opened a shop in Badulla . Subsequently their younger brother Taiyebally joined in the business. Later Abdulhusain moved to Bandarawela and today his heirs continues to run the business.

There was a Bohra business establishment in Kurunegala owned by Mulla Jeevajee of Bagasra but the business was closed down during the war in 1940. Adamji Kadibhoy had a shop in Rambukkana until 1970 when it was closed down after the tragic death of Abdulally Kadibhoy during the 1970 April insurrection.

Presently in Galle there are two business establishments.



# Details of some of success Bussiness Establishments

## Akbar Brothers

History of both Ceylon tea and Akbar Brothers family were destined to commence in the same era in Sri Lanka in the 1860's. James Taylor, a Scotsman, planted the first tea sapling in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1867 whilst in 1864, the great-grand father of present Akbar brothers' Shaikh Hebtulabhoy, left his native India, and settled down in Sri Lanka . His son Tyeabally Shaikh Hebtulabhoy along with his brothers, M.S. and A.S. Hebtulabhoy pioneered the family in to the thriving Sri Lanka tea industry, by joining M. S. Hebtulabhoy & Company. Tea historian D. M. Forrest's 'A Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea' book in page 152 states thus: Very large purchases today, for the Middle East market in particular, are such firms as Hebtulabhoy & Co established in Colombo for generations, began shipping tea abroad in 1907. In time, Tyeabally Shaikh Hebtulabhoy's grandsons, Abbas, Abid and Inayet Akbarally who too were well versed in tea, relinquished their positions in Hebtulabhoy & Co., and formed Akbar Brothers in 1969. Within 3 short years Akbar Brothers succeeded in making

significant breakthroughs into major tea markets in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Akbar Brothers Limited was incorporated in 1972. Significantly, in the same year, the father of these founders was removed from the Chairmanship of Hebtulabhoy & Co. which made him join his sons, making available his 40 years experience in the highest echelons of tea industry. Moreover, the flourish thus set, kept up its' momentum for the company to become the largest tea exporter. For 20 consecutive years, Akbar Brothers Limited has been acknowledged as Sri Lanka's largest tea exporter. Further, "Akbar and Alghazaleen" brands have become the flagship brands of finest Ceylon tea.

In recent years Akbar's have successfully diversified into a range of sectors through strategic reinvention and expansion. Today, the Group has a firm presence in of Tea, Power Generation, Healthcare, Packaging, Property Development and Environmental Services.

## M/s. T.A.J. Noorbhai & Company

Mr. Jeevunjee Noorbhai, also known as Shaikh Jeevunjee Noorbhai, left his hometown, Mandvi, a port city in the District of Gujarat, India in search of fortune to Bombay, now called Mumbai.

Having established a fleet of sailing boats plying between East Africa, trade flourished to include stopovers in Maldives and Ceylon, as we were then known. This necessitated some family mem-

bers settling down first in the port city of Galle and then moving to Colombo as a business necessity, which was way back in 1860. Business in Ceylon grew faster and T.A.J. Noorbhai and Co., became one of the largest importers of food items. It then diversified into imports of Cement, electronic household items and exports of Coconut Shell Charcoal, Copra, Cloves, Betelnuts and Coir Yarn. Today it has become a large importer and distributor of various types of Fire Safety Equipment.

The Company further diversified into the Plantation sector, buying Coconut, Tea and Rubber Plantations, under the name of Noorani Estates

Limited, which was established in 1942. When the dreaded Land Reform was introduced in 1973, Noorani Estates Limited, further diversified into the Livestock Industry. Today it has established an integrated Poultry Farm and Hatchery under the brand name NELFarms to provide Day Old Chicks, both Layer Chicks and Broiler Chicks to farmers and processors and also contributing to the Economy by helping a large number of small farmers to become self-employed. NELFarms is also a very large supplier of quality ISO 22000 HACCP & GMP Certified Eggs, to the market.

*The business philosophy of its founders has been "That the customers is always right at all times"*

## Adamjee Lukmanjee & Sons

A native of Kutch Mandvi in Gujarat Mr. Adamjee Lukmanjee arrived in then Ceylon in the mid 1860s and started a family business. Adamjee Lukmanjee was among the earliest members of Dawoodi Bohra Community who sought to establish business and make Ceylon their home.

Adamjee, initially commenced a partnership with a Parsee businessman, operating from Bankshall Street in Pettah. He traded in pulses, sugar, dried fish, condensed milk, raisins and pulses.

After deciding to trade on his own Adamjee Lukmanjee moved business in 1907 to Grandpass, the present premises. Here he started producing coconut oil while exporting local produce like tea, rubber, coconut and spices.

Originally residing at 5th Cross in Pettah Adamjee purchased 1922, Lakshmigiri, a sprawling eight acre villa. The property now is a Heritage site and still belongs to the family.

Adamjee Lukmanjee was a benevolent philanthropist and passed away in 1927. The Adamjee Lukmanjee Maternity & Nursing Home on Prince of Wales Avenue and the Sucharita premises in Hulfsdorp (Residence of former President Premadasa) are living testimonials to his memory.

The legacy was continued by his three sons Mohammadally, Gulamhusain and Taiyebally who ensured that the business set up was continued.



Over the years they invested in plantation properties consisting Tea, Rubber and Coconut.

The next generation saw the businesses grow exponentially during the '50s and 60s'. Years later the Company grew to become one of the largest exporters and processors of coconut products in this country.

Today Adamjee Lukmanjee Group of Companies now run under the following Umbrellas.

Adamjee Lukmanjee & Sons-Leading global supplier of all Coconut related products, and spices.

The other leading Bohra firms are Hemas Group, Jafferjee Brothers and E.G.Adamally & Company



## Education

The religious leaders Dai al Mutlaq, of the Dawoodi Bohra Community have always stressed upon the importance of both religious and secular education of both boys and girls.

Before independence the medium of instruction was English and the children of the community pursued studies in the English medium in public schools. When Swabasha was introduced then accordingly switched over to swabasha from the primary classes.

When government allowed the creation of International Schools, the local Bohra Community started the Burhani Serendib International School which was opened for children of all religion & ethnic groups. This institution has produced students who have excelled in various curricular and extracurricular activities for imparting

religious education a Madrasah functions with trained religious teachers.

Presently considerable number of boys and girls of the Sri Lankan Bohra community are pursuing advanced studies both in Sri Lanka and in Foreign Universities. These students have chosen diverse disciplines like medicine, Mechanical, Chemical, Electrical, and Civil Engineering, Architecture, Business Management, Accounts and Information Technology.

It has been a notable feature of the community in Sri Lanka that most of the students after completion of studies abroad have returned to the country and either joined their family businesses or joined multinational companies as Senior Executives.

## Customs and rituals

### Birth

When a child is born, some verses from the holy qura'an is recited softly on both ears of the new born.

A child's naming ceremony takes place on the sixth day. An aunt brings a tray with a diya lit with pure ghee, a white cloth sprinkled with saffron water and quill with which the destiny of the child is believed to be written.

### Birthday

A coconut or a tray of fruits is waved round the head of the girl or the boy whose birthday is observed.



## Aqiqa

On the 7th, 14th or 21st day the baby's head is shaved a goat is sacrificed and the meat is distributed to family and associates.

## Misaq

At the age of puberty every Bohra, or mumin (believer) as sectarians call each other, pronounces the traditional oath of allegiance which requires the initiate to adhere to the shariah and accept the leadership of the imam and the dai. This oath is renewed each year on the 18th of Dhu al-Hijjah (Id Gadir al-Khumm).

The Marriage



*Courtesy of internet*



*Applying 'Mahedi' henna dye,  
a tradition practiced on festive occasions and during wedding.*

## **Nikah**

**N**ikah is the religious observance of marriage. It is performed by the religious head, the Dai al Mutlaq or his representative the Amil of the local community. It is a contract between the groom and the bride's father or guardian. The meher or dower is fixed at a nominal sum of Rs. 110, 252 or 1052.

A Bohra bride enters her new home led by her uncle who shows the way with a lantern. A red cloth is draped round the shoulders of the bride and groom symbolizing their eternal union. This ritual adopted from Hindus is now discontinued.

At the entrance to the in-laws house, the mother-in-law waves a brass vessel filled with water round the heads of the couple to ward off evil.



***Nikah Observance - The solemnization of marriage by  
His Holiness Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin the current Spiritual leader of the  
Dawoodi Bohra Community.***

The Bohras follow Fatimid school of jurisprudence which recognizes seven pillars of Islam. Walayah (love and devotion) for Allah, the Prophets, the imam and the dai is the first and most important of the seven pillars. The others are tahrah (purity & cleanliness), salah (prayers), zakah (religious dues), sawm (fasting), hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and jihad (holy war). Pilgrimages to the shrines of the saints is an important part of the devotional life of Bohras, for the facilitation of which rest houses and assisting organizations have been set up.

Salat (prayer) as per tradition to be performed five time intervals specified as Fazr, Zohr, Ashr, Magrib and Ishah. Zohr and Ashr are having overlapping period, same is Magrib and Ishah. Hence they are combined together and Bohra perform these five prayers in three

intervals. Fazr in morning, Zohr & Ashr in afternoon, and Maghrib and Ishah in the evening, making convenient to perform.

Dawoodi Bohras have their own jamaats (local communities) which will be focused around a Mosque or a community centre where an “Amil” (leader appointed by the dai al Mutlaq leads prayer and gives discourses).

Dawoodi Bohras have a unique system of communal eating with groups of 8 or 9 people seated around a thaal (particularly large circular metal tray). Each course of the meal is served for the people around the thaal to share. The place where meals are served is called the Jamaat Khaana. The Jamaat Khaana is usually adjoined to the masjid complex.



A pinch of salt taken before partaking meals



A 'Thaal' dish laid for serving meals





# Religious Beliefs of Boharas

## Beliefs

The Dawoodi Bohras profess Islam and belong to the Shiah Ismaili Taiyebi sect of Muslims. They are called “Taiyebi” after Imam Taiyeb (AS), the 21st Imam, who went into seclusion and was followed by a chain of Doat-Mutlaqeen (RA), literally the “absolute or unrestricted Missionary”, who conducts the dawah (Mission). The Dai al Mutlaq has the full authority to govern the community in

all matters, both Spiritual and Temporal during the period of occultation of the Imam. After the death of the 26th Dai al-Mutlaq in 1588 AD, the followers of Syedna Dawoodi bin Qutub Shah (RA) came to be called Dawoodi Bohras, the term “Bohra” reflecting their hereditary calling of trade.

## The Dawoodi Bohras believe that

- There is One God
- Muhammad Rasulullah (SAW) is His Prophet to whom He revealed the Holy Book (Qur’an Sharif)
- Maulana Ali Amirul Mumineen is the Vasi of the Prophet Muhammad
- Maulana Ali (AS) was succeeded by a line of Imams in his lineage, each of whom was appointed by his immediate predecessor, son after father
- An Imam always exists though at times one from amongst the unbroken line of successive Imams may decide to keep away from public
- The 21st Imam Maulana Taiyeb (AS) went into satr (seclusion) and his descendants, one after the other continue to function in that manner
- Today there is an Imam on earth (in seclusion) who is the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through his daughter Moulatena Fatemah (AS) and son- in- law Moulana Ali ibn Abi Ta’alib (AS), whose mission is being accomplished through his vicegerent, the Dai al-Mutlaq.

The Doat Mutlaqeen (Plural of Dai al Mutlaq) originally were Yemeni Arabs. They functioned from Yemen until around the year 1539 when the dawah, administrative centre was transferred to India. The 24th Dai al Mutlaq Syedna Yusuf Najmuddin became the first Indian to hold the sacred office.

The present Dai al Mutlaq His Holiness Dr.Syedna A'ali Qadr Mufaddal Saifuddin, is the 53rd in the unbroken line of succession. He succeeded his predecessor His Holiness Dr. Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin upon the latter's demise in 2014.

Like his two predecessors, the current leader Dr. Syedna A'ali Qadr Mufaddal Saifuddin holds the Chancellorship of Aligarh Muslim University.



*The 52nd Spiritual leader late Dr. Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin delivering the Ashara sermon in Colombo in 2008 when over 12,000 Bohras from world over gathered in Colombo to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad.*

## Muharram and Ashura

### Mourning of Muharram

Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. The first ten days of this month are marked by Bohras to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad.

Dawoodi Bohra begin mourning from the second eve of Muharram and continue with discourses during the day and gatherings each night which climax with the day of 'Aashura' on the 10th of Muharram. This is the day on which Husain and his family and 72 of his companions and family were killed by the army of Yazid I at the Battle of Karbala on his orders. The surviving members of Husain's family and those of his followers were taken captive, marched to Damascus, and imprisoned there.

Thousands of Dawoodi Bohras flock from around the world to hear the discourses offered by the Da'i al-Mutlaq usually in a different place each year. The 52nd Dai al Mutlaq conducted the Ashara observance in Colombo in the years 1970,1991,1999,2007 and 2008 when thousands of Dawoodi Bohras congregated in Colombo.

The event takes place in every Bohra community worldwide along the same lines in terms of time and duration. Selected discourses by the Dai al Mutlaq are broadcast live from wherever it happens to be that year

## Political Representation

Mr. E.G.Adamally was a member of the Legislative Council of Ceylon for two terms. Mr. Gulamhusain Lukmanjee, Adamally Mamujee and Kurban Adamally sat in the Colombo Municipal Council as Appointed Members. Mr.Kurban Adamally was also the Deputy Mayor of Colombo.

Mr. Kurban Adamally was nominated to the Upper Chamber of Senate in 1955 and he was the Senator for two consecutive terms.

Mr. Saifuddin Jafferjee was an appointed appointed member in the short lived Parliament of 1960.

## Mosques and Community Centres

The main mosque of the community in Colombo is the Masjid al Husaini situated at Bambalapitya. This was dedicated by the 51st Dai al Mutlaq Syedna Taher Saifuddin in 1957.



The other mosque in Colombo is in Pettah at 4th Cross built in 1905.

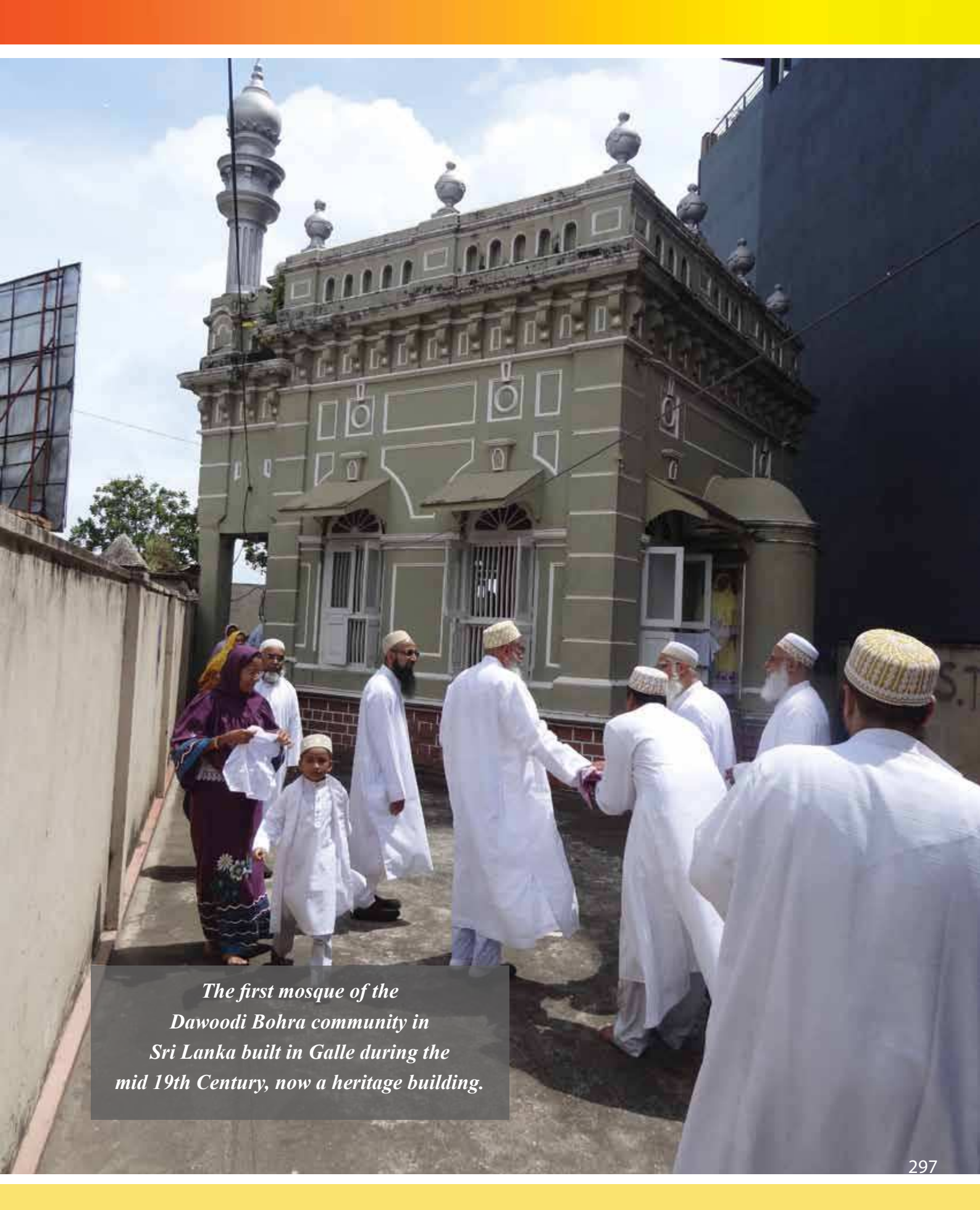
The Galle mosque was the first mosque of the community in Sri Lanka.

The Jaffna mosque was built in 1960. During the war it was devastated. The family of Abdulhusain Jafferjee refurbished and it was formally dedicated in September 2015 by the 53rd Dai al Mutlaq Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin the present Spiritual leader of the community.

The Qutbi Hall is a Community Centre where all social gatherings take place. This is also at Bambalapitiya adjoining the mosque.

The Burhani Serendib School is located at Glenaber Place in Bambalapitya. The entire complex where the mosque, community centre and school are located at Bambalapitiya is known as Burhani Park.





*The first mosque of the Dawoodi Bohra community in Sri Lanka built in Galle during the mid 19th Century, now a heritage building.*

*Facade of the main Bohra mosque located at  
Bambalapitiya*



## Religious and Social Organizations of the Community in Sri Lanka

The Anjuman-E-Saifi Sri Lanka Trust is main governing body of the Community in Sri Lanka. It comprises 52 members with a Board of Management of 18 members.

### All other organizations and associations are:

- The Shabul Ediz Zahabi is an organization of youth.
- The Toloba ul Kulliya and Talebat ul Kulliya are respectively the Boy's and Girl's student organizations.
- The Kaleemi Khidmat Guzar is an association of young members who undertake social and cultural activities and provide help during natural calamities in the country to the victims.
- Husaini Masjid Committee
- Saifi Masjid Committee
- Qutbi Hall Committee
- Kabrastan Committee



## The Engagement in Sports



*The Bohra 38<sup>th</sup> Colombo Scout Troop -1939*



*Bohra Sports Club -1939*



*Young Bohra Cricket Club of Ceylon - 1939*





# The Vedda Community of Sri Lanka

Prof. Yasanjali Devika  
Jayatilleke

## Introduction

In studying the origin of Vedda Community in Sri Lanka, it is absolutely necessary that we devote our attention not only to the recorded history of Sri Lanka but to the pre-historic era as well. The term Vedda has its derivation from the traditional usage of the term hunter. This term has similarities with the Sanskrit word Vyadha which gives the meaning

of a hunter (Wijesekara, 1964: 41). Philologically it means the one who shoots with the bow and arrow. The Vedda community, however introduce themselves as Vanniyalettho or the people of the jungle (Dharmadasa, 1993 : 7). Even in Tamil language the Veddas are referred to by the term Vedar or Veduvar), meaning the hunter.

Many are the Folklore woven around the Vedda community. Among them, the most popular and widely discussed is the story of Vijaya and Kuveni as depicted in the Mahawansa. As it is reported there, at the time of Vijaya's landing in Sri Lanka (then it was known as Lanka), several years after the visit of Lord Buddha, this island had been governed by a tribal community called Yakshas out of four indigenous clans, other three been the Rakshas, Nagas and Devas. Subsequently Vijaya the visitor, having befriended with Kuveni, the indigenous female ruler managed to win her affection and won her over to live with her as a result of which Kuveni had two children, a son and a daughter by the names of Jeewahattha and Deesala fathered by Vijaya. Later on when Vijaya became desirous of gaining the kingship of the new found island he was anxious to get his qualifications for the throne enhanced and wished to have a royal princess in order to face

the coronation. This compelled him to drive away the son and the daughter fathered by him along with the mother Kuveni out of the palace and made arrangements to get down a royal princess from Madurapura.

Kuveni, been thrown away from the palace approached her kinsmen for redress but they with no hesitation punished her for deserting the clan and bringing it into disrepute. The two children of Vijaya been mortally scared of the punishment their mother had received ran into the forest of the Samanola Hills and lived there as husband and wife starting a new stock of people who came to be known as Pulindas. Today they are been credited with the origin of the indigenous community of Veddas. Since Jeewahattha and Deesala are considered to be the offsprings of Vijaya and Kuveni and as Jeewahattha and Deesala had lived together and started a new generation of people

### A youth of Vedda Community

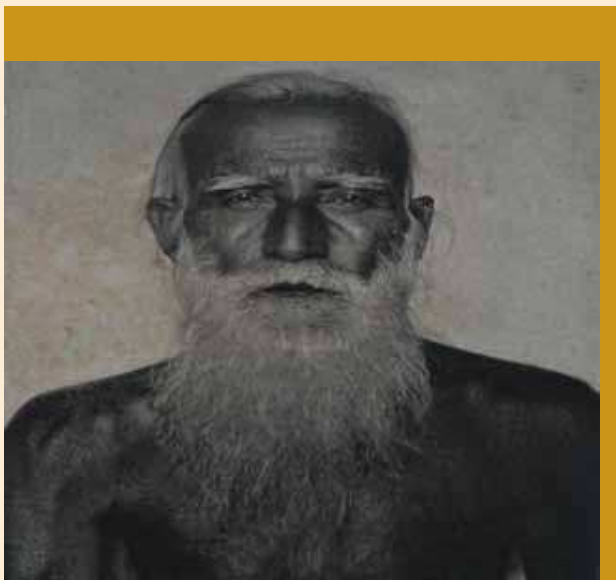




who are called Pulindas they are today credited with the distinction of founding a new branch of human stocks called Veddas (Geiger, 1950: 54-57). Therefore we can safely conclude that Vijaya was the progenitor of the Vedda tribe in Sri Lanka thus clearing the doubts among many that Wijaya was the progenitor of the great Sinhala stock of people who claim with much pride an unblemished local origin which not many can lay claims on however powerful or developed or even wealthy they may be.

Yet the view of the learned people regarding the origin of the Veddas is different. According to the view of the most of these intellectuals Veddas are a mixed- group of human type originating from the mixture of the Negrito, Austroloid, and Mediteranian stocks of people belonging to the early Stone age. According to the eminent Pre-Historian Deraniyagala (1954: 116) the prosperity of the Balangoda Culture persisted until about the beginning of the Tank Age and in addition to its existence till recent times, Veddas happen to be the earliest human stock belonging to this period. Beside these yet another view held by the learned men regarding the origin of Veddas is that their great grand parents who are unknown had migrated to this Island in the very early period from India.

Thus it is seen that there had evolved several controversial views about the origin of the Veddas. There is no clear conclusion still about this matter. The Veddas had been identified in three different ways according to their life style. as Niriveddas, (Naked Veddas belonging to the earliest period), Kola veddas (Veddas wearing a ring of leaves around the waist) and Gam veddas (Veddas living in villages after having discarded the life in the jungle). Robert Knox in the 17th century, (1681) identified these jungle-oriented people as jungle- based and tamed (Knox, 1958 ed-98) while Davy called them jungle-based and village-based (Davy,1821:116-118). It is no doubt that Knox had referred as tamed to the village veddas. Anthropologists have described the physiological characteristics of the Veddas as follows. “Veddas are a small made shy and silent type of people with bright opened eyes and a lean body. Vedda has a small elongated head, protracted flat face, conspicuous jaw bones, narrow and long lips, well structured teeth, black curly hair and a body with sparse hair. Their eyes take a thick brownish colour. The skin takes a thick blackish oily colour. Nose is broad while the lean legs possess weak muscles (Wijesekara, 1964:50).



*Veddas of 19th Century ( From the Sarasins' collection of photographs)*

Throughout their unbroken history, the main source of livelihood of the Vedda community was the hunting and dry cultivation (slash and burn). In the past they used the bow and arrow for hunting but from about the middle of the 20th century, the government started to supply them with the ammunition-guns. Veddas are well known as clever collectors of bee-honey and they used the honey so collected for the purpose of preserving the hunted meat and flesh for future use. However by now their sources of livelihood and mode of life had changed very much. At present they are heavily dependent on tourism, trade, paddy cultivation, and hired labour employment in state and private sector as labourers and security servicemen, teaching, local and foreign employment as domestic servants, etc. The ever developing tourism industry has become a sure means of their earning.

According to Seligman, one of the leading scholars in the field of Ethnological Studies about Veddas, every Vedda person belongs to one or the other type or clan and extra-marriages are very common among them (Seligmann, ed: 30). Apart from that he had found their society to be a matrilineal society. But according to James Brow, since their settlements were situated far apart it is impracticable and hence unimaginable that they resorted to extra-marriages and as such they practiced intra-marriages (1978: 23-24).

Among the Veddas there is a hierarchical structure of positions. Out of their popular clan names, Bandara alias Rugam, Morana, Unapana, Uru, Nabudan, Nabadana alias Namadeva, Embala

alias Ambala, Thala etc stand out as prominent. In addition to these, Neville (1886: 176) had added or had given as alternative names to the already known names two more clan names as Uru Wadiya and Kovil Vaname. Yet what is in vogue at present of the clan names in Dambana and Hennanigala are only Morana, Unapana, Uru and Thala. Five of the clan names, for instance, Moran, Unapana, Uru, Thala and Ambala according to the folklore that relate the birth stories of them attribute their origins to trees and beasts.

When considering the areas of leadership and social administration, the Vedda leadership is not one derived out of their clan concept or even social consensus. The current Vedda leadership is just a nominal one and its emergence appears to be a recent phenomenon that has arisen as an effort to meet a particular social need.

Accordingly, the modern Vedda leadership does not indicate any historical evolution or a traditional line of heredity. The father of the incumbent Vedda chief, Tissahamy was a popular leader among the Vedda community. He passed away in 1998 and he was succeeded by his elder son. In addition to them, they have provincial leaders as well. For example, Thala varige Thapel Bandiya and Thala Varige Kaluappu etc who lived in Hennanigala, and with their demise the present leaders like Thala Varige Gunabandiya, Pollebedde Thala Bandaralage Gobha, Suda Vanniya of Ratugala, Pattan Kadiramar of Wakare, Dalukane Appuhamy and Milalane Yapa etc who lived in Polonnaruwa can be taken as proofs.





*Former Vedda chief Uruvarige Thisahami*

In the past there was a close and cordial relationship between the Gamarala and the people of the village. Each village had a Gamarala of its own. Even among the Vedda community the eldest in the clan group inherited the post of Gamarala. Vedda community may have had borrowed the term Gamarala from the Sinhala in the neighbourhood. Gamarala was the peace maker who resolved the village disputes. It was the responsibility of the people of the Vedda village to supply the meat and flesh and honey to the Gamarala of the village.

The Veddas of the time used their own system of communication peculiar to them. They utilized a creeper in a tree for this purpose. The number of knots added to the creeper depended on the nature of the message. If the creeper had one knot it meant that the villagers had to meet the Gamarala. If there were two or three knots in the creeper it meant that the villagers had to meet petty officials like Arachchi or Korala respectively. In a society where there was low literacy level there was not



*Present Vedda chief Uruvarige Wanniyalaththo*

only the use of such simple and unsophisticated mechanisms but managed to maintain law and order in the society along with the rural officialdom. The entire administrative and judicial system had been borrowed by the Vedda community from the Sinhala community. However at present the entire administrative and judicial services of the Vedda community are being fulfilled through the new officialdom in the civil society of the country. Except for that, all other needs of the people are still being fulfilled through the employment of the traditional social mechanism of Yakadura-traditional healer in the community.

Ample historical evidences can be found in proof of the close, cooperative and cordial relationship they had with the Sinhala Community from very early times. According to Henry Parker,(1984ed.: 24-25) during the time of king Pandukabhaya, the Vedda Community received favoured attention from the king in reciprocity to the unconditional support of the Vedda community had given to the

King in his wars with the warring uncles whom he massacred with the support rendered by the Vedda community.

Mandarampura Puwatha, an historical record in poetry which throws light into the period from King Rajasingha 1st to the period of King Kirthi Sri Rajasingha in the 18th century provide us much valuable information regarding how the local rulers bestowed various positions and allocated responsibilities to the Vedda community in the king's administrative system.

Considering the present situation of the Vedda community it would be seen that the Vedda community is faced with some utmost hardships and challenges in their struggle for survival against the rapid modernization process that has brought about a situation where they find it difficult to continue their traditional life style against the modernization while on the other side they suffer heavily from loss of their life expectation. This is because they find it impossible to adjust to the rapid changes taking place in the society that leaves no room for them to adjust and fit in.

Furthermore, the large scale irrigational schemes initiated since the gaining of national independence have brought about a heavy impact on the social organization of the Vedda community. These projects had brought about new settlements for the Vedda community while at the same time the giant scale irrigational tanks and the construction of highways have encroached into the large scale forests thus reducing the geographical area that the traditional Vedda community had for themselves to engage in their traditional vocations like hunting, collecting bee-honey, engaging in dry cultivations etc. Between 1930 and 1940 the large scale irrigational schemes like Minneriya,

Minipe etc and the village extension schemes in Polonnaruwa and Mahiyangane drastically reduced the forest land area and the situation was further aggravated considerably by the influx of the Sinhala and Tamil colonists to occupy the newly opened up lands.

The completion of the Gal-oya scheme in 1950 was heavily responsible for the drastic reduction of the Vedda population in the country. The hunting grounds of the Vedda community and the much of area of land that existed for them to collect their food requirements in addition to the several caves where they lived went under water with the storaging of water in the Inginiyagala Reservoir that came to be known as the Senanayake Samudraya considered at that time as the largest reservoir. Finally when the accelerated Mahaweli Scheme was started in 1977 their socio-economic pattern was completely overturned and was subjected to total wash-off. Adding insult to injury in 1983 the Maduraoya forest area which provided much of the food supplies to the Vedda community was taken over by the Forest and wildlife Department and declared under the Wildlife Act as the Maduruoya National Park thus legally depriving any access to the area for anybody for any reason. Those who were found to be resident within the National Park were provided with alternative settlements within the Mahaweli Projects in the B and C Zones.

The Government decided to resettle the 133 families who were found to be living in Kandeganwila in Hennanigala within the System C. Accordingly resettlement of the Vedda families was started in 1982 November thus making the jungles that they as well as their grandparents from time immemorial had been enjoying the consuming rights to the fruits and products of the

Mother Nature, a prohibited area or tabooed area ever since then. It was found for the people who were born and bred in the jungle environment very difficult to adjust themselves to live in a strange environment artificially made by some others

for them. Hence they were destined to be living ever since then with untold trials and tribulations, challenges and hardships in the socio-cultural and worst of all economic systems.

## Past and present geographical distribution of the Vedda community

Considerable amount of evidences to prove the presence of the Vedda community in this country much before the migration of the Aryans and the Tamils started, can be found in this country. As a result of these and the subsequent immigrations the Vedda community got cornered in the dry zone thick forests thereby losing their eternal right to the land of birth. The excavations that had been carried out in places like Bandarawela, Diyatalawa, Balangoda, Kataragama, Bintenna etc vouch for this. According to Robert Knox who is considered to be the first foreigner to have devoted attention to the Vedda community in 1681, the original birth place of the Vedda is the jungles of Bintenna (Knox quoted by Virchow, 1886: 350). What has been elicited from the studies conducted ever since then about them is that their first settlements were concentrated in the areas presently known as Central, North-Central, South-East, East and North-West Provinces. In the meantime, Uva -Bintenna, called the “Maha Vedi Rata”- Great country of the Veddas”and it was often considered the birth place of the Vedda community. John Davy in the 19th century had written about the areas where Vedda people had lived (1881:115-116). This area covers the central highlands and the North central province and

these provinces happen to be dissected by the longest river of the island namely Mahaweli.

Beside these, Sabaraganuwa too had been considered as a Vedda settlement from the early periods in history. Even today Sabaragamuwa in the sense of “the village of the hunters” is a name used to refer to the district of Ratnapura. Names like Vedda panguwa (Vedda share), Vedda kumburu (paddy fields of the Vedda), Vedda Watta (Garden of the Vedda), Vedda Ela (Stream of the Vedda), Veddagala (Rock of the Vedda) are in use in the Ratnapura district (Wijsekara, 1964:56). This view is further proved by the evidences revealed by the Archeologists and the Anthropologists in the mid-20th century to the effect that the pre-historic human who had lived in Ratnapura belong to the new Stone age and the modern Veddas descend from them (Deraniyagala, 1939:351-375, 1954: 113-124).

The ritual of Kohomba Yak Kankariya (a healing ritual in honour of the Yakka chief Kohomba) that is performed in this country beginning from about the period between the 15th and 18th centuries has an item called “Inviting the Veddas” or “Aile Yadeema” (preying on the ritual hut) during which

the Veddas in the four corners of the country are been invited into the ritual arena. (Dissanayake, 1990: 426, Godakumbura, 1963:13-16)

Furthermore the Mandarampura Puwatha written in the Kandyan period states that there were over 300 Vedda villages.



*The past and the present Vadda settlements*

Also there is much historical evidence to prove that the Vedda community had established settlements in and around Anuradhapura. The inscriptions belonging to the early period of Anuradhapura too provide evidence about the Vedda settlements in Anuradhapura. Parker believes that during the time of King Devanam Piya Tissa with the introduction of the Buddhism the Vedda community who were living in the stone

caves offered their traditional homes or the caves to the venerable priests and went to the village for their living. One of the ancient inscriptions in the old temple of Dambulla contains a statement which reads as “ Siddha raja Pulinda Abhaya thakara sidahaga kapagala” meaning that King of Pulinda by the name of Siddattha Abhaya made this” thus making us believe that a Vedda king had donated a cave built by the king of that name (Parker and Perera, Quoted from Karunaratna and Namalgamuwa 2010:118). Since the end of Anuradhapura period, Chronicles mention about the Veddas in thousands serving in the armies during the time of King Parakramabahu the Great. Hence it can be justifiably concluded that Vedda community in large numbers were present in the Sinhala society establishing their settlements in and around Polonnaruwa and its environs.

The view of the Archeologists and the Anthropologists that the Veddas in large numbers had lived everywhere in the country is proved true by the above facts. Dambadeni Asna, (Quoted from Karunaratna and Namalgamuwa, 2010:118) yet another local historical record contains much information about the Veddas who lived in the time of King Parakramabahu 2nd (1236-1270). Furthermore, Deraniyagala goes on record to have expressed the view that according to the “Nithi Prabhedha” another historical document we can conclude that Veddas in large numbers had been living throughout Sri Lanka by 15th and 16th centuries (Deraniyagala quoted from Karunaratna and Namalgamuwa, 2010:118). Another historical record by the name of “Sithawaka Satana” (Battle of Sithawaka) which had been a panegyric description of the battle of Sithawaka and the King Rajasingha’s bravery and eminence at war according to Deraniyagala clearly states that the King’s battalions had Vedda



soldiers from 18 Vedita Pattus (an Administrative unit) (Sithawaka Satana quoted from Karunaratna and Namalgamuwa, 2010:120).

As has been recorded in Wannu Kadaim Poth (Boundary demarcations of the Wannu area) the four administrative areas of Puttalam Pattu, Munneswaram Pattu, Demala Pattu and Wannu Pattu had Vedita chief Panikki as its head in addition to the vesting of them to him and his successors after him. (Karunaratna and Namalgamuwa 2010: 120). According to Hugh Neville too, there had been Veddas living around Puttalam during the reign of Buwanekabahu 6th in Kotte (Neville quoted by Raghawan, 1953:51).

The living settlements of the people identified as Wannu men, Anuradhapura Veddas, Gam Veddas and Wannu Veddas are mostly found scattered primarily in the modern districts of Anuradhapura, adjoining Vavuniya, Polonnaruwa and Trincomalee (Bohinguamuwa and Siriwardhana, 2010: 354). James Brow, Edmond Leach etc who had made studies of these people known as Anuradhapura Veddas express the opinion that even today it is these Gam Veddas who live in the Maha Wannu area. It is estimated that the Wannu people have established themselves in 68 places. While Brow's study included Kukulewa of Wannu Leach's study included Puleliya. The marriage customs, traditional means of living, beliefs and practices, language etc of these people up to the present day have closer affinity to the Vedita culture.

C.G.Seligmann, one of the notable pioneering investigators into the life of the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka is reported to have visited the following

places in 1911. They are Henabedda, Danigala, Kovil vanama, Seethala Wanniya, Galmeda, Omunayi, Unuwatura Bubula, Dambana, Nilgala, Malgode, Elakataliya, Kalukelaba, Yakkure, and Rotawewa of Thamankaduwa. Out of these it is only in Dambana and Nilgala that Veddas still persist.

It is not only the Sinhala speaking Veddas that had been able to come into the attention of the scholars. These scholars had revealed important information about the Tamil speaking Veddas as well. These Veddas had come to be identified as Coastal Veddas. According to Seligmann they live in the East coast settlements close to the villages of Tamil speaking people. Seligmann reveals that the Vedita community itself confessed that they too have come to these settlements from the interior of the country.

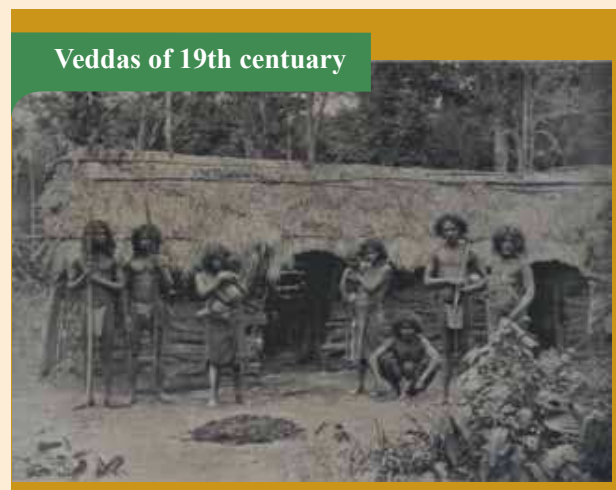
However, the present day Vedita settlements appear to be restricted to a limited area within the Mahaweli Scheme. Accordingly it is not strange that their settlements are confined to places like Dambana, Watuyaya, Gurukumbura, Kotabakiniya, in the Uva-Bintenna Mahiyangana area, Hennanigala of Ampara or the System C of Mahaweli, Ratugala of Moneragala District, Pollebedda in Mahaoya of the Ampara district, Coastal Wakere of Batticaloa district. More interesting is the fact that the identity of the Vedita people in Anuradhapura district and in Muttur in Trincomalee district has reached a point where they cannot be distinctly identified with any group owing to their intermixture with the Sinhala community and the Tamil community respectively.

## Population

It has become difficult at the present times to gather the population information of the Vedda community. It is due to the continuous refusal by the officials of the Department of Census and Statistics to recognize them as a separate group of their own with identifiable characteristics they share with none other. Also the large scale inter-mixture of them with the Sinhala and Tamil people has made it difficult to identify them as a separate group from the others. On the other hand some Veddas appear to be taking unilateral decision to introduce the ge-names of the Sinhala race like Herath Mudiyansele, Attanayake Mudiyansele etc to their own children without any reason or rationale since it appears that such a move had not been taken as a result of the marriage either but rather a result of using such names from the time of birth.

Statistical information of the Vedda population appears to have been collected by certain scholars before the start of population census in Sri Lanka. In 1849, J.Gillins, a Christian priest had taken a

count of the Bintenna Veddas in the four areas of Rugam Palathi (or Palatha?) Udappalathi, Ratuwapalathi and Pallappalathi and reported it as 1538 people. Furthermore Bailey reported in 1863 that there were 686 Veddas in Batticolaoa, Nilgala and Bintenna (Bailey quoted by Virchow, 1886: 356).



Veddas of 19th century

(From the Sarasins' collection of photographs)

Table 1 : Statistical information of the Vedda population from 1871 to 1953

Year	Vedda Population	Number increased or decreased	Percentage
1871	2030	-	-
1881	2238	+198	+9.8
1891	1229	-999	-44.9
1901	3971	+2742	+223.1
1911	5332	+1361	+34.3
1921	4510	-822	-15.4
1946	2361	-2149	-47.6
1953	715	-1646	-89.7

(Wijesekara, 1964:192)

In 1946 there is a heavy reduction of 47.06% in the Vedda population. The disasters that resulted from the malaria, parangi, drought and floods in the dry zone during this period are considered to be the causative factors for this situation. Veddas as separate ethnic group had been taken count of, for the last time in 1953 and there had been a total population of 803 Veddas. However since 1963 the Census and Statistical officers had taken them as a separate group and enumerated under the category of “others” Since then there had been no way to assess the census in respect of Vedda community in official records.

The writer of this paper during 1995-1996 made an enumeration of the Vedda population in Dambana. According to this census it was found that there were 456 Veddas living in Dambana, Watuyaya, Gurukumbura, Kotabakiniya etc. Genderwise out of this population 51.8% were Males while the other 48.2% were females. According to a census conducted by de Silva and the team in 2011 there had been total population of 786 Veddas in Dambana with a total number of 217 families (de Silva, 2011:17). de Silva reports that the total population of Veddas in Hennanigala in the year was 1078 (de Silva, 2011:17). But according to the 2016 reports of the Grama Seva

Officer in charge of the area, the number of Vedda families in Hennanigala was 402. According to the above mentioned study the Pollebedda have had a total of 175 Vedda families with a total Vedda population of 521 (de Silva2011:17). Yet according to the 2016 official records of the Grama Seva Officer in charge of Pollebedda, the total Vedda population of Pollebedda was 847 with a total number of 238 Vedda families (de Silva2011:17). Again, according to the de Silva study (de Silva, 2011:17) the Vedda population in Ratugala was 286 with a total of 88 families. But Nanayakkara reports that the total population of Ratugala is 110 while claiming that only 30 of the number of families there, do have claims of vedda origin whereas others are considered as descendants of mixed marriages with outsiders. (<http://exploresrilanka.lk.2012/01/forest-dwellers-of-rathugala>). Accordingly, it is clear that there appears to be many contradictions in the population statistical records in respect of Vedda community.

In 2011 it was revealed to the present writer in her observations of the Vedda community in the coastal zone of Wakare that the total Vedda population there was 198.

Table 2 : The total coastal Vedda families of Wakare in 2011

Area	Number of Families
Madhuran Kernikulam	25
Kungnamkulam	35
Kadirawelikattumari	75
Pudhir kadiraweli	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>

(Based on the discussion with Mr Vijitha Ranabahu Karunakalage, the Assistant Superintendent of Police in charge of the Police area called Karadiyanaru)

Beside this, as has been mentioned later too, since the Wannu Vedita community in Anuradhapura District as well as the Muttur Vedita community in the Trincomalee District have mixed up with the Sinhala and Tamil communities respectively

to a point where it is extremely difficult to identify them separately, it had been found that their population statistics are not easy to be enumerated.

## Vedita Language

Although there would have been a language of their own in the past, since it had been subjected to a complete change, its identity has been extremely difficult to be noticed at present. Geiger too had expressed this view (1935, 504-516). The similarities in the Vedita language to the Sinhala language had been described by Geiger by making a deep and broad analysis of the derivatives of the two languages. His opinion had been that this had occurred due to prolonged mix up with the Sinhala community which resulted in borrowing of more and more Sinhala words into the Vedita language. Naturally as an impact of this the original Vedita language went into disuse and commonly popular Sinhala words got into the Vedita language. He further points out that all the words in the Vedita language that do not display similarity with the Sinhala language are those that belong to the original Vedita language.

The present writer in her sojourns to Pudir Kadiraweli in Wakere asked the question from Pattam Kadiraman, the leader of the Vedita community whether they ever had a language other than Tamil. The answer given was that there had been a language which is not known by any at present and it had been known as “Vedita Sinhala”. His reference was to none other than the Vedita Sinhala or Vedita Sinahala. Therefore by introducing their original language as Vedita Sinhala yet again they vouched to the fact that

from time immemorial the Sinhala language had been mixed up with the Vedita language.

We can guess that Vedita language had been there from their inception. Probably the sub-languages that had been in vogue would have been swallowed into the Sinhala language. Some of the words found in the Vedita language are not derived from Aryan languages (Wijesekara, 1964:102-103).

Some scholars hold the view that the Vedita language contains non-Aryan language characteristics that appear to be akin to Munda and Austric language categories. (Rayer, 1964:29, Wijesekara, 1964:102-104). Furthermore Parker (1982 ed: 89) shows that according to the opinion of many scholars Vedita language is a native language and that it is a mixture of old Sinhala, modern Sinhala, Tamil and the language of the Giri tribe in South India.

But according to Stegaburn (1993:14-16) who had expressed his view on the analysis made by Merrit Ruhulan and Babara Grimms about the Vedita language on the basis of the interpretation given by Philologist Sughathapala Silva on “Wannileththo” is of the opinion that Vedita language does not belong to any of the language categories of Munda or the small Munda language families in vogue in North-East Indian territories. According to him it does not belong to the language groups of South-



East Asian or Mon-kahamur either and not even to the language groups of the people of Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal.

According to Sughathapala Silva, (1964:4) the modern form of the Vedda language has taken shape on the basis of mixture of the ancient languages with the Sinhala language. He further points out that although Vedda language had mixed with Sinhala language there are many characteristics in the Vedda language that are not found in Sinhala language. Philologist K.N.O.Dharmadasa (1990-86) who holds a similar view says that according to the scientific pronunciation the voice similar to the Sinhala words can be commonly noticed in the pronunciation of the Vedda words but some Vedda words in vogue are quite different to the Sinhala pronunciation.

De Silva further says that the language used by the present day Veddas can be identified as a mixed language but it is not a local language of the Sinhala language. When a larger society mixes up with another sub society, it is the large society that swallows up the sub society. As a result of this process the words and the models of the large society get into the sub society and the sub society

gets modernized to suit it. Then they are identified as “Kriyoala” or “Kriyod” languages.

When all these different shades of opinions are considered together several common factors regarding the Vedda language can be observed. That is the Vedda language which had existed in the distant past as an independent primary language lost its original characteristics to the language characteristics of Sinhala and Tamil of the Sinhalese and Tamils which in turn came to replace them. This was a result of the invasions by Aryans and Tamils whose languages had survived in the past as independent languages.

However the usage of the Vedda language among the Vedda people is found to be continued only by a very limited number. Vedda children who go to schools do not use it at all. Although they have the proficiency of the Vedda language they are shy of using it. Those who are desirous of maintaining their identity, though they make up only a small minority continue to use it but large majority seem to be using it merely to exhibit their identity for gains only. Accordingly the Vedda language is in the list of languages anticipated to be perished very soon.

## Religious beliefs and Rituals of the Vedda people

The religion and sorceries play a significant role in the settlement of day to day problems of the Vedda community. Vedda religion is basically based on a belief system associated with the dead. The spirits of the dead relatives cause good or bad for them. Beside the Demons they believe in certain deities as well. The intermediary between the Vedda people and their religion is the Vedda

Shamans. This Shaman or the intermediary representative is born from among them and serves people’s religious needs.

The “Ne-Yakku “ or demons born of relatives render a great useful service to them. In order to gain help and redress from these Demons, the living ones have to perform rituals on behalf of them. If

and when the Demons are angry and furious, they bring about great disaster. Vedda people believe that the Demons would bring about disaster by way of causing food shortages, destruction of the harvests, and spread of chronic diseases, Epidemics or disastrous climatic changes. It is by such means that the Vedda people had been motivated towards the fulfillment of their physical requirements through the belief in the Dead relatives that makes a balance between the living and the death which infuses meaningfulness to the inter-relationship.

When considering the worship of the relatives in the form of grandparents by the Vedda community the leadership in the hierarchical order of the Demons is enjoyed by Kande Yaka. Vedda people perform rituals to Kande Yaka in the hope of achieving success in hunting.

The Kande Yaka appears once as a demon while at another time he appears as a Deity. The Kande

Yaka although helped to achieve success in hunting, he never hesitated to punish the offenders. The brother of the Kande Yaka was Bilindi yaka. He too was a powerful one. Among the powerful other demons like Kalu Bandara, Maha Kohomba Bandara, Irugal Bandara, Sandugal Bandara, Mawaragala Panikka, Lepath Panikka, Rerangala Panikka, Indigolla Yaka, Maralu Yaka, Seran Yaka and Dives Yaka, the most powerful of all were Kande Yaka and Bilindi Yaka.

Elle Yaka was of special significance to the Vedda people. In order to seek protection from epidemics and other illnesses they made offerings to him. Many of the rituals that were in existence among the Veddas from an unknown historical past are no more among them. But the rituals that are in practice at the present time by them convey much information about their beliefs on the demons and the Gods.

Table 3 : The Vedda Rituals and their objectives.

Ritual	Invited demons or the deities	Objective
Ne- Yak offerings (Offering for the dead relatives)	Kande Yaka, Bilindi Yaka and other demons -relatives	Enhance hunting, prosperity and protection
Arrow Dance. This is not in vogue	Kande Yaka	Protection of the children
Bed of chacoaled flesh Adukku bambara	Kande yaka, Bilindi Yaka and other demon relatives	Protection of the children.
Offering of Bambara to demons	Bambara Yaka	harvesting yams & hunting the pigs
Stream demon dance	Dole Yaka	collect bee-honey and prevent illnesses

Offering to Rahu demon	Rahu Yaka	-- do—
Forest yak dance	forest demon	success and protection in hunting
Patha yaka	offering of a Pathaya	Protection during pregnancy
Kiriamma offering	Kiriamma	Protection of the children
Pena Balima ( watching through trance)	Kande demon and other demon relatives	Identify the demon relative/s responsible for illnesses
Offering of Hathma	12 deities and Elle yaka, gale yaka, ne-yakun, Kande yaka bilindi yaka.	success in hunting and prosperity, prevention of disasters and diseases, ensuring protection.

Beside those Demons and the Deities there are many other demons and deities to whom the Vedda people pay offerings among whom are Aluth yaka, Millane Yaka, Gale Yaka, Reeri Yaka Thota yaka, Minneri Deviyo, Katharagama deviyo, Ilandari deviyo, etc. who are considered Vedda deities or provincial deities. The objectives of the offerings to those as well are similar to the earlier ones. The Vedda shaman has the power and the knowledge to engage in the affairs with the demons. When ritual of Ne-yakuma is performed the shamans initially calls the recently elevated demons and offer the poojas.

When the offerings to the demons are given the container which contains the offering is called Yakpettiya. The special altar prepared for keeping the Yak-pettiya (devil box) is called Yak-pela (hut) and is constructed close to but out of the house. It is so done in order to prevent the exposure of the Yakpettiya to “kili” or impurity which if happened

would annoy the demons and the consequences would be disastrous.

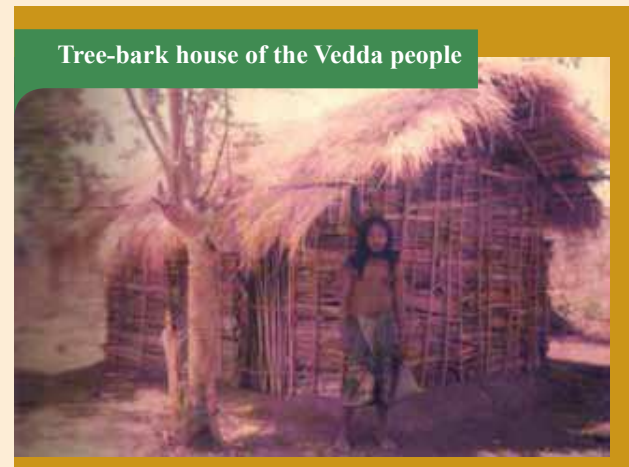
It is then very clear that from the overcoming of difficulties resulting from the failure of the harvests to the guarantying of plentiful supply of food as well as from the creation of disaster to the gifting over the best of hopes and life’s happiness, almost all the inter relations of the Vedda community appear to be managed by the demons and the deities. Despite the exposure of the Vedda community to the changes, still they most fondly cherish their belief system associated with demons and deities. John Darts (1990:72) too had shown that the coastal Vedda too despite maintaining close relations with the Tamil people, still hold on to their belief in the demons. It is most interesting to see that these people from long past stick up to know to their deep belief in the demons.

## Vedda life pattern

Ancient Veddas utilized the natural environment for their living purposes. When hunting was their main means of living they used rock caves as their abodes. When the means of living changed from hunting to chena cultivation (dry cultivation) they changed their living places from caves to the small huts they constructed. The Vedda hut at the time looked very simple. Le Mesurier had described the nature of such a hut as follows. (Le Mesurier, 1886:339) “Their huts had been constructed in a very rough manner. They consisted of 3 or 4 sticks kept slanting and a roof. One end of the stick was fastened to the ground while the other end was kept as a support to a cross bar. The rest of the sticks were kept on the roof on either side slanting towards the ground. They were reminiscent of the old army camps. This hut was thatched with barks of trees or dried grass or straw”.

Afterwards towards the beginning of the 20th century Vedda people are believed to have had made a hut of their own style by bending one end of a strong long pole in a crescent shape to touch the ground and covering its top (roof) with illuk grass. When these type of huts were covered right round with sticks, the people had to creep in, in order to gain access. They reminded of the Igloo houses of the Eskimos. At the next stage they had their entire houses covered with tree barks thus creating walls. In these houses the roof was again covered with illuk grass. In these houses they had the additional construction of a structure with a flat rectangular surface. This was covered with neatly arranged sticks of kolon, damunu, welan, etc wrapped tightly with the help of lihiniya creepers. This served as a bed for sleeping.

By the middle of the 20th century Vedda houses continued to evolve further. The houses were covered entirely with tree barks as well as animal hides. Roofs had usual illuk as easy material for the covering of them.



Tree-bark house of the Vedda people

By the present day, the vedda houses are built with rough walls. The structure of the houses are constructed with the help of the sticks and jungle poles. Once it was over then it was packed with lumps of prepared mud. Even today these houses are thatched with illuk grass and the floor is applied with mud and the house contained a narrow open area in front of the house called “pila”. For all purposes the house has one room. Almost every house has one or two specially made seats of mud. This seat is about 3 feet tall and long. It is about 1 to 3 feet broad. Filled with mud and neatly prepared smooth surface serves as a bed, seat or for any other purpose in the house. The hearth is constructed on the back side of the house while a separate structure of sticks outside the house in the back yard is a specially prepared for storing as well as drying up the washed and cleaned kitchen utensils.



Old Vedda of Pollebedde sitting on a clay seat



. Making fire with the traditional method



Ancient Vedda had used two methods to make fire. One was by rubbing two sticks against each other and the other was to rub the blade of the hand axe against the surface of a stone. For the first method the sticks of Welan plant had been used. The second method is considered to be a popular method in the past. Parker had described how the Vedda had made fire by using these methods in the 19th century. (1982 Ed: 52). Therefore it can be surmised that the

Vedda had learnt the art of making fire by using bow and arrow system (Bow-Drill Method) only after the 19th century. By now all these methods have gone out of use because they too have the privilege of using gun-powder -based box of matches.

The main means of earning a living of the Vedda people in the ancient times had been the hunting and the collection of food items. For this purpose they had been using the bow and arrow and hunting dogs. Vedda are well known as clever hunters who run after the prey and kill it by shooting with poisoned arrows. However the hunting of small beasts like iguana and kaballewa was done with the aid of the hand- axe. In the ancient times the Vedda possessed hunting dogs whose place is now been occupied by the gunpowder. The traditional methods like maruwela, (hidden string as a trap), habaka (a trap constructed with sticks), ugul thuwakkuwa (a trap made with the aid of a gun that gets activated by the accidental contact with the mechanism) etc have disappeared from among the Vedda as well.

Veddas are clever at collecting bee-honey as well. There are several varieties of honey like bee, bambara, danduwel, kanamee, kotha etc depending on the type of bee responsible for the building up of the bee-hive. In the Vedda language they are known as kanda rukuli or kanda arani, kanda palli, kuda kanda palli, potthi, and gal mala etc.

Although the chena (dry) cultivation is a tedious job it is very popular among the Vedda. These people who suffer from the heavy drought for half the year, suffer from heavy rains during the other half of the year. This climatic factor was grasped by the Vedda almost through inner sense from the ancient times. They are clever at predicting the arrival of rain on the basis of the intensity of the heat they feel. Among the most popular planting crops are wheat and kurahan and over and above them they use to cultivate varieties of pumpkins, cereals like green

gram, kawpi and yams like manioc, sweet potato etc. Even today they do not use any chemicals in their cultivations.

Fishing is being practiced by Vedda in the natural ponds and in the tanks. Several methods are adopted here. Most common is the emptying of the water ponds and catching the fish. It is done by emptying a part of the pond and then making the fish in the other half inactive by introducing either mud or some poisonous element which make the fish unconscious but not kill them. The water ponds are introduced with the juice extracted by grinding the kekuru fruits or thimbiri leaves or collecting the milky juice of daluk. The fish that would float in the water after being made unconscious through the introduced elements would be collected by the Vedda. Beside these, they resort to fishing by hooks as well. It is said that in the past the seacoast Veddas of Wakare had been very clever at fishing by shooting with the bow and arrow.

The main (staple) food of the Vedda was the hunted meat and bee-honey. Among the hunted meat most popular were the gona, deer, wild-boar and monkey. Beside them they added iguana and kaballewa as well. However the Vedda never took beef, goat meat, and elephant meat for their consumption. Vedda are delighted to enjoy a meal of thalapa made out of wheat or kurahan flour with hunted meat. Still for all, they are no more dependent on those traditional foods at present and instead they are getting accustomed to the foods of the Sinhala neighbourhood of rice or bread and curries. In the past the Vedda resorted to the barter system of trade whereby they exchanged bee-honey and meat with whatever things they required. It was through barter system that the Veddas obtained whatever they wanted from the Sinhala traders with whom they exchanged goods for goods. Among the things they obtained from the village blacksmiths

on barter system were the axe-blades, arrows, and fire-making instruments. Certain writers used to call this system “the silent trade”. The barter system that prevailed perished some two or three generations ago and in its place came the economic system based on monetary transactions into use.

Leaving aside the period when the Vedda people had been nude and wearing the rings of leaves they come into the age of using dresses. Evidences are abundant to prove that two or three generations before present Veddas without a distinction of male or female had their upper body naked. At that time male Veddas had only a scanty cover the underneath of the abdomen while the vedda female were naked on the upper body with a scant cloth wrapped round the waist covering up to the feet. Subsequently the males adopted a short sarong while the females had a dress covering the breast too.

Female Vedda with open upper body



*( From the Sarasins' collection of photographs)*

By now one can see the old-aged Vedda ladies wearing the wrap up cloth with a dress (jacket) to the upper body as well while the young ladies wear gowns or with the gowns a wrap up cloth round the waist. Tradition-conscious male veddas can be seen wearing a short sarong but in a manner of the old scanty cover of abdomen. They can still be seen with bare upper body in the age-old traditional manner. Such Veddas can be seen with the long hair tied into knot behind. They still have their hand axe rested safely on the shoulder as a symbol of their identity. Some are always seen with their bow and arrows in addition to the bag that carries the items required for a chew of betel hanging in their hands. They are believed to be more a consumer of betel than rice.

From the ancient past Vedda people had been known for giving prominence at marriage to the cross-cousin relationship. When a girl is born to a Vedda family, the symbolic marriage between the tiny little girl and her cross-cousin is solemnized by tying a string of pebbles right round her waist by the parents of both parties. Once they reach the proper age the marriage proper between them will be held. Beside this, when a male Vedda youth falls in love with a Vedda girl it will be informed to the girl's parents by the parents of the male in the traditional way.

Subsequently the young male will go to visit the female with bee-honey and hunted-meat. This tradition has given way to the carrying of betel and areca nut sometimes afterwards. The female to be able to accept these gifts should be able to fulfill two conditions. One was that the parents of the girl should have agreed that their relationship is good enough for the consent to be given. The other condition was that the girl should have had a liking for him. If the parties agree that marriage can be executed then as a token of agreement for

the marriage the girl will present the male with a brand new waist thread. Beside this they did not have any other ceremonies etc in respect of the marriage. Selligmann states (1969 ed:97-98) that at the marriages of the Vedda people there were the offering of bows, arrows, hunting dogs, plots of land, keteriya or cutting instrument (keththa) etc as dowries but it does not appear that these customs were adhered to in a manner economically unbearable to the parties.

However, eclipsing all these customs in the Vedda society today, much new creations can be seen gaining acceptance. At the present time it can be seen that the Vedda marriages are often decided on the basis of the wrong reactions to the false promises and utterances of the crooks, instant likings with no depth or sense, fantasies etc. There is a strong trend among the Vedda youths, both males and females, of overlooking the relationships and even their family positions and live together secretly in the huts in the cultivation plots paying no regard to their underage position either.

From the ancient times the nuclear family system is prevalent among the Vedda people. Most writers depict the Vedda as truly confidential loving husbands who look after in the most dedicated manner their wives providing all their requirements. According to Harry Williams (1956:174-175) Veddas could have been the best husbands of the world. Vedda look after their children in the most loving manner. Selligmann (1969 ed: 90) was of the opinion that the Vedda people never ever reject their children and they are highly dedicated fathers with utmost love and affection. Even today they do not consider children to be a nuisance or an impediment and instead they consider it their responsibility to provide them with nourishment. Yet the modern vedda people are subjected to drastic changes in the society. Modern Vedda

wives are often subjected into much harassment at the hands of their husbands. Winds of change in its worst manner seem to be blowing across the innocent people as well.

The concept of Death created a sense of fear in the Vedda. The reason being that according to their belief system after one's death he or she is born a demon. Therefore when a person died in a cave it was customary for all to hide the corpse in a hole in the cave and empty it and go in search of a new place for living. Subsequently when they went into the occupation of small huts a dead body was deposited in a pit, dug in the middle of the house, and vanished from there as well in search for new place.

Various writers had written about the funeral (death) customs and practices of the Vedda community. According to Selligmann (1969 ed:147) when the English government after

having established cemeteries proclaimed that the dead bodies must compulsorily be buried in the pits dug for the purpose, Vedda community vehemently protested against it. According to Hartshone when a Vedda had died the body was wrapped with a hide of a 4-legged animal and buried in a pit dug with the help of an axe and buried it and nothing more was done. (Hartshorne quoted in Virchow, 1886:361).

However, by now the Vedda customs related to funerals are almost akin to those of the Sinhalese. Following the Sinhalese they also use the coffins. Having kept the body in a simple coffin they bury it in the village cemetery. Yet when Tissahamy, the Vedda chief of the time died in 1998, the Vedda community followed much of the customary practices that were known to them from the past. The coffin was made in the simplest way out of the bark of the trees.

## Important Events

With the declaration by the United Nations Organization, a Decade and a Year of the Aborigines, there has begun a special awakening about the Aborigines.

The present Vedda chief, Wanniyaleththo attended the 14th Session of the Action Committee of the UNO on the Aborigines and submitted to it the numerous problems his tribal people are been subjected to owing to the Government's take-over of their land for the Maduruoya National Park in the following manner.

"I would like to draw your attention to Sri Lanka

and the special situation we are faced with. Those of you, the Aborigines who are assembled here may know the Sinhalese and Tamils who live in Sri Lanka. Yet I do not think that anybody here would know about our tribe. But according to the archeological evidences our history goes back to over 130,000 years or more certainly to 500,000 years Before Present (BP). We are the Aborigines of our country. On 9th November 1983, the Sri Lankan Government having named our last forest land we had as "Maduruoya National Park" we all were evacuated from there. Through this action, having deprived us of the opportunity of hunting and collection of the fruits of the forest they took



precautions to label us as illegal forest hunters. In the face of the English law which we have no knowledge of, our long historical life pattern had been identified as a criminal activity. We are being forced to cultivate paddy lands in the area known as Zone “C” under the agricultural enterprise by the name of Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project. Our 51,468 hector yards large last jungle hunting land had been taken over for a giant hydro-electricity and an irrigational project as a feeding area and had named it as a Wildlife Forest Zone. By now our entire population has been reduced to 2000. For the last 13 years we have been continuously engaged in our traditional vocations of hunting, collecting of food items and dry cultivation. We, the Wanniyaletho or the people of the forest are being debarred under these regulations from our historic rights to hunting, collection of flowers, fruits, and bee-honey and even to enjoy the life by sitting round a bright fire.”

This address made in the UNO for the international assemblage, by Wanniyaletho making him the first such aboriginal leader to make an address to the UNO Assembly can be considered as historic events in the history of the Vedda community.

The deep concern and the great interest shown throughout the World about the Aboriginal Communities since the UNO’s initiatives to protect and poster the social, economic and Cultural heritage of the aborigines was almost unheard up to then and it was so in Sri Lanka as well. In 1994 the UNO declared an International Day for the Aborigines and ever since then Sri Lanka too started to celebrate this day 9th August every year. Since 2010 the Cultural Ministry has taken over the great responsibility of celebrating this Day annually in honour of and in salutation

for the Aborigines in Sri Lanka.

The Vedda community that converge from all directions of the Island under the leadership of their traditional tribal Head, Wanniyaletho, present cultural items that add much glamour and pride to their cultural heritage they so fondly cherish from time immemorial. This is often followed by a cordial discussion with the political leaders and the officials to make them aware of the numerous problems and hardships the community members are presented with. Owing to the terrorist problems that prevailed for over 3 decades the Vedda community that was living in the North-East was unable to join the others. But since the defeat of the terrorism, the presence of the Vedda community of Wakere was significant as they had a guarantee of new hopes of living together with their kinsmen. The best example of this new breath of fresh air was seen when the International Day of Aborigines was celebrated in 2011 in a Tamil speaking area in the Eastern coast, namely Wakere under the Chairmanship of the Honourable President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Furthermore on the 9th August 1996 a Museum of Aboriginal Culture was opened under the sponsorship of the Uva Provincial Council in the village of Kotabakini in Dambana which happen to be the village where the Vedda Community leader resides. The Museum which is of great Anthropological interest display the Vedda life from the past to the present day and hence it is an inestimable and invaluable asset to the community as much as the country as a whole. This Museum of the Aborigines had been taken over by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and had been redeveloped with much additions and reopened for public exhibition from 2015.

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# The Sindhi Community of Sri Lanka

Mr. Narain Chathulani

## Historical Background

The Sindhi's are a community that can trace their roots to the Sindh Province in India which after independence came under the jurisdiction of Pakistan. The Sindhis of the Hindu religion were not tolerated by the Muslim Sindhis and were compelled to leave their homes overnight and migrated to different cities in North India and from there to different parts of the World. They

have eventually been recognised as very successful entrepreneurs internationally.

The Sindhis first came to then Ceylon in the late 19th Century as Traders selling silk textiles and artefacts in the Fort area catering to tourists embarking from ships. From there they proceeded to Main Street Pettah and set up retail shops for the local population

and eventually ventured into the wholesale business selling to traders in the other cities.

In 1924 the Sindhi Merchants Association of Ceylon was formed with a total membership of 32 names comprising of 22 firms in Colombo, 03 firms in Jaffna, 02 firms in Nuwara Eliya, 01 firm in Kandy, 01 firm in Badulla and 03 Street Hawkers/Brokers. The first President of the Association was Mr. Hemandas Chandiram who continued till 1930. He was succeeded by Mr. Choitram Parsram Hundlani who continued till his demise in 1960.

It was in the early 1950's that the incumbent Government announced that only Ceylon citizens could own land and operate businesses and urged the expatriate community to acquire Citizenship by Registration. Some registered for citizenship while most decided to leave the shores of Ceylon.

It was during that period that the Sindhi Merchants Association decided to purchase a Land in Colpetty, and a Community Centre was planned with the help of a Sindhi Architect attached to the Colombo Municipality and the construction supervised by a Senior Member of the Association Mr. G.J.Hirdaramani. After the completion of the building it was inaugurated in 1952 by Prime Minister Sir John Kotalawela. After some time a Hindu Temple was also inaugurated on the top floor of the same building. In 1956 Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was also felicitated by the Sindhi Merchants Association.

During this same period some of the merchants moved out of the traditional Fort and Pettah areas towards the Galle Road in Colpetty and Bambalapitiya mainly for retail shops.

The late 1960's and early 1970's saw a few of the Merchants diversifying from imports to the manufacturing of textiles for distribution locally and subsequently manufacturing garments for export to developed countries. Hirdaramanis and Kundanmals were the pioneers and quite a few others also ventured into industries. During this time Mr.Muni Kundanmal was the President and represented the Association at various government forums, diplomatic missions and other social groups.

When the global economy was opened up in the late 70's many merchants diversified further away from textiles into electronics, hardware, household items, construction and various other fields. The Sindhi Merchants Association then changed its identity to The Sindhi Association of Sri Lanka and its membership was changed to individual membership from the earlier Firm (Company) membership.

The occupations of the Sindhis in Sri Lanka also changed with time. The first generation were entrepreneurs with retail outlets. The second generation went into the textile Industry with some manufacturing for export. The third generation consolidated their involvement in textiles and began importing and selling wholesale and retail electronics, hardware and general household ware. The fourth generation after studying abroad mostly in the IT field have opted to be professional in their respective qualifications.

## Population and Geographical Distribution

The population of Sindhi's in Sri Lanka has over time declined sharply due to the younger generation specially the girls, who were required to marry within the community but due to fewer options available in the small community, had to go overseas for marriage and after marriage did not return. The boys left for higher studies and eventually married and settled down overseas and only a very few returned to their family businesses. However, a new trend shows that the younger generation who have mostly studied in International Schools in Colombo have integrated well with their class mates of other ethnic groups and more inter community marriages have taken place recently.

The Sindhi Community of Sri Lanka numbering only about 500 individuals have now banded

themselves under the Sindhi Association of Sri Lanka and have an established Community Centre in Colpetty housing a Hindu Temple and a spacious auditorium for recreation and entertainment .The Sindhi Charitable Trust and the Sindhi Ladies Club also operate from the same premises and are involved in charity and social service, religious functions and arranging the various festivals of the Sindhi culture and Sindhi cuisine which are sold at fund raising social sale bazaars organised by the Ladies Club. Almost all Sindhis in Sri Lanka are now domiciled in the city of Colombo with perhaps only a handful in Kandy and Nuwara Eliya but they are not registered with The Sindhi Association of Sri Lanka.

## Religious and Cultural Practices

The Temple has a resident Priest from India who conducts all rituals at weddings, funerals and other auspicious occasions and conducts poojas for many functions. Weekly Sai Baba bajhans are held with several non-Sindhi Hindu devotees also participating. Other poojas listed in the annual Sindhi Almanac prepared by the Priest, are also held regularly.

Traditionally there are several festivals. Most notable of these are Holi, the festival of colours and Diwali (Deepavali) the festival of lights. After the religious rites are completed, an annual Diwali Ball Dinner/Dance is arranged with invitees from other communities too participating.



## Sindhi Foods



*Sindhi biryani*

## Sindhi Language

The Sindhi Language is an Indo Aryan language of the Historical Sind Region spoken by the Sindhi people all over the world. The Sindhi text is written from right to left with some letters joined. The present Sindhis in Sri Lanka hardly speak or

write in their mother language, with the language of communication being English, the language in which the younger generations have been taught in the schools and Universities.

## Attire

The Sindhi traditional costume/dress has changed from the inception according to the geographical climate and invariably adapted to the place of residence. In Sri Lanka almost all the Sindhis have

adopted the western mode of dress but with a mix of the eastern saree and salwar kurtas for men and women influenced more by the Indian model.



Portrait of a girl from Sindh, (1870s)



*Pictures Courtesy of Internet*

*Sindhi Wedding Sindhi people are basically Sanatani Hindus,  
who do not follow Hindu rites strictly*





# The Sri Lankan Gypsy Community

Ms. Ganga Rajinee  
Dissanayaka

## Introduction

### Historical Background

According to researches by anthropologists, while the 'Ahiguntika' or gypsies, through their characteristic links to a human race belonging to the East Austroloid category, display their relationship to their early India origins, for centuries they still continued to display the same human characteristics by living in small groups, being on the move and not mixing with the

Sinhalese race. While they identify these small gypsy groups as a 'kuppayama', this kuppayama becomes a tribe with the amalgamation of several families. Cooperation, respect to the leadership, unity, a system of law and order, mental bond, a certain extent of division of labour in their livelihoods are evident within these tribes.

## Names used in identifying the Sri Lankan Gypsies

If to interpret the hard to interpret ‘Ahiguntica’ image name, I fact we need to refer to the cultural books like the ‘Panchatantra’ and the ‘Vissuddimagga’. There are several words similar to the word ‘Ahiguntica’ found in these books. Within these words ‘Ahiguntica’, ‘Cuntika’ etc there are similarities in sounds as well as meaning.

If the ‘gunda’ derivation meant in the etymology of ‘Ahiguntica’ is considered, the meanings may be taken as ‘wrapping’ or ‘setting a trap’ and also at times as ‘comforting the ears through music/song’ and singing. Despite being interpreted thus in the cultural language, the opinion of linguists is that they are not so sure how the sound ‘ahi’ (aahi) could be confirmed as having split from another word (Refer The Journal of the Pali Text Society -

1886). Though its meaning is ‘point’ in the cultural language, it is difficult to be compared with the word ‘gunda’. Its meaning could be linked to the hood of a cobra.



- **Koothandi** – The origin of this word comes from the colloquial Tamil language. While this name is mostly used within the North-Central Province, the nomadic life and livelihoods may have been the results of its usage.
- **Kuravar and Maddala** – While this is a name used to identify Indian nomadic tribes they are mostly identified by this particular name within the Northern and Easter Provinces.
- **Rila Panicci** – This name has been used since they resort to ‘rila’ or monkeys for displays of dances and tricks. The name ‘panicci’ has been resorted to in Sinhala society to identify various individuals.
- **Tribal leader** – The gypsy tribal leader gains more respect than implied by the term tribal leader.



Though it is the normal practice for the leadership to be gained from generation to generation, there have also been instances where such a leader could not be elected. At all such instances, the gypsy groups get together and elect a leader. There would be no major differences between such an elected leader and a leader down the generation. This is since the majority of the gypsies live reserved within their traditional lifestyles. Whichever gypsy leaders world-wide are compared to each

other, there are several evident common values among them.

While the gypsy community in Sri Lanka had four leaders by 2005, by now this number has increased to six. Among them, while the gypsy villages in Kudagama, Andara Kele, Kala Oya and Akkaraipattuwa are the initial group of villages, the other villages are those established later based on various necessities.

The first category of villages	The second category of villages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kudagama</li> <li>• Deva Grama (Akkaraipattuwa)</li> <li>• Kala Oya</li> <li>• Andara Kele</li> </ul>	<p>Mihintale Akkaraipattuwa Vavuniya</p>

All these leaders have been installed through their generations. While they possess a unique personality than the others in their gypsy following, the Andara Kele leader is a prolific,

elderly individual with a wide understanding with all the other gypsy tribes. The equality in the behavior, lifestyles, obedience to their leader is indeed surprising.

## Literature

They continue with a very delicate, enjoyable literature through their generations. Music, dance as well as the tricks of making monkeys and snakes dance, and the art of sooth saying are part and parcel of their literature.

Though it is a fact that the gypsies do not possess

a recorded literature, they do possess a literature which they maintain by word of mouth.

Vaman Lal, who indulges in a very deep research into these, says he is in possession of some 2,000 recorded folk songs of Hungarian gypsies.

# Present situation

## Location of villages

While Sinhalese villages surrounding the Kudagama, Kala Oya and Andara Kele gypsy villages and Tamil villages surrounding the Deva Grama are unique features, they have been pushed into a sensitive mental trauma and an state of isolation by their villages being called as ‘ahicuntica gama’ or village of gypsies and ‘kooththandi gama’ or village of entertainers by the Sinhalese community and by being restricted to a limited area. As a result of the entire gypsy tribes being restricted to particular villages, a main factor evident is that unless during special festive occasions, while their relations maintained with their kith and kin in other villages are limited, the isolation in locating almost all the villages is

a problematic issue. Since they had often met on the roads while being mobile in engaging in their livelihoods prior to being settled permanently, these meetings had often led to marriages and an advantage in the communication of customs, practices and traditional knowledge.

The main four gypsy villages possess very good infrastructure facilities; these are to a comparatively weak condition only at the Andara Kele village while the highest urban facilities are found only at Kudagama. Another unique feature is all these villages being located some 10 to 20 kilometres away from the closest towns.

## Education

While they equally receive modern systematic school education, an important feature is their gradually losing their exchange of education through their traditional methods of communication. Every gypsy village has school-going facilities for the children while they even have schools specially reserved for them.

The Kudagama Vidyalaya is a school with facilities for its student to receive education up to the Grade 11 while the schools in the other gypsy villages do not possess educational facilities to

that extent though they are adequate. Three per cent of the students from among the gypsy children who sit for the General Certificate of Education – Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) qualify for the GCE Advanced Level. While student who qualify for the University are 0.01 per cent, there is one female who has obtained a University Degree. The gypsies have a natural tribal connection network in place for their traditional knowledge to flow from the older generation to the new. During their daily lives the elders spend a few compulsory hours with their children. The gypsy children

possessing a keen listening capability is a tribal characteristic while the elders include the children in their traditional methods of livelihoods like capturing snakes, hunting animals, palm reading

etc. The gypsies gain environmental awareness through their mobility and they exchange these experiences with the others.



Equipment used by Gypsy Community

## Traditional and Modern Livelihood Methods

The males performing tricks with snakes and monkeys and the females engaging in sootsaying and musical entertainment as common to both genders have been identified as their livelihood by the gypsies since ancient times. Distribution of employment is evident within their traditional livelihood methods. While the females never engage in performances using snakes or monkeys, the males never engage in palm reading. Musical entertainment is common to both genders.

Some individuals with similar outward resemblances to the Sri Lankan gypsy community

(like those with the knowledge of Malayali witchcraft) engage in palm reading, irrespective of their genders.

The leaders of the four recent gypsy tribes have laid down a law that at least one male and female child from each family engage in their traditional livelihoods. A code of ethics related to their traditional livelihoods is compulsorily taught by the elder generations to the new generation. From future trends, it is evident that percentage-wise, the new generation is engaged in attempts to move away from their traditional methods of livelihood.

Despite the new younger generation staying away from their traditional methods of livelihood, they not focusing on any permanent income providing employments are a unique feature while the younger gypsy generation shows more interest on impermanent jobs like selling books in buses,

manual labour, selling fish etc. They never work as domestic aides in households while the gypsies display a strong dislike to any employment opportunities which may keep them sedentary in one place for long.



Equipment used by Gypsy Community





# Population And Demography

## Direct migration to Sri Lanka from India

It is not surprising that a group of gypsies who began migrating westward from India arriving in Sri Lanka via South India.

There is a long historic evidence of various relations between India and Sri Lanka during the reign of indigenous kings as well as during the subsequent periods when Sri Lanka was under the rule of Western powers like the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. Only the issue of during which such relation and how the gypsies arrived in Sri Lanka remain problematic. While the gypsies had never maintained any relations with the Veddahs who are the indigenous people of Sri Lanka, they lived a peaceful and silent life since there were no quantitatively large numbers in their population as in India.

The gypsies were no strangers to the Sri Lankans since ancient times. The sight of slightly fair, medium built females dressed in colourful, attractive attire and ornaments and their infants hugged to their bodies by means of a piece of cloth, walking hastily; the bare-bodied males (mostly), wearing ear and neck ornaments, dressed in colourful sarongs, cloth, with snakes in wicker baskets and carrying their belongings in boxes, is a pleasing sight of the gypsies for any Sri Lankan, whether young or old. We gain details of the arrival of the gypsies in Sri Lanka only from the live evidence in recent history. They themselves claim that the groups of gypsies who had arrived in Sri Lanka during recent times did so from Rameshwaram in India to Mannar through the

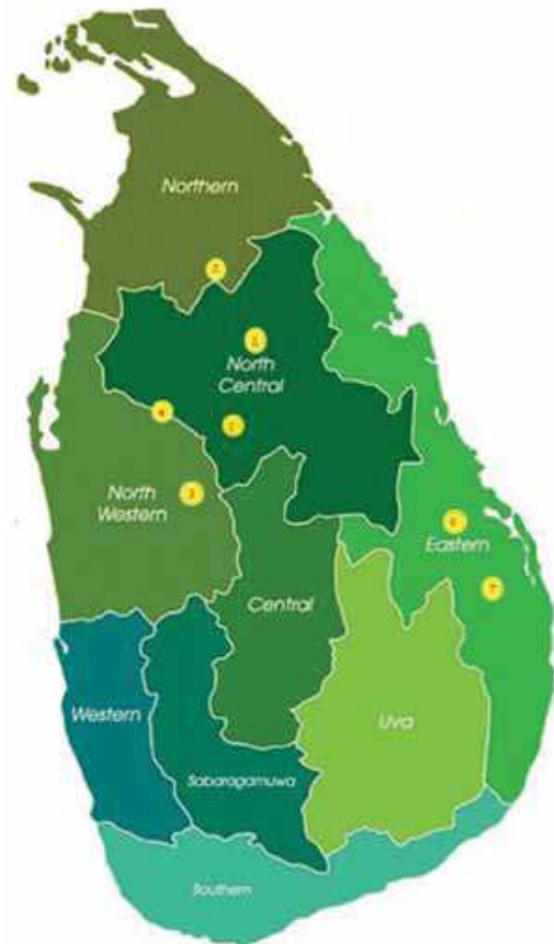
ocean strip that is identified as the Adams Bridge in boats bringing along with them several white cattle. Rather than making a record of their verbal details, finding any other details was indeed a difficult task. When the reasons for the worldwide migration of the gypsies are analysed, we understand as a fact that it was a common practice for gypsies to arrive and depart to and from Sri Lanka for temple festivals in Mannar in the Northern Province. Since the gypsies still engage in palm reading, staging performances with snakes and monkeys even during present festivities in temples, churches and shrines, it proves that they had been used to such activities, wherever they had migrated since the past. While the assumption of 'Nadaraja', the Kudagama gypsy leader is that among these groups of gypsies who had made it a habit to arrive in Sri Lanka, some may have stayed back while others may have left, is proved a fact when past factors are considered. A section of the gypsies who thus arrived in Sri Lanka reached the centre of the country through Western coastal regions and settled around Kalawewa. While the Kalawewa is the main irrigation reservoir within the North Central Province, this proves that later, a group which reached Kurunegala in the Wayamba or North Western Province settled at Andara Kele in Galgamuwa and that yet another group had settled in the Thambuththegama area between Galgamuwa and Kalawewa. The other group which split from the original group to arrive, had reached the Eastern Province along the northern coasts instead of travelling along the

western coastal regions, and settled at Aligambay in Akkaraipattuwa. It is a clear fact that the main reasons for all these settlements in these regions are their being unpopulated, the availability of water and sans any outside social interferences. The memories of the elder generation are that despite their not building permanent houses within these areas, they had lived within an

extent of an acre, in small dwellings erected out of Palmyra and coconut fronds, walked all over Sri Lanka and return to the same place. However, in 1989 AD, they had been provided with higher and paddy land for permanent settlement with the intervention of the government of Sri Lanka. This transformed their migratory lives into different lifestyle.

## Present Population

Year	Village	Population
2015/2016	Deva Grama (Akkaraipattuwa) 1	1,100
	Kalaoya	260
	Kudagama	1,500
	Andarakele	260
	Vavuniya	240
	Akkaraipattuwa 2	280
	Mihintale	152



## Language

The language of the gypsies scattered worldwide and identified as Romani, Romany or Gypsy or Gipsy, is commonly considered as Roma and Sinti iskaÜ. While studying this language, linguists have discovered that Roma shows several similarities to the Indo Arya Romai language.

- The Sri Lankan gypsies who migrated to Sri Lanka via South India may have been influenced by the South Indian language culture of the 'Kuravar' tribe and developed the slang from the Telungu called 'Tulu' as their language.
- The Sri Lankan gypsy who shows closer relationships to South Indian characteristics through his physical and biological features are more closer to the smaller Indian communities like the Kuravar, Maddal etc and not to the Western gypsies.

The Sri Lankan gypsies claim that they had migrated from the Kerala region in India and that this gypsy group which split from the original group and migrated to South India had lived for a near century in proximity to the Telingu state.

Hence their spoken language of 'Tulu', while there may have been no facilities or the necessity to learn its written component. While the language of the Sri Lankan gypsies is one of the Telingu language versions of 'Tulu', there is not a single adult in the present Sri Lankan gypsy community who is aware of its written version.

The Sri Lankan gypsies presently study in the Sinhala language. Despite the school-going children learn to read and write Sinhalese, while always resorting to their 'Tulu' usage in their daily livelihood activities, they take great pride in the Sinhalese being unable to understand this language. Always disliking them being identified as Tamils, none of them are able to talk or write in Tamil. However, those living in Akkaraipattu receive their education in the Tamil medium. Here, their second language is Tamil.

Though the second language resorted to by the gypsies in Aligambay (Deva Grama) is Tamil, this has not affected their usage of Telugu, and the Aligambay gypsies' ability to be well conversant in the oral and written Tamil language is a huge advantage to them in their social lives.

## Religion

The religion of the ancient Sri Lanka gypsies was based on four deities and the ritual systems surrounding them. While these deities were Venkades, Masemma, Sellapur Amma, Madasamy they are for invoking/receiving blessings for prosperity, security, relief from misfortune and hazards and safety. While some 80 percent of the present gypsies are Christians, the rest follow Buddhism or their ancient religion.

- Lifestyle
- Modes of dress and accessories

The males of the gypsies garb themselves in a sarong (below the waist) and a turban on their heads, they also wear neck chains of multi-coloured beads. The elders were bare bodied,

wrapped an open sarong on their shoulders and they also wore earrings. While they do not have the habit of growing long hair, they prefer to grow beards. The present elderly gypsies still dress in these earlier garbs but cover the upper part of their bodies with a shirt.

The gypsy females dress themselves in colourful Indian sarees, they wrap the loose ends of the saree from over their shoulders around their body and tuck the end at their hips. They apply oil on their hair, comb it tight and tie in a knot at the top of their heads and wear several kinds of neck chains.

Their permanent ornaments are the ear studs, nose rings and the rings on fingers. Though most females wear a dot on their foreheads, this is not a compulsory feature.

## Gypsy Dwellings

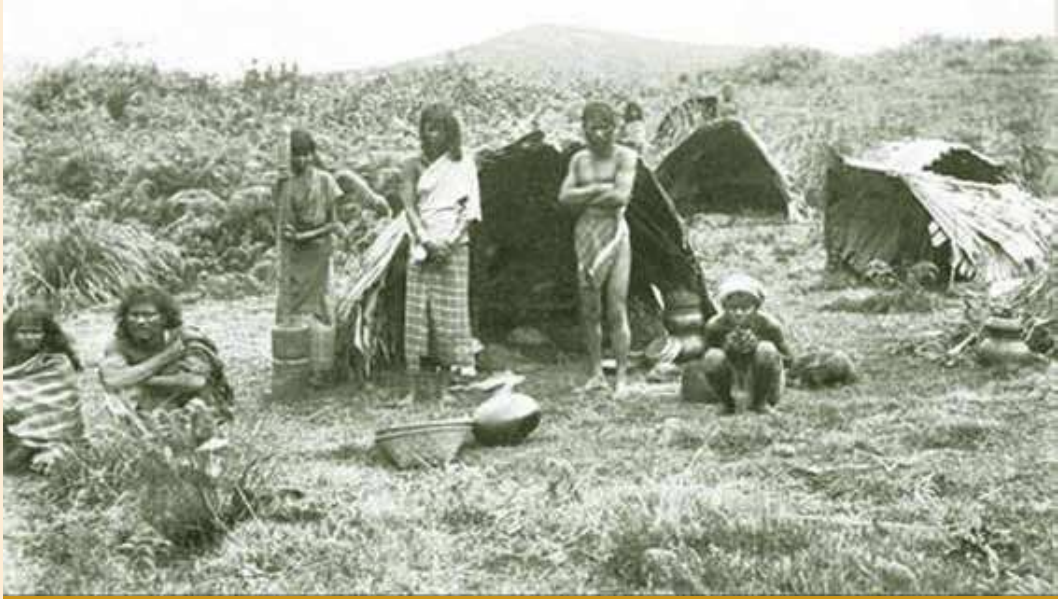
The gypsy hut or dwelling is the lodge for the gypsy community to which migrating from place to place is as bound to their bodies as their life-breath. This is their temporary lodging. While they earn their livelihoods publicly by staying at a particular location, the time spent at one place before their next journey is four days.

Wherever in the world these gypsies are scattered they lead a dwelling centred migratory life. Similarly, while they construct dwelling of different shapes, it would always be circular in shape.

In Sri Lanka, this dwelling is referred to as 'Nailla', they are constructed by using Palmyra fronds and are approximately eight and a half feet by nine and a half feet with a height of five feet.

Within each, items for their daily needs, like a few pots and pans, pillows and bundles of clothes are arranged very neatly one on top of the other. All these temporary dwellings are set up in a circle close to each other and a dwelling for each family is set up within an hour. The females sleep within these dwellings while the males sleep in front of their dwellings.







## Child Birth

A gypsy family which considers children as a symbol of nature has three or four children in each family.

The gypsy parents who show special affection towards their children do not consider the gender of their offspring, while a gypsy female conceives she happily informs this to her close relatives. The pregnant gypsy mother who engaged in a daily

routines without any difference, they carefully safeguard their pregnancy. The reasons for pregnancy related illnesses, child mortality rates, miscarriages remain a secret even to this day. While in the past, expectant Sri Lankan gypsy females have drunk a decoction called 'Kayami' gravy minutes before childbirth; they believe that it would make childbirth easier and without much pain.

## Naming the Child

The child born within the dwelling is brought out within three to five days, introduced to the tribe and is given a name proposed by the parents. Subsequently, the child's birth is duly registered with the relevant Divisional Secretariat of the area. The Christian gypsies arrange for their offspring to be baptized and follow their religious customs.

All gypsy children are named while using the name of the child's father or grandfather in front.

Among the names resorted to Sri Lanka, the usage of names like Ramasamy Nadeeka, Erappan Ranjan are common at present.

## Puberty

The opinion that a female should remain a virgin till marriage is still deep-rooted among the gypsies.

These are safeguarded through the laws laid down by the tribes and while all within the tribe are duty bound to protect the young females, the rape of a virgin girl of the tribe is always considered by all as the gravest crime that a gypsy youth could commit within a gypsy tribe. Though with slight variations, the punishment for this crime within any gypsy tribe world-wide is a punishment very similar to the death sentence, since if a girl loses her virginity it would become an open secret within the tribe. Despite this being a disgrace, she is under no circumstances ostracised from or ignored by the tribe. Similarly, there are no taboos in loving or marrying her or her participating at festivals. They believe that a girl's first festival is her coming of age or reaching puberty. As soon as the signs of puberty are evident, the first act is to keep the girl in a separate dwelling (in a hut made out of leafy branches) with her younger sister as companion. This period lasts for seven days. The males not seeing her and she being left alone are

compulsory customs, her meals are a coconut mixed tubular boiled rice called 'pittu'. At dawn on the seventh day, she is covered with a piece of cloth, taken out of her dwelling, bathed with water which is boiled with a mixture of Kohomba, Pawatta and lime leaves and given in charge to her parents. Then, turmeric (saffron) mixed water is sprinkled within the dwelling she had occupied and it is set aflame with all the materials she had used during her stay. This is considered a strategy to safeguard against impurities. Once given in charge to the parents, the ritual of burning the evil eyes and words is performed on the new young adult (dry coconut fronds, salt, black pepper, dry chillies and mustard seeds are burnt) and she is fed with seven balls of boiled white raw rice with salt. The reaching of age transforms into a festivity from that instance. The gypsies celebrate a small party on this day and after the next menstruation period they perform all these rituals as before and celebrate it with a grand party. At present this is a very rarely seen custom since it is a common practice to follow the Sinhalese customs to mark the event.



# Marriage





The marriageable age of a Sri Lankan migratory Telugu community is between 21 to 25 years. Though there are marriages among first cousins, no force is exerted on this issue. Among the Deva Grama gypsies, marriages between paternal uncle (younger brother of the father) and daughter and between uncle and daughter are considered important.

The ancient marriage rituals of the Sri Lankan gypsies could be identified thus:

- On the day before the date fixed for the wedding, two Palmyra frond tents are erected facing each other with a 20 metre distance between them.
- The night prior to the wedding is spent by the bride and groom with their parents in this Palmyra frond tents. Before sunrise on the wedding day the couple is bathed in water mixed with the flour of two sacks of pounded white raw rice, the bride is dressed in a red and yellow mixed saree and her hair oiled, combed and tied. The groom is dressed in red and white cloth below the waist and a yellow thread embroidered attractive shirt (at instances he is bare bodied). The groom wears a red or white turban and a spot on his forehead. Several neck chains numbering over seven including black thread pendants, beads, silver chains etc are worn by the groom, while on the hands he wears a variety of cloth ribbons and a wrist watch if available while he waits for his bride. The bride dresses in her attractive saree, wears bead chains and bangles with a black dot on her forehead. They avoid wearing any footwear.
- Following this, the groom is taken under a canopy to the seating area. The others surround them to watch while playing their musical instruments.
- The groom puts a black beaded chain with a large golden bead at its centre around the bride's neck.
- He puts a row of bangles on the right arm of the bride who so far had worn bangles only on her left arm. This becomes the medium to announce to the world that they are now married.
- After the food and liquor filled meals that follow, the couple is accompanied by the parents of both parties to the Palmyra frond dwelling of groom.
- The following morning, the groom's aunt arrives, inspects the bride's purity and goes among the tribe describing the details. If the bride is found impure, the decision regarding this is taken by the groom. This is since the bride and groom from the same tribe are mutually known since childhood, the groom usually does not entertain any suspicions over the bride's virginity. However, there are instances where this differs as well. During such instances, this disgrace is eliminated by the bride's father offering some amount of cash or gifts to the groom.
- For none of these activities do the gypsies resort to the practice of approaching astrologers looking for auspicious times.

## Dowry

In most gypsy marriages, the dowry is bestowed not by the bride to the groom, but by the groom to the bride. This consists of cash, items, cattle or any other animals, it is offered to the bride's party before the marriage. Whatever the dowry, it is a common practice for the bride's parents to offer some cooking utensils and provisions, mats and pillows for the couple to use after their marriage.

Among the Sri Lankan gypsies too there is utmost concern in contributing as much as they can towards the issue of the dowry. While nothing in particular is requested by either party as a dowry, both parties offer something considerable as dowries to their offspring.

## Gypsy Ethics

The gypsy community strongly maintains ethics within their tribes. More than the existing tribal laws and regulations, they possess tribal ethics which they have brought by birth. The females of a gypsy tribe never indulge in prostitution.

Jean – Pane Celebert states that such gypsy prostitutes are not genuine gypsy tribal females but who pretend to be so.

The gypsy females do not face any economic difficulties since from childhood they train themselves in palm reading, dancing etc. They learn their livelihoods while following on the footsteps of their mothers. Economy wise,

equipped with great independence and strength, the gypsy females never indulge in prostitution. Another reason for this is their abhorrence of relations with other males apart from their husbands, fathers and brothers.

The gypsies show great disgust towards homosexuality. Another factor to such disgust is their strong faith that children are the supreme results of a male and female union and their powerful faith and enjoyment on the forces of reproduction. This is a feature unique to the Sri Lankan gypsies as well as the gypsies spread the world over.

## Funeral Rites

In the event of a member's death during migration, his/her body is discarded in the jungles without the knowledge of anyone and the journey continued.

In the event of such a death while they are camped, the body is placed on a platform atop two coconut stumps, buried at the nearest cemetery before sundown, return fast to their dwellings amidst the

beating of drums and blowing of flutes and go to sleep. After some three weeks, all tribal elders meet at the dead member's dwelling. This is in the evening. Subsequently, as one, all of them indulge in liquor or such drinks and after 6.30 in the evening (with the beginning of nightfall), with drum beating and blowing of flutes and with the tribal 'arachchila' or chief at the forefront, go to the closest relative of the dead member, prohibit him/her from speaking, take him/her to the nearest source of water (a reservoir, river, stream or pond). His/her first cousin collects water into a winnowing fan from all four sides of the seated person seated in the water and pours on his/her head. After this, the person coming out of the water is surrounded, taken again to his/her dwelling amidst the beating drums and blowing flutes, covered with a cloth and left alone. The following dawn, the elders place cooked rice and

flesh on the plantain leaf covered winnow fan and offer it to the crows before daybreak. In the event crows do not eat the offering, it is in turn thrown into a stream and they return to the dwellings after completing the act of invoking merit on the deceased.

Subsequently, facilities are made for the closest relative of the person on whom the rituals had been practiced the previous day to speak to him/her. The funeral rites conclude after all in the tribe cook and eat the food and invoking merits on the deceased.

These rituals are to this day practiced by a minority within the gypsy community and there have been no restrictions place against them through the religions they currently follow.

## Social, Cultural Facets

### Judiciary and Law

The court of the gypsies' is dominated by the tribal chieftain – the 'arachchila' while it sits during the night around a campfire. The complainants as well as the defendants have to provide the liquor to the chieftain and all the others while a certain amount in cash is also charged as trial expenses. In the event the defendants accept the fault, a fine is imposed as a punishment. The other two modes of punishments are the minor swearing and the major swearing. The day after the trial, the defendant who is in the custody of the chieftain should bathe at a stipulated time, still dressed in the wet clothes; dip his/her index finger into a boiling vessel of oil before the chieftain. This

is the minor swearing. During the major swearing, the culprit is made to touch a red hot piece of iron.

Apart from this, the defendant charged with a minor swearing has to place a betel leaf on a new pot of water provided, place it on his head and crawl around the council thrice. Finally, after the chieftain takes a look at the betel leaf, the extent of the crime is decided upon and the judgment is delivered by him. The judicial system of the gypsies is the chieftain's warnings, advice and punishments and this by itself portrays the capabilities of a small group to safeguard their ethics.



## Removing of Snake venom

A 'naigala' or snake stone is placed on the marks made by the snake sting. The snake stone sticks to the skin and after about an hour, it falls off. When the fallen snake stone is immersed in a vessel of coconut milk, the milk turns reddish. This has to be done in silence.

When the gypsies venture into the jungles they carry a piece of a plant 'Naga Madara' with them to safeguard themselves against serpents. However, this is not carried with them when they venture out to capture snakes. Their opinion is that by hanging a few pieces of the 'Naga Madara' plant at a few locations of the open space where they setup camp.



## Verbal Communication

### Traditional Songs:

*Naailu karthedi kadikilu lef vana kurthedi madi  
aada undithi*

*Vana kurthedi ottu kottakundu bamam sachvila  
kundu*

*Oru vavan thaas os padul thaas*

*Ninna sampan nee kuduthalanavidian sahan*

*Nuwana aadavaththa neehoo sampalam neendi  
sissa*

### Traditional Stories:

The story of God Kataragama and Valli

**G**od Kataragama also known as Skanda Kumara, once stopped a beautiful damsel returning from her bath and inquired about her. While declaring that she was the eldest daughter of a family earning their livelihood by migrating from place to place, she pleaded that she be freed to go. Then Skanda Kumara had declared his love and married Valli. (While this is a story believed by the gypsies, according to their view Valli is a gypsy damsel)





## Reading palms

Almost all gypsy females learn to read palms. This they do from either their mothers or their grandmothers. 'Agatakka' is currently the oldest and cleverest female to read palms. After her, palm reading has been learned correctly. While there are no recorded principles regarding this, for instance it is learned by showing the hand.

There is a style and method in palm reading. Prior to venturing on their own to read palms, every female has to accompany an elder female in palm reading for at least two years.



Capturing Snakes



An elder gypsy male is essential in venturing into the jungles to capture a wild snake. Following his long and thorough search of the location of a snake, three gypsy youths go into the wilds, stay motionless, capture the serpent, force open its jaws with a special small curved knife and cut its two poisonous fangs. Subsequently, the

snake is tamed by feeding milk and caressing its body for two to three months.

There are several species of snakes identified by the gypsies and they are classified as the Trade caste, Berawa caste, Royal caste etc. The Berawa caste snakes have black dotted, patterned skin.



## Capturing and performing with snakes

While trading the gypsy youths in the art of capturing snakes is done only on full moon days, the serpent has to be trained by the person who owns the reptile and does the performances continuously. Every snake is not docile to every gypsy. They use a special flute to make the snakes dance and while it is blown they make movements parallel to the snake's hood, while the snake too moves its hood parallel to the flute.

- Making of snake stones

'Types of soil' called Naga Pasanam, Garunda Pasanam etc are ground together in equal proportions, made into a ball, then flattened and dried in the sun. Furthermore, a matured piece from the wild Naga Madara tree is wrapped in a piece of cloth and dried in the air. The piece of stem is peeled and only the pith is taken.



- Preparing the ‘snake dancing’ flute

The inner flesh of a mature bitter gourd is removed through a small hole at the stem end, dried in the air. A piece of bamboo tube with three holes drilled equidistantly is pasted on to the dried shell of the gourd using bees wax, the mouth piece is prepared at the end of the bamboo tube and the flute is ready. The flute prepared thus is dried in the air for seven years before being blown.

- 07 Inter-social links and Community Participation

A trend of the gypsies maintaining closer relations with the other Sri Lankan communities could be observed at present. The younger generation has come forward in unity to recognize the written version of their ‘Tuli’ slang, and created the necessary organizational skills to maintain links with state institutions and win their fundamental rights. By now, they are in the forefront in safeguarding their ancient livelihood methods and to relax the rules and regulations imposed by the government against them. Apart from these, they have taken steps to form a cultural association with the objective of safeguarding their cultural features and register this association with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

While a cultural centre built with state and private sector participation has been by now established at Kudagama, there are signs of the gypsies uniting towards a long journey within the Sinhala community in unity with the other communities in Sri Lanka.

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## Footnotes

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# The Parsis of Sri Lanka

Prof. Kalinga Tudor Silva

## Introduction

Modern Parsis<sup>1</sup> (also referred to as Zarathushtis) are a tiny Indian community settled in Bombay and other cities in India and elsewhere. The total population of Parsis worldwide is estimated to be around 100,000. They are an ancient people of Persian origin who emigrated from Persia over 10 centuries ago, probably to protect their ancestral

religion of Zoroastrianism from Islam after the conquest of Persia by the Arabs. In spite of their Persian origin and lack of cultural grounding in India, Parsis managed to thrive in India due to the cultural tolerance prevalent in the country at the time and adaptability and ingenuity of the Parsis themselves. They were remarkably successful

<sup>1</sup> Parsi is sometimes spelt as Parsee. But in this chapter we will consistently spell it as Parsi.

during the raj. They made a major contribution to industry, commerce and philanthropy in India, a contribution that is far in excess of their miniscule size in the vast Indian population. It is in some ways inconceivable that the relatively small Parsi community has produced the top-most industrialists and business houses in India, such as the Tatas. Similarly the modern philanthropic tradition in India owes a great deal to generous Parsi philanthropists in the past like Rustom Manock (White 1991).

Up until the latter part of the 18th century Parsis used the port city of Surat in Gujarat as their economic and social hub, serving as trade agents (brokers) to the Portuguese, Dutch and eventually the British East India Company (White 1991). During this period they amassed a lot of mercantile wealth which enabled them to become one of the leading mercantile groups in colonial India. During the 18th century, Surat became politically unstable and economically insecure due to the power struggles between remaining Mogul rulers and their rival groups, including the colonial administrators themselves. This led to a gradual decline of Surat as a political and commercial centre in western India. At this point, the Parsi community made a strategic decision to move to Bombay and, from there, to other centres in the colonial empire in order to expand their commercial activities and long distance trade in the Indian Ocean. This is how a small branch

of the Parsi community from Bombay moved to Colombo and established a Parsi settlement there and gradually gained an upper hand in selected economic activities in this colonial town during the 19th century.

Thus Parsis came to Sri Lanka from Bombay and Surat primarily for engaging in long distance trade in the Indian Ocean that thrived in leaps and bounds as the colonial empire expanded. Even today a few of the leading business houses in Sri Lanka are under the control of the small Parsi community in Colombo.

Throughout the colonial era Parsis in South Asia served as an important commercial broker between colonial rulers and local communities. Their westernized lifestyle, control over commercial capital and the trust they had established among different commercial partners contributed to their gradual rise as an Indian Ocean trading group. Their economic dominance, however, gradually declined in the postcolonial era with nationalist political elites in India and Sri Lanka taking control over the state, often perceiving economically dominant minority commercial groups as privileged “outsiders” vis-à-vis the impoverished peasantry in the countryside for whose votes the political elites were competing among themselves (Chua ). This, in turn, often led to the political marginalization and alienation of such overseas trading communities.

## The Origin and Development of the Parsi Community in Colombo

Like Memons, Borahs, Bharatas and Chettiars, Parsis are a trading community of Indian origin that established itself in Colombo side by side

with each other during the colonial encounter (Muthiah 2003). The Parsi history, however, goes beyond colonial India and indicates the cross-

border mobility of these trading communities taking advantage of the colonial empires.

According to K.J. Choksy, a Parsi scholar of Sri Lankan origin currently based in the US, Parsis have been living in Sri Lanka from the early 19th century. Records of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce indicate that at its very first meeting held on February 20, 1939, 11 firms joined this organization. Of these two, namely Hormusjee Espondiarger and Sapujee Hirjee, were Parsi firms. The rest were owned by Englishmen. The next non-European member of the Chamber of Commerce elected in 1890 was also a Parsi firm, namely Framjee Bhjikhajee. With its head office in Bombay, the Colombo branch of this firm was established in mid-19th century. It was engaged in import export trade and extraction of coconut oil through a mill established in Grandpass. The

Kotahena Parsi Burial Trust was established on April 19, 1847. As the Parsi population in Colombo grew in numbers, a bigger burial site was established on a land area of two and a half acres in Jawatta Road secured from the government in 1887. This burial ground is still being used by the Parsi community in Colombo.

Zoroastrian religion forms a very important aspect of the identity of Parsis. Ceylon Parsi Anjuman and Parsi Sports Club Maintenance Fund was created in 1910. The Parsis rented houses from time to time to be used as a prayer hall and accommodation for the priest and his family. In 1923 Mrs Kapadia, a leading member of the community, donated a land for establishing a prayer hall and living quarters for the priest. Located in 5th Lane, Kollupitiya, this continues to be used even today.

## Population

According to Pieris (2005), the total number of Parsis in Sri Lanka declined from 450 in the 1930s to about 45 persons in 2005<sup>2</sup>. According to the records of the Parsi Anjuman and Parsi Sports Club examined in 2006 by Choksy (2007), there were only 37 Parsis (18 males and 19 females) in Colombo, one of them being recent immigrant from Bombay and the other being product of a mixed marriage where the mother came from the Parsi community and the father from another community and, therefore, strictly speaking not a Parsi<sup>3</sup>. The reasons for the reported decline in the number of Parsis in Sri Lanka included termination of immigration from Mumbai and out migration

of Parsis from Sri Lanka to other countries since 1950s. Many Parsi professionals left Sri Lanka for Australia and other countries due to changes in official language policies between late 1950s and 1970. Intermarriages with other communities also contributed to this declining trend as the children born to women who married outside the community were not accepted as Parsi while this did not apply to children of males who married outside the community. Marriages within the Parsi community, however, took place across national boundaries particularly with members of the Parsi community in Mumbai.

2 One report, however, says that there are about 50 Parsi families in Sri Lanka.

3 In 2006 eight Parsi men in Colombo had non-Parsi spouses and, moreover, 10 children from mixed marriages had opted not to go through Parsi initiation ceremony which confirms Parsi identity. They were not included among the 37 Parsis referred to earlier.

## Languages

Many Parsis use English as their day-to-day language at home and work place. They, however, treat Gujarati as their ancestral language. Accordingly, they got down a teacher from Mumbai to teach Gujarati for their children somewhere in the 1940s. Parsis in South Asia do not speak any Persian languages, showing

a total disappearance of their Persian cultural traits in their long process of social adaptation to local conditions. Similarly as of now usage of Gujarati has more or less disappeared in the Parsi community in Colombo. Many Parsis in Sri Lanka also use Sinhala or Tamil in their day to day conversations.

## Religion

Parsis are an ethnoreligious community with their religious identity and practices defining the essence of their ethnicity. Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest religions in the world, perhaps dating back to the era of the Old Testament. Parsis see themselves as guardians of this faith and wherever they migrated to, whether in precolonial, colonial or postcolonial eras, they carried this faith with them. Moreover, safeguarding the faith has been an important motive in their movements from place to place. As in the case of Jews, when they felt they were not free to practice their ancestral faith in a particular place, they sought to move to a new environment with freedom to practice their religion.

Parsis consider fire to be an eternal source of energy and an embodiment of the divine. As they keep fire going in the Zoroastrian temples, they are often referred to as 'fire temples'. The

proverbial Tower of Silence where a Parsi is placed after death for the vultures to devour body parts, a practice prevalent among Parsis in India has never been introduced to Sri Lanka. Instead burial of dead bodies has replaced this custom among Parsis in Sri Lanka.





Parsi traditions and culture in Sri Lanka point to the complex blending of Persian and South Asian traditions. The naming of a Parsi baby, for instance, is according to the date and time of birth. A letter is chosen and depending on this letter a Parsi name is selected. A Parsi child's initiation into Zoroastrianism or confirmation takes place between the ages of seven to fifteen years. It is at this point that the children will receive the sacred white garment 'Sudreh' and the sacred girdle 'Kusti' in an initiation ceremony called "Navjote". Holy water or bull urine which has been blessed through prayer, is a very important sacred object among the Parsi people. At confirmation, at marriage and even in the funeral rituals the holy

water is used in a purification rite. Although today marriage ceremonies take place mostly in leading hotels, orthodox Zoroastrians prefer marriage ceremonies to take place in the temple.

Fire, a symbol of purity to the Parsis, is lit immediately when a person dies and the lamp is placed near the body of the departed soul.

A unique feature in a Parsi funeral is the employing of a 'four-eyed dog' (a dog with two markings above its eyes) which is led up to the corpse. If the dog turns away from the deceased this serves as a final test to ensure that the person is dead.

## Parsis in Public Life in Colombo

Abans Group of Companies, with charismatic Aban Pestanjee as its chairperson, is one of the leading Parsi-owned companies in contemporary Sri Lanka. With over 13,500 employees, this group is involved in trade, sale of motor vehicles, tourism, restaurant business, engineering, hospitality and financial services.

Another Parsi family, namely Captains' family, are the largest shareholder of John Kheels Holdings, which owns the Kheels Supermarkets network in Sri Lanka. The assets of this family were built by Sohli Captain who owned the Wellawatta Weaving Mills since the 1950s and his son Rusi Captain who currently manages the various enterprises under the control of this family.

The Khan family from Bombay owned the well-known oil mills in Colombo. They built the clock tower in Pettah at their own expense as an

important landmark in the city. Other important Parsi business people in Colombo included P.N. Kapadiya, R. Pestonjee and J. Rustomee who were all engaged in wholesale import and export trade in Pettah.

Dr. Jamshed Dadabhoy who was the renowned Chief Eye Surgeon of the Colombo Eye Hospital, was a well-known Parsi in Colombo. His niece Roshan, (later Peiris) now of The Sunday Times, was the first woman editor of the Observer. Other well-known Parsis in Colombo included the architect Jamshed Nilagriya and Jimmy Barucha, the renowned broadcaster.

According to the family history of the Choksy family, the founder of this family, Kaikhusru D. Choksy, emigrated from Surat to Colombo in 1884. His son, Nariman K. Choksy, was a Queen's Counsel and a Justice of the Supreme Court of

Ceylon. The grand son, Kairshasp N. Choksy (1933 to 2015), was a well-known lawyer and a politician and served as the Minister of Finance in

Sri Lanka. He was perhaps the best-known Parsi in Colombo at the time.

## Parsi Community Organizations

For a community of less than 50 persons, Parsi community in Colombo has a number of active organizations.

Ceylon Parsi Anjuman is a community organization established among the Parsis in Colombo in 1939. Its office is located in the Nawroz Baug Building, which also houses the prayer house. The organization generates funds for the activities of the Parsi temple, including rituals, charitable activities and community services. The organization hires the services of the Sorastrain priest named Mobed who conducts religious activities in the temple. Its trustees are elected once in five years from among members of the community. K.N. Choksy served as the chairman of Anjuman from 2005 to 2010. In addition to regular membership fees, Anjuman received endowments from the rich members of the community including land, money and

maintenance costs of the temple. Anjuman plays a role in all community activities, including weddings, funerals and any other cultural activities in the community.

The Parsi Club is active in keeping the Parsi community together. Its current president is Aban Pastanjee who is also the chairperson of Abans Group of Companies and its secretary is Ms. Perlin Captain. The various activities of the organization seeks to promote fellowship among community members. The organization celebrates the Prophet's birth day, the organizations birth day and March 21 each year. The celebrations involve a dinner, games and dance.

Parsi Sports Club dating back to 1929 promotes sports, cricket in particular, and physical exercise among youth in the community.

## Charity and Philanthropy

Parsis worldwide have earned a reputation for their philanthropic instinct and the religious desire to keep away the evil of poverty (White 1991). Parsi community in Colombo is well known for its philanthropic work. For instance, Sohli Captain, took leadership in building Sri Lanka's first Cancer Hospice. Parsi leaders

were instrumental in establishing certain key monuments in Colombo spending their own funds for these activities. The individual Parsi Philanthropists in Colombo contributed towards the establishment of community centres such as the Zoroastrian temple, burial grounds and community activities in general



### Overall Contribution to Sri Lanka Society

As one of the smallest communities in Sri Lanka, the Parsi contribution to Sri Lankan society, culture and economy is outstanding. Its contribution in commerce, import export trade, establishment of private sector agencies in general and charity and philanthropy in Colombo far exceeds its miniscule size in the Sri Lankan population. Even though the size of the community has

decreased substantially in the post-colonial era, it continues to have a significant presence in the Sri Lankan economy. Parsi diaspora with Sri Lankan connections has spread widely and yet they have shown a keen interest in preserving and promoting Parsi heritage in Sri Lanka. They may also have considerable potential for expansion of the private sector as an engine of growth in post-war Sri Lanka.

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